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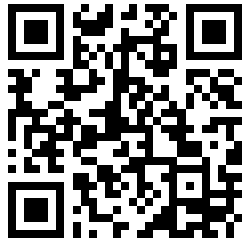

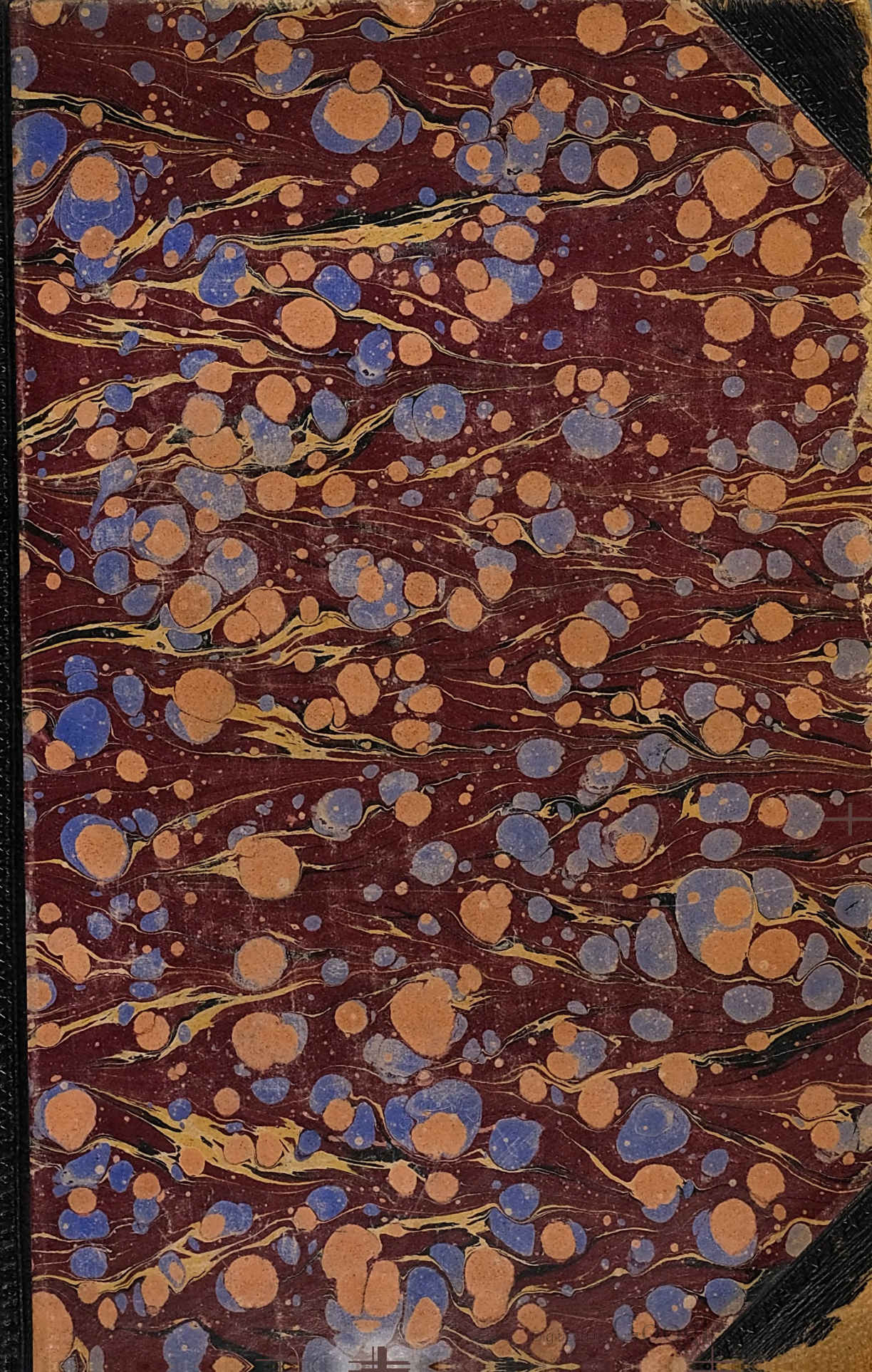

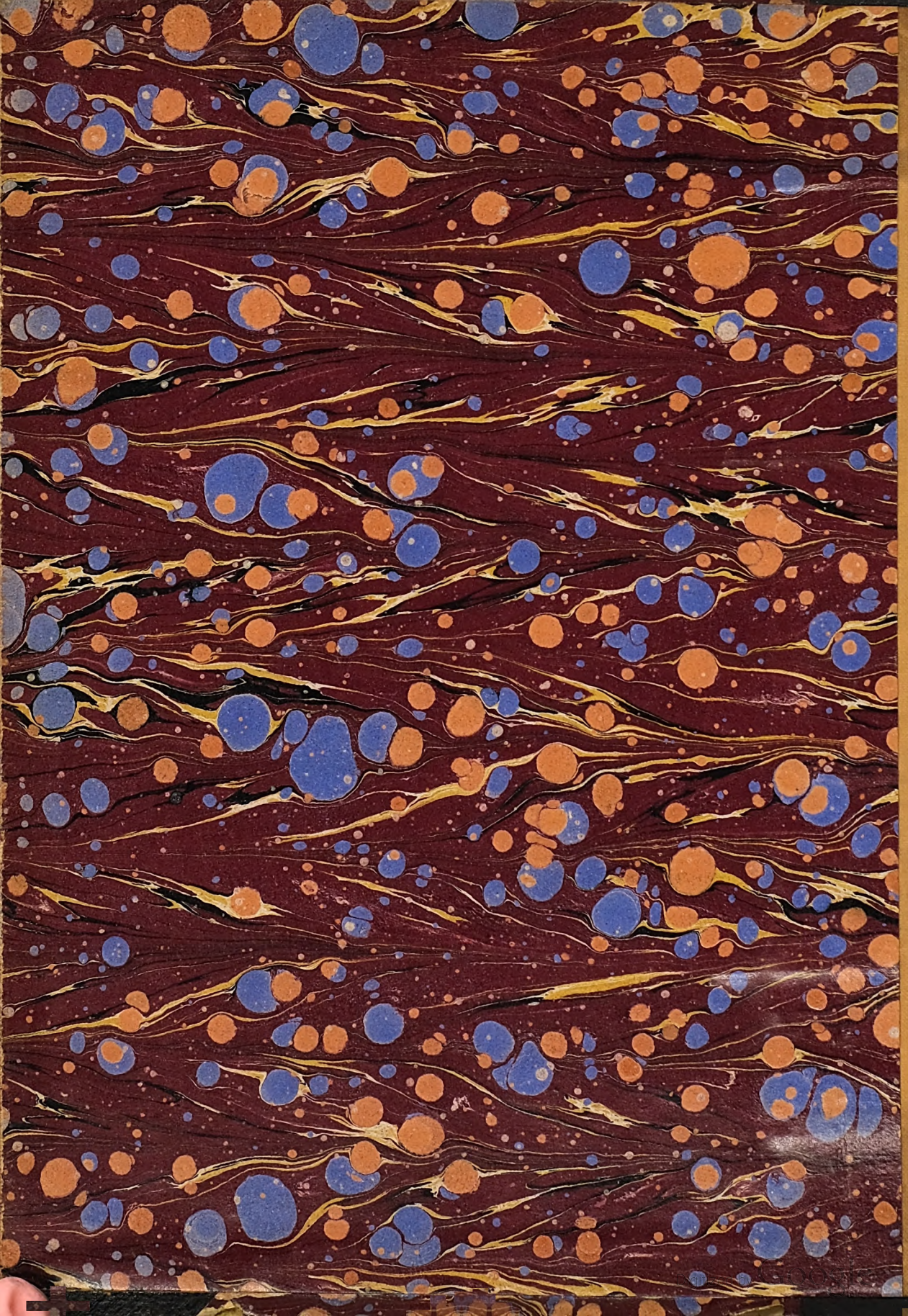

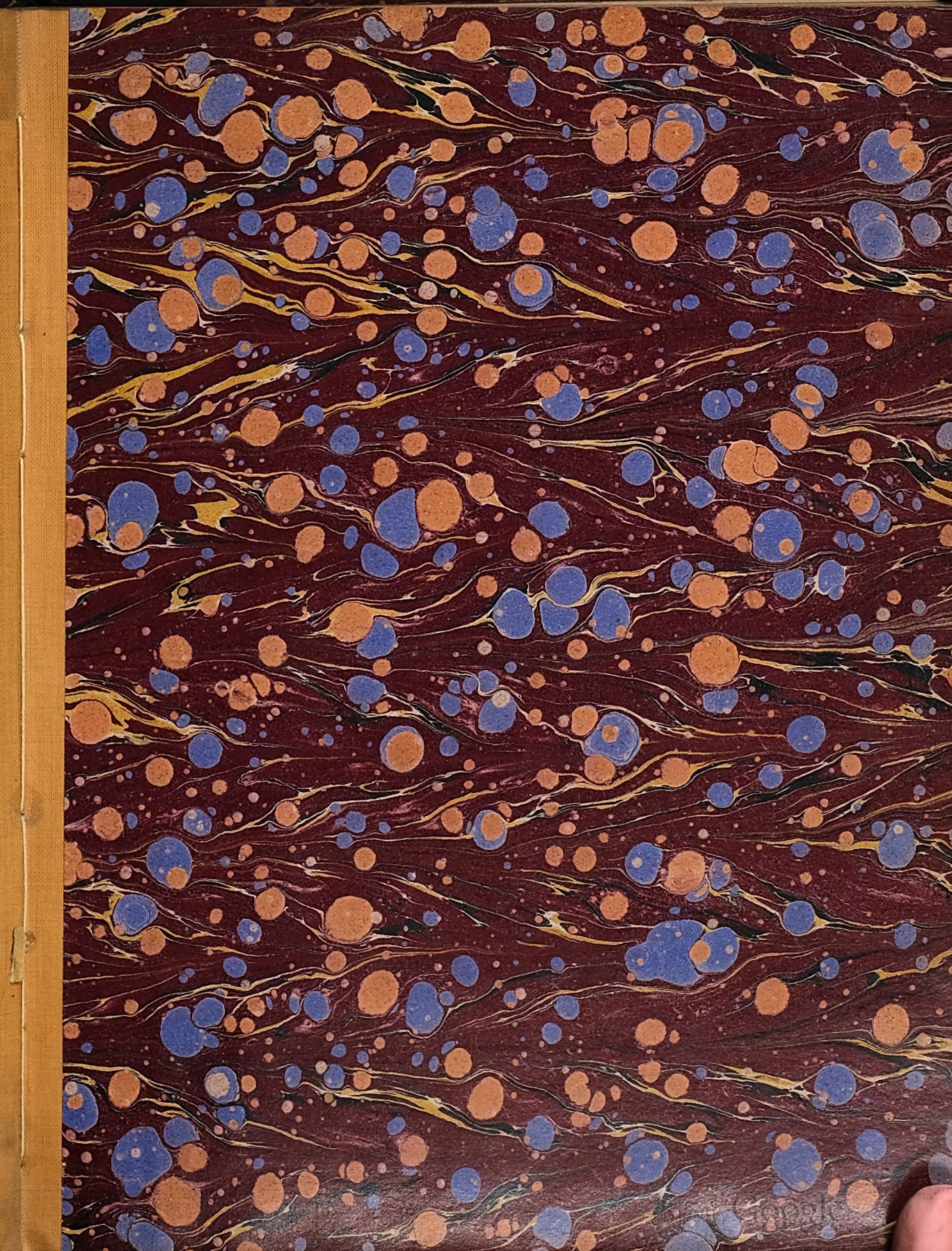

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SHORT STORIES

THE DAINTY HOME STORY PAPER. TARTAN COVER. No. 10.—MACFIE.

No. 757.] Week ending July 4, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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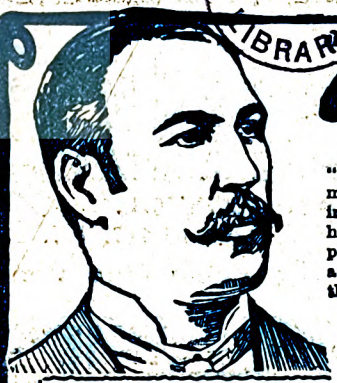

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Short Stories

No. 757.] [One Penny.

Week Ending July 4th, 1903.

That Sweet Little Fool.

THE ROMANCE OF A SECRET MARRIAGE.

The question which I found so difficult to answer was "What shall I do with Betty Dalrymple?"

Screen her I might, give her sanctuary in my home, but, there was no doubt about it, Betty was to blame—greatly to blame. The girl's action made me indignant—angry, rather than anything else. You see, I had idealised Betty. I thought that her pride alone would have forbidden her to take such a step. Well, I was mistaken. By this time her name was in everybody's mouth and neither she nor her family would be able to stir out of doors without meeting the curious gaze of every passer-by.

I, Elizabeth Dalrymple, am Betty's aunt. At the time of which I am writing I lived in the greatest retirement, in the suburbs of Darlington, at Briar-rose Cottage, a sweet, secluded spot, hedged about with an old-fashioned garden.

Now, it was natural enough that my niece and god-child should come to me in her hour of trouble, but that an old maid, like myself, should be called upon to play so important a part in the girl's love affairs was the marvel.

One day I was sitting in dreamy abstraction, in my sunny morning room busy with my fancy work.

A soft wind breathed rapturously in at the open window. The laburnums tossed their golden tassels and the lilacs blossomed everywhere. No sound was heard save the murmur of a brook, three fields away, the hum of the bee, the twitter of the birds, and the inarticulate voice of Polly in her gilded cage.

On this particular morning I was supremely happy. No restless feeling, no disturbing presentiment warned me of approaching trouble. With a sense of the keenest enjoyment I had settled myself at the table behind my embroidery frame, but scarcely had I worked in a dozen stitches when the sound of approaching wheels caused me to lift my head and listen.

"A cab at my front door! Who can it be?" I said to myself. A feeling of curiosity prompted me to push back my chair, go to the window and peep behind the curtain, for now the sound of an arrival permeated Briar-rose Cottage. Someone was certainly coming along the hall. A door slammed. A chair was thrown down. The dog barked and through all the commotion I heard an unmusical, rasping voice—a voice that brought a flush of annoyance to my cheeks—call out: "Here, Prudence, take my parcels! Bless me! where is the girl? Never at hand when wanted. Elizabeth, Elizabeth! Where are you? E-liz-a-beth! Here am I, come by the early train from Newcastle on purpose to see you."

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The door of my morning room was thrown open, and Mrs. Dalrymple, my brother Tom's widow, stood on the threshold.

I know I ought to have met her with outstretched hands and honied words of welcome. But I did not. I certainly was not pleased to see Maria and it was against my principles to appear so. You see, we have nothing in common. Maria has any amount of confidence. She is also frightfully extravagant, while I am retiring and careful—almost niggardly.

When, on rare occasions, I invited Maria to spend a day with me I always prayed an especial prayer for patience, but this time I was taken unawares. So instead of meeting her with Christian fortitude, I offered her a limp hand which she held for a moment and dropped. Then I waved her to a seat on the low settee and sitting upright in my high-backed chair I took off my spectacles and braced myself for battle.

"Well, Maria," I said tartly, "what is it you want?"

Maria drew a long breath of astonishment as she unfastened her feather boa.

"My dear creature, how uncomfortable of you! Want—the idea. Do you know it is eight months since you and I exchanged confidences, and that I have come on purpose to see you?"

I laughed shortly.

"Then I know you have come begging," I insisted. "You would never dream of coming to see me unless you wanted something."

"My dearest Elizabeth, you are so suspicious. Is there anything more terrible than to be misunderstood? The fact is, I am not well. I felt that a day's rest would be soothing to my nerves so I came to you. Besides, I have something to tell you—something about Betty. But won't you ask me to take off my bonnet? And mayn't I stay to dinner?"

By this time I had become a little ashamed of my ill-humour.

"I am sorry if I misjudged you, Maria. Stay by all means," I said with a slight degree of cordiality. "Ring the bell, please."

Her summons was answered by my one maid, Prudence Strong, who looked flustered and rather cross.

Now Prudence had lived in the service of the Dalrymples since she was a girl. She would have broken her heart if I had not taken her to live with me when my mother died. Prudence was a treasure. She managed everything. Sometimes I caught myself wondering if she or I were the mistress.

"Prudence," I faltered, "Mrs. Dalrymple will stay to

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dinner. Can you—that is—have you time to go into Blackwellgate to order a little fish?"

The woman's lips tightened.

"Indeed, I cannot, Miss Elizabeth, you know that. I wonder you ask me, mum, ironing day. There's plenty for dinner though—cold lamb, a salad, custard pudding and a fruit tart."

With that she shut the door and tramped back to the kitchen.

And Maria laughed and hoped I would not make the slightest difference on her account.

A simple meal was therefore provided and we sat down without ceremony.

Maria fidgeted about from room to room all the morning. Nothing escaped her inquisitive eyes. She knew everybody's business and talked incessantly, yet did not again refer to Betty.

The afternoon was one of golden sunshine and creeping shadows. We went into the garden—such an odd-looking couple.

Maria was well over forty, inclined to stoutness. She had on a trailing dress that rustled over and swept the greensward, and a wonderful hat. "Parisian" she called it. I, Elizabeth, am well over fifty, tall, angular, sharp-featured. I strutted by Maria's side in goloshes, a dress made short and scant, a garden hat of the mushroom order, and a faded velveteen cape.

We sat under the old apple tree and talked.

"Well, Maria, what about Betty?" I queried. Maria laughed.

We were sitting on a seat which I had had built round the trunk of the old apple tree.

"Ah, this is nice!" she said with a sigh of satisfaction, not heeding my question. "My dear Elizabeth, at this moment I positively envy you. While the mood lasts I too would follow your example, dress in a nun's garb and hide myself in some quiet elysium, for at times the hollowness of my Society friends palls upon me."

I sniffed witheringly.

Maria was a creature of moods, she was not easy to understand.

Presently she asked: "Guess what I have to tell you about Betty?"

"I am not good at guessing riddles," I said shortly.

"You must prepare yourself, Elizabeth, for a great surprise. Our—dear—Betty—is—engaged. Don't look at me like that! Engaged, I tell you, and to that dear, Cyril Dare. I always said that those two dear things should marry and I meant to manage it somehow. You don't care for him? You think his temper arbitrary and over-bearing? My dear Elizabeth! A landed proprietor, a man of good means, handsome, fascinating, clever. What more could any girl desire? True, there is a slight disparity as to age, and, yes, I grant you, Cyril Dare is somewhat masterful—but—why he has wanted to marry your god-child for the last four years. As for Betty—well—Betty is Betty—proud and wilful."

So Maria rattled on. To me the news was startling and so unexpected that it almost took my breath away.

"Stop," I cried, "Betty engaged! Betty about to be married! Does she—tell me, Maria—does she love this man—this Cyril Dare?"

I hurled the words at her quite fiercely.

"Love? Really I never inquired. You foolish, sentimental Elizabeth, what a question. It will be a practical, sensible marriage with good settlements, so I am satisfied."

"You are a horrid, heartless woman, Maria—you do not deserve to be a mother," I said hotly. "Stop chattering for a moment—do! I want to think!"

If the truth were told I wanted to cry. Betty had been away for four long years, she had only just returned to the home-nest and now again she was on the wing. And yet, I will not deny that for some reasons her engagement delighted me. Why should I not be pleased?

Four years ago I had strongly opposed this alliance for I knew that Betty's heart was given to Rex Davidson.

Rex was a mining engineer, and Betty would have married him, there is no doubt, but for a dreadful accident which befel him. One day, when in the coal-pit, fathoms below the beautiful earth, a deafening explosion shook the air. Huge pieces of coal were hurled from side to side of the narrow passages. Whether Rex was hit or not he did not know for the darkness of night overshadowed him and he sank down unconscious. He must have lain near to the borderland for weeks before he awoke to the fact that he was hopelessly disfigured, a heavy weight of coal having fallen upon his face. The marvel was that he was alive. Poor Betty! Of course she could not marry a man whose features were marred beyond all recognition—a man whom the children were terrified to meet. I must confess that I could not blame her, and yet—and yet——

When they told Rex that Betty no longer loved him, he was dreadfully cut up, poor fellow. But he was too brave a man to die for any woman's love. So he shouldered his burden, and left the country to fight under Kitchener in the Soudan, where he lost his life. Betty wrote to me that she was going abroad with some people of high rank as a sort of companion to an invalid girl; that she expected to spend some years upon the Continent, travelling about from place to place. "I long to get away from gossiping Newcastle," she wrote, "and by the time you see me again I shall be quite Bohemian in my tastes and ways. But you will love me still, auntie, *whatever happens* because you are a true woman. I cannot come to say 'Good-bye.' Why? The reason why you will some day know."

For answer I sent her a cheque for one hundred pounds.

Betty was eighteen when she left Newcastle for the Continent, she had been home four months and she was now two and twenty. Here I awoke from my reverie.

"Dear Betty," I said very quietly, "I hope she will be happy. Will the engagement be a long one, Maria?"

"Certainly not," she answered with some abruptness. "What on earth is there to wait for? 'Strike while the iron is hot,' say I. The wedding will take place at Westgate Road Chapel six weeks to-day."

Here she launched into a detailed description of the dresses to be worn at the wedding and the reception which was to be a brilliant affair. But all the time Maria was speaking I felt that she had an end in view, that she was holding herself in check.

"The expense will be simply awful," she continued. "Why, my dear, the bride's dress alone will be twenty guineas. No, you need not be alarmed, Elizabeth. I promised Betty that I would not appeal to you for help, and I won't. 'Mamma,' she said in her proud way, 'if you dare to sponge on aunt Elizabeth, I will not be married.' Tiresome Betty, her idea is a quiet wedding—a travelling dress and so forth. Think of our position. What would people say?"

"Maria," I said icily, "you see I was right; you have come begging. Do not try to disguise the fact; for in this case I am perfectly willing to—"

"Just my own words, my dear. 'Betty,' I said, 'you are unkind to your aunt.' Nothing, my love, would delight her more than to, as Lord Byron said, 'Clothe you like the sun for your bridal.'"

I shrugged my shoulders irritably and said: "It is certainly my pleasure that my god-child should be married as befits the eldest daughter of the house of Dalrymple."

Whereupon Maria leant forward, flung her arms round my neck and said I was a dear, sweet, generous darling.

"I cannot thank you enough," she repeated again and again. "And now there is another small matter." Maria coughed uneasily.

"About yourself, dearest. We shall be bitterly disappointed of course, but I know the excitement would be too great—that you would not be comfortable meeting the McLeans', and the Cowans, and that dear Lady Riddle. We must not forget your years. Your love of retirement must be humoured, but I shall see to it that you have wedding-cake, and——"

"I do not understand you, Maria." But I was wrong, I

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understood her too well. Strange as it may seem, Maria wanted only my money—of me she was ashamed. She thought I should disgrace her in some way—I should be shy, and awkward—perhaps odd. I shook from head to foot with indignation. No doubt Maria saw she had made a mistake for she hastened to say:

"Of course if you really wish to——"

"Certainly, I wish it."

"How good of you! So glad. Delighted! Now do let me order for you a perfectly appointed costume from Bond Street."

"No, I thank you. I have a dress quite suitable for the occasion."

"There, now I have offended you, haven't I? Well, dear, we won't quarrel, have everything your own way. Why, I declare, there's the cab. Goodness!" she cried, looking at her watch. "It is four o'clock and my train leaves at four thirty, good-bye," and with a parting nod she was gone.

During the next few weeks there was a rare amount of talk and surmise between Prudence and myself over the coming wedding, but upon the eve of that all-important day I felt nervous and fidgety.

Every preparation was made for the journey on the morrow.

My sister-in-law lived in Rye Hill, in a red-brick, five-storied house, just opposite to St. Mary's Church.

Had she forgotten that I was coming by the mid-day train? There was no one to meet me at the Central Station and there was no one to bid me welcome when I arrived at my destination. A smartly-dressed maid oponed the front door when my cab drew up and beckoned me to follow her. So I toiled wearily up the stairs to a small room at the very top of the house—an attic room—with a slanting ceiling. Here the girl put down my dress basket and said she would bring me a cup of tea when the kettle boiled and would I excuse her mistress; the house was full of company and she was very much engaged.

I frowned and a stinging retort rose to my lips, but it died away unspoken, for the girl had gone and in her stead stood Betty.

My beautiful Betty in her wedding-dress of shimmering white satin. We clung to each other, cried a little, and then smiled through our tears and admired the dress. Betty said it was a shame that I should be put in that poky little room, but that her mother had no management. Only wait until she had a home of her own. She would show them how to treat her most honoured guest—her dear aunt Elizabeth.

Before leaving my room I was completely metamorphosed in appearance. The short, scant skirt was discarded for a handsome flowered brocade. I wore a poke-bonnet, too, although it was not quite in the fashion—trimmed with broad white ribbon, and pink rose-buds, and a costly shawl of old Brussels lace pinned at my throat with a heavy cameo brooch. I had arranged for a private brougham that I might appear at the church in a fitting manner. Mr. Reginald Hoker had been appointed by Maria to share my carriage. I had pictured to myself a middle-aged gentleman of military bearing, it was somewhat disappointing to find him a school-boy in an Eton jacket.

We sat under the old apple tree and talked.

As we went up the aisle hand in hand quite a titter of amusement greeted us. Someone said in a stage whisper: "Old maid. Very eccentric."

I sat down and looked about me. It was a brilliant day. The sun shone brightly behind the stained glass window and the guests were pleasantly excited. The bridegroom's face I did not admire as he stood, waiting by the communion rails. Now and then he glanced down the aisle. He looked impatient, bad-tempered, anxious. Every time he turned his head half a churchful of people turned theirs too, in expectation. But the bride still tarried.

A pretty group of bridesmaids stood at the entrance waiting her arrival. They held baskets of choice flowers tied up with pale blue streamers and their pretty faces looked girlish and sweet under their broad-brimmed hats.

"She is coming," somebody whispered.

A false report, Betty still lingered.

Another half hour went by and still no Betty. The bridegroom was restless. The guests toyed with their flowers, fluttered their fans and looked at the clock. The clock chimed the quarter, in another fifteen minutes Betty would be too late. What could be detaining her?

Again the sound of approaching wheels. A carriage drew up. The bride had arrived. No, it was only Cuthbert Faber, the grey-headed gentleman who had promised to give her away. Evidently something was wrong. Mr. Faber walked hurriedly through the church to the vestry. Cyril Dare followed him and did not return. Maria had the sense to keep her seat but her face paled. She told me afterwards

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that she had a subtle intuition as to the real condition of things.

"They are saying," whispered the serene Miss Butler, who sat by my side, "that there will be no wedding to-day. Is it true, dear Miss Dalrymple?"

No wedding! I opened my mouth to deny such a statement but no words came. Presently I realised it was all too true, and found myself in a crush of tired, disappointed people, who were thronging the aisle. Maria put her hand on my arm as I was leaving the church. The smile upon her face—not a very pleasant one—met with no response from me, for a dreadful suspicion that Betty had eloped with some unknown lover haunted me. I shuddered at the thought.

The news of the postponed wedding had spread. At the door of the church and in the road a group of people had gathered, full of curiosity. A row of dirty, ragged children climbed up the railings.

"Miss Dalrymple's carriage!" thundered a burly constable and murmurs of excitement broke out at the sight of me.

Well, we went back again to Rye Hill, thankful to hide our disconcerted faces from the public gaze.

The house was in a terrible state of confusion and alarm. Betty had mysteriously disappeared. People were running up and down the stairs looking for her. Of course the reception was postponed, and Maria was in hysterics. Glad enough was I to find myself again in the attic-room with the slanting roof. With a sigh of relief I attempted to remove my finery. My hands were trembling, but they trembled still more as I picked up a letter addressed to me that had fallen from the table to the carpet. With a fast-beating heart I broke the seal, and, sure enough, the letter was signed "Betty."

"Tell mamma," she wrote, "that I shall never marry Cyril Dare, never, never! Tell her not to look for me, that I shall not come home again. No woman could act as I have done and continue to live in the same town. Forgive me, auntie, we shall meet again, but not on this side of Heaven will you know how dear you are to me."

Well, it was a weary time before I could get away from Rye Hill. First I must compose myself, then read the letter to Maria, and what with one thing, and what with another, it was getting dark before I left the house.

Not altogether, even then, could I get away from the vexatious subject. Along the platform ran an evening newsboy calling out at the top of his voice, "Fashionable wedding postponed. Mysterious disappearance of a bride!"

Everybody in the compartment seemed to stare at *me* as I hastily dropped my veil.

Rain, rain, rain! It beat upon the windows and came down in torrents when at length we reached Darlington. Oh, I was so glad to be at home again. It seemed to me that for years and years I had been away from Briar-rose Cottage. When I alighted from the cab at my own gateway I actually laughed with delight, as I ran under the dripping elm tree to the porch.

There was a bright light behind the red blind of the kitchen window, the rest of the house was shrouded in darkness. But it didn't matter, nothing mattered for I was at home again. Home, sweet home. With nervous fingers I pulled the old bell that dangled among the ivy and before it had ceased to ring, Prudence opened the door.

"It is no fault of yours, Miss Elizabeth," she said at once.

"Then you have heard, Prudence?"

"Heard? Why the whole town is blazing with the news—the evening papers is full of it. I was just saying to—there—I forgot." Here she whispered in my ear. "There's a person in the kitchen waiting to see you. She was just going, for I told her you would not be coming now it had gone nine o'clock."

"To see me?" I asked incredulously, "who is it, Prudence? Do you know her?"

"Bless you, no! I never set eyes on her before in my life. A middle-aged woman with a towsled, carroty head, and a green tartan shawl."

I opened the door of the old raftered kitchen and there, bent almost double, sat the woman with her face to the fire.

"What can I do for you, my good creature?" I asked.

At the sound of my voice she rose to her feet and turned to look at me. The faded shawl slipped from her shoulders, and, with the greatest composure she removed her bonnet—and—yes—actually a wig of red hair. She stood before me tall and stately, a young and beautiful girl in a tailor-made gown. Her face was pale and in her brilliant eyes there glowed the fire of a great resolve.

Prudence uttered a faint little scream.

"Lord-a-mussey!" she cried; "did ye ever see, why, if it ain't Miss Betty! Lor', how bad I do feel!"

"What fooling is this?" I said, staggering against the wall for support. "Betty Dalrymple, I—I am ashamed of you!"

Was I? The man was to be pitied indeed who had let such a girl slip through his fingers.

"I am sorry for that, aunt, in my extremity I came to you."

Every tone of her voice, every action of her small, white hands made you feel her pride, her independence.

"And pray, what excuse have you to make for your scandalous behaviour?"

"No excuse."

"I demand to know why you have caused all this trouble and confusion."

"It is quite impossible for me to explain at present. You see, auntie, it is not altogether my secret."

"Secret? Fiddlesticks! Am I to be made a laughing stock? Is it nothing to you—the dishonour—the scandal—the—the great expense?"

Betty flushed hotly. Her voice was clear and cold.

"I am not unmindful of all you have done for me, auntie. I came here to-night intending to tell you something—a secret of my past life. Oh, I have had trouble enough, God knows." she said with a sad little laugh. "Now, I cannot tell you my secret, you are not in the mood to understand. You will allow me the shelter of your roof for to-night? I am going to bed. Is my room ready for me, Prudence?"

Now had Betty been humble, if she had knelt at my feet and wept, if she had begged forgiveness things would have been different; but her coolness angered me.

"Listen to me, Betty," I said sternly; "you are not only wicked, but deceitful, and ungrateful. But duty is duty, I shall certainly send a wire to your mother to-morrow morning."

"Do so, aunt, by all means, your triumph over me will then be complete."

"You carry things with a high hand, young lady," I said, "but, mark you, it does not follow that because I have left you all my money that I cannot make a fresh will."

Betty made a gesture of the most scornful disdain.

You see, I was so angry that my fiery tongue ran away with me. Oh, had I but known the unutterable yearning of Betty's heart for one word of sympathy.

That stupid Prudence was shaking like a leaf.

She seated Betty in the old rocking chair and knelt down to unfasten her wet boots.

"There, mistress," she said, "do be quiet! You are only making a rod for your own back. Your niece is the very fiddle of your heart, as everybody knows. Come your ways, my honey, to your bed, and I'll bring your supper up. It's mightily tired ye all are."

Ere Betty left the kitchen she put her arms round my neck in the old impulsive way, but I repulsed her. I am not the woman to be bought over by any show of affection. Half an hour later I slipped quietly to the door and turned the key in the lock, thinking it were better to be on the safe side. In my dreams that night the teasing question wrote itself in blazing letters on my brain. "What shall I do with Betty Dalrymple?"

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Prudence told me, in the morning, that she couldn't get a wink of sleep for listening to the restless girl who paced her room hour after hour like a lioness in a cage.

"Her room is now as silent as the grave itself, Miss Elizabeth," she continued. "Sleeping? May be she is. The cup of tea I took her up an hour ago still stands upon the door-mat."

"Hark!" I said with uplifted finger, "I hear her moving about. Yes, you can make the coffee, Prudence, I will go upstairs myself and bring her to reason," for strange to say I had forgotten the locked door.

The key was well oiled and turned easily. I tapped lightly on the panel and, receiving no answer, entered the room.

"Betty? Why—" I began and then came to a pause for the room was untenanted and the window wide open. I stood aghast, leaning against the door-jamb for support. fear took hold of me. I lost control over myself and with my hands to my ears I fled down the long landing.

"Help! Help! Thieves! Murder!" I cried in terror, my shrill quavering voice echoing through the old house.

Prudence came panting up the stairs and took me by the shoulders but it was quite a long time before I could make her understand what had happened. "Gone? Where? How?" she kept repeating. Then she said, grimly, that it was just what she had expected and that the girl would surely do herself a mischief. There was no doubt about it, Betty had escaped by the window. She was a daring athlete. To take a leap from the sill to the outstretched arms of an old apple tree hard by was nothing to her.

By-and-bye Prudence left me, and I sat alone in the white window seat of the empty room, but my eyes were so full of tears that I could not even see the roses that clung to the casement distinctly. I shut the window and jerked down the blind. What had I to do with the gladness of the summer morning. All the shine had faded from life—gone with Betty. How could I be so cruel to her? Oh, how could I be such a shrew? Ah! There lay the sting.

As one in physical pain I paced the room, then hid my quivering face in Betty's pillow, and then, with a half-smothered sob, I tried to pray.

In an hour's time I went into the garden, listless, crushed, and broken-hearted, there I sat, counting in a stupid way the tall white tiger lilies in the oval flower-bed.

I thought I had nothing left to live for; but life is full of sweet surprises. All at once I heard the sound of pattering feet, and a sunny child, with tangled curls and lovely questioning eyes of blue, toddled up to my chair. She carried a sleeping kitten in her pinafore, and, putting her hand in mine, she lisped in baby language:

"Are 'oo kying, poor lady? Shall me lend 'oo my Kitty?"

A strange yearning filled my heart as I lifted the little creature on my lap and covered her sweet face with kisses.

"What is your name, my little one?" I asked softly.

"Darling," she answered. "Darling stop with you, poor lady; come and see box?"

"Whose darling are you, little one?"

"Muvver's. Come and see box?"

I muttered something inarticulate and rose to my feet. My woman's curiosity was aroused, and the ache in my heart was growing less.

In an instant we were hurrying along a winding, overgrown path which led through the shrubbery to the garden gate. Suddenly I caught my breath.

"Box, box!" cried Darling, sitting upon a small portmanteau which someone had put inside the garden. It was directed to myself in Betty's handwriting. "Darling's box. Muvver coming soon." The baby's lips quivered.

"Oh, what does it all mean? Oh, Betty, this is terrible?" I faltered as my fingers caught at the label and tore it to atoms. This then was the wicked secret of her past life. Then there rose, in my heart a wonderful happiness that thrilled me through and through. God had sent this little child to me—to be my very own. This was His gracious answer to my prayer. And even as I stood there at the garden gate staring down with misty eyes at the darling, I wondered if it were wrong to deceive Prudence. After all, I argued, this was a family skeleton to be locked away in the cupboard of secrets.

"Oh, my little lamb, worse than motherless," I cried. "You are mine, mine! My very own!"

Presently, all unnoticed, we entered the morning room by the French window.

As one in a dream I turned over the frocks and dainty garments the portmanteau contained, while Darling stamped her tiny feet impatiently, in her eagerness to show me everything at once. Her shrill young voice awakened the echoes in the sleeping old house and brought Prudence in, wondering, from the kitchen.

"Prudence," said I, trying to speak firmly although my heart went pit-a-pat. "This little girl has come to stay with me for—a time. Her name is Lizzie, Lizzie Jones, but she calls herself 'Darling.' Her mother is my dearest friend, we were at school together. She is now very ill—travelling I mean. You will have heard me speak of Annie Clarke?"

This fairy tale must have been a suggestion of the Evil One, and it cost me many tears of repentance.

"I hope, mistress," said Prudence scornfully, "that you don't expect one of my years to believe that trumped-up story. Miss Elizabeth, you are hiding something. Haven't I served you faithful, that you should treat me so?" she said with a

With the greatest composure she removed her bonnet—and—yes—actually a wig of red hair!

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sob. Already her rough hands were laid in a loving way on the child's curls.

Suddenly a triumphant little laugh escaped Darling.

"Muvver, Muvver!" she cried, clapping her hands and running to the hearthrug above which hung a life-size portrait of Betty.

Then I knew Prudence must be told everything. Wonderingly she listened to my story, my description of foreigners and their evil ways, and the many pit-falls of Continental life. When at length I said, "Keep the story to yourself, Prudence, what else could I do but trust you?" she laughed a little loud and scornful laugh.

"What!" cried she, "noise such a story abroad? Me? Why, mistress, I don't believe a word of it. I think 'ill of our Miss Betty? Never! I would die first! Mark my words," she continued, with a knowing wag of her head, "you will prove yourself in the wrong before many days come and go." Then she stopped and caught up Darling in her arms and carried her off to the kitchen to feed the kitty.

Prudence is a good woman, but dull and heavy. She has no fine feeling—no intuition.

Two whole days came and went and we were so occupied with our treasure that we gave no thought to the future or what it might bring for us.

An evening of surprises at length arrived.

At five minutes to nine we had retired for the night. At a quarter past nine the front bell door rang loudly. In the lightest of attire Prudence and I issued from our rooms and met on the landing. We listened attentively. Again and again clanged the bell, and at length Prudence, being the braver of the two, crept down the stairs, shading the candle with her hand.

"See that the chain is up before you open the door!" I called to her over the banister.

"Who's there?" cried Prudence.

But whoever it was they had gone away—not however, before waking Darling. With wide open eyes I found her standing up in the old wooden crib. Her golden curls were tossed and her pretty cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Muvver!" she cried—"Muvver's coming."

Scarcely had I soothed Darling to sleep again when the window rattled. A branch of an old apple tree had touched the glass as the wind swept by. Yet I listened with my heart in my mouth, then I heard someone crying.

"Let me in! Let me in!"

The voice was strikingly familiar and as I turned in terror I saw Betty's face, looking through the window.

I shook like an aspen leaf. How my palsied fingers managed to unhasp the casement to let her in is a marvel. She had again climbed the old apple tree, swung herself on to a projecting piece of masonry, and by the help of waterspouts and ivy, drawn herself up to her old room where a bright light was burning.

"Betty, you might have been killed!"

"Betty, you might have been killed. Oh, how could you? Oh, my darling—my darling!" For some minutes I was quite hysterical. She tried to dispel my fears by laughing gaily.

"There is no danger," she said. "Besides, auntie, you compelled me to do it. First you lock me in, and then you lock me out, I was really obliged to use the staircase provided by Nature."

She crossed the room to bend over the old crib.

"Mine," she whispered.

"Aye, my dear one, I know. But what brings you here, Betty? Never fear, I will take care of the child and no one shall guess at your secret."

"I couldn't rest, auntie, I couldn't; I felt lost without my baby."

"But you must not stay, my dear. Already there are some very queer tales afloat about you. Not that I take any notice. I am not the one to cast the first stone. No doubt, poor child, it was not altogether your fault. Have you any money, Betty? You shall want for nothing while I live. But you must go away, my dear, right away, for Darling's sake, her mother's fault must not be visited upon her."

"Go away, right away? What are you talking about? Oh, auntie, auntie, I wouldn't have believed you could have had such bad thoughts of me."

A great restlessness came over her.

She hugged and kissed me. She rang for Prudence and hugged and kissed her. She took Darling in her arms and, sitting on the edge of my bed, asked us, with a radiant face if we had never guessed that she was married—married four long years ago to Rex Davidson.

I stared but was speechless. Prudence stared but was speechless.

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Apparently not noticing our helpless condition Betty told of her clandestine marriage with Rex some weeks before he left the country, and her suffering, when the news came to her of his death—of the birth of her child in a foreign land, and her unfortunate resolve to keep her marriage a secret from her mother—of the help my present of one hundred pounds had been to her, and of her many situations in France.

"I know I made you rather cross, dear auntie, and Prudence, when I ran away from my wedding day, a week ago, and I know that I deserved that you should be very angry. But you see I couldn't possibly marry Cyril Dare, now could I?"

"Why?" I asked, "was the child the hindrance?"

"The child? Why, auntie dear, what a stupid question. When I found that my dear husband was alive and on his way home I——"

"What!" I interrupted. "Alive! Rex Davidson alive!"

She got up, kissed us both again and slipped back to her seat on the edge of the bed.

"Didn't I say that his letter was put into my hand, when I was in my wedding dress waiting for my carriage. What could I do but run away? Poor Rex had written to me many a time—we rather suspect his letters were withheld."

A handful of gravel rattled on the window pane.

"That's my dear old hubbie," cried Betty, "tired of waiting at your hospitable door," and the girl rushed away with Darling in her arms to open it. We followed.

"God bless you, aunt Elizabeth," said Rex when I bade him welcome. He stooped and kissed my wrinkled cheek, then he shook hands with Prudence—who was wiping her eyes—and after that we were all at home and comfortable.

The lamps were relit and in less than a quarter of an hour a feast was prepared. The house was filled with gladness. Rex had still an ugly scam across his face but it was wonderful how much he had improved in appearance since last I saw him.

Dearie me, what the doctors are able to do in these days!

Rex himself was not altered a bit. He was thoroughly convinced that he was the husband of the dearest of girls and that the little daughter nestling in his arms was beyond compare.

They unfolded to me their plans.

Rex had obtained a good appointment as manager of some coalpits at Hebburn, and I was to let Briar-rose Cottage and make my home with Betty, taking Prudence with me.

The truth is my old heart clung so closely to them all that I could not again face a life of loneliness.

The next day I wrote to Maria and told her everything.

A few days afterwards her answer came, and with it a bundle of unopened letters addressed to Mrs. Rex Davidson.

"I wash my hands of Betty," she wrote, "the girl is a fool!"

"She is indeed," said Rex, proudly folding his wife in a close embrace. "A sweet little fool!"

B. Leicester.

An Ingenious Parent.

How a Father Saved the Expenses of a Wedding.

A young man who had long and dearly loved a beautiful girl, besought of her recently to name the happy day, which she did, with such shy, fond, reluctant delay that it would hardly have been thought she had made up her mind when the date was to be more than two months before.

They accordingly waited upon her immediate ancestor on the male side, and besought his blessing. He was a practical and economical old gentleman, with a mind fertile of resource, and when the young man had stammered that he loved her more dearly than his life, and had a salary of £350, and that he hoped—the old man caught up his trusty walking-stick and, calling his prospective son-in-law all sorts of names, drove him out of the house; then he bore his daughter off to the attic and locked her in there.

What is the consequence? The next morning the young man came with a rope-ladder, an ample cloak, and a marriage license, and stole his bride away, and they were made one at 8.30. Then the young wife said to her husband:

"Algernon, my father behaved very badly to you. Still, he was my mother's husband, and we ought to have some deference for him; so let us go to him and tell him we are wedded, and ask for that blessing. Besides, I want to get my brush and comb bag that I left on the dressing-table."

"Well, I'll go," said the young husband, "but, mind you, Matilda, if he lays a hand on me, save in the way of kindness, I'll knock his two eyes into one. I suffered his previous indignities because he was the hoary-headed author of your being, but now he is only my bald-headed father-in-law, and I won't stand it, if he is three times as old as I am."

Accordingly they went home, and when they got there and were excitedly feeling for the bell-pull, the old gentleman opened the door, and said:

"Come in, come in; how's the blushing bride, eh? Bless you, my children. Now, by the time you have partaken of a bottle of champagne the cab will be here to convey you to any railway station you may be pleased to indicate."

They followed the old gentleman into the parlour like people in a dream.

"I was afraid once," he said cheerfully, "when I saw Matilda coming down that ladder that the thing would break—for she's fully sixteen ounces to the pound, Matilda is—and drive all my new rose bushes and tulips into the ground. Why on earth didn't you, when you were compelled to flee from my wrath, elope out of the front door like Christians? I left Matilda's dungeon cell unlocked, and I left the front door ajar, and I went to the foot of the stairs and snored a the top of my voice so as to give you every facility."

"Do you mean to say, venerable and respected sir, that you have and have had no objections to my paying my addresses to your daughter?"

"Never in the least," replied the old man, beaming mildly on them; "you are the son-in-law I should have picked out of millions if I had been permitted to choose, and even if I had not been satisfied of your worth and sobriety, I could not have found it in my heart to refuse to do what Matilda desired me to do."

"Then, sir," exclaimed the young husband, thinking that he had married into a family having the hereditary taint of insanity in the blood, "why did you turn me out of the house in such an energetic and inconsistent manner?"

"Because, my dear boy," said the good old man, "I saw that you would instantaneously take out a license and elope with the girl and get married at an expense of two sovereigns, borne exclusively by you, whereas, if the marriage took place in the ordinary course of events, I would have been let in for a trousseau, and dresses, and flowers, and a wedding breakfast, and, on the top of all that, presents to the extent of about £30."

Percy Wixon.

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ROGER AND I.

A Story of Jealousy and a Lucky Find in a Book.

It is a very simple story. My name is Marian Ray, and I was twenty years old when I first met Roger Dermott at Poole, in Dorsetshire, where I was passing the summer.

We—my mother and I, who composed our entire family circle—had strayed to this quiet place because we knew that her lease of life was not for very long, and I grasped at any suggestion of possible relief to her, even as the drowning catch at straws, forgetting how frail they are. And it was terrible to me to think that I must be left alone in the great, wide world—alone and poor.

We were always together—my mother and I—for she was more like an elder sister than a parent, and we clung the closer now, for we felt that the time was short.

Therefore, I made her life as pleasant and easy as possible, and her only anxiety was for my lonely, unprotected future, when we must leave her out under the flowers and the dew, and I would be friendless.

But I, feeling very brave and confident, as the young are prone to do, smiled back courageously into her face, and at last, when my future began to be discussed, changed the subject of conversation.

And so we lived on at the sea-side, and our two lives were very grey and uneventful, until the time came when a ray of sunshine slipped in; but, ah! when the sunshine goes again, I notice it is always darker than before it came.

We were strolling along the beach one divine June morning, my arm round my mother, in a tender, protecting way, when she suddenly started from my side, advanced a few steps, and with a flush upon her pale face, held out her hand in a cordial greeting.

Glancing up in surprise, I met the laughing brown eyes of Roger Dermott. He saluted me with a courteous bow, insisted upon taking my place beside mother, and together we resumed our morning walk.

That was the beginning of many pleasant days. Days no longer lonely, for he was ever with us; no longer now was my heart filled with gloomy forebodings for the future, for Roger and I were betrothed.

It is wonderful what great strides hearts will make towards each other when isolated from society and surrounded by the wealth which dear Mother Nature loves to lavish upon her children.

Looking back upon that past, after the laspe of years,

"*I think my eyes grow wet, as somewhere within my breast*
Stabbed a faint and slothful pang never wholly laid at rest."

Somehow, that secluded spot has ever been to me as the grave-yard in which all I ever loved lies sleeping; and yet, there is no dust there to which I have a claim. There are grave-yards in the memory sometimes, and there it seems to me we always lay our bravest and best.

Roger was a sailor, and it was strange how soon I learnt to take an interest in all that pertained to the ocean. We passed hours by the salt sea waves, while he unfolded to me the mysteries that lay hidden in its shining, deceitful depths.

I loved the sea then; oh, how I loved it! But now, when I walk along the beach, it talks to me of partings, and all dreary things, and the sound of its tumultuous roaring comes to my ears like the cries of a soul in despair.

One gloomy afternoon in September, with the sky threatening and dreary, and the sun red and sullen, sinking in a crimson ball behind the mass of clouds lowering in the west, I walked upon the rocks beside the sea. Roger was to meet me there—for he was to sail on the morrow for the Indies, leaving me, with a heart like a lump of lead, to await his return.

I could not endure the thought of this parting. But he would be captain of the vessel when he came back, he said, and he must not lose this chance in the world.

He would have taken me with him as his wife, but there was mother, too frail to undertake the journey, and so I would stay behind. But no matter how much is to be gained by the voyage, there never was a woman yet that could feel, at such a time, the value of any gain; and I suppose I was like the rest.

And so I paced up and down the rocks in the sunset, with my heart all choked-like, and my voice full of tears. But my eyes were dry—quite dry—for Roger must not see my weakness. When he was gone there would be days and nights to cry in, and then my tears need not be restrained.

So, waiting bravely for his coming, I watched the offing, where the ships rocked lazily, to and fro, with the rising wind. The surf lines came booming up at the foot of the rocks, frothing and foaming angrily; the gulls circled above my head, shrieking and dipping into the white-capped waves. And then, watching the sun go down, I began to wonder at Roger's delay.

We had walked upon the beach every pleasant evening, but never before had I waited his coming at this spot. And I thought how pleased he would be to find me so much nearer than he anticipated.

I smiled to myself as I marked at last his familiar form moving along the beach. But—where was he going? He directed his steps to a little nook or cove on the shore, which I had never visited, for he had warned me of its danger when the tide was in.

As he entered the sheltered nook, I perceived that the place was occupied, for there was the gleam of a gay dress, and then I saw a slender form.

It was Milly Dean, the daughter of a fisherman, living near, and my heart gave a great, angry bound, as I saw that Roger evidently expected her.

I saw her turn to meet him, and flinging back her long, dark hair from her pretty face, she seized his hands with a passionate gesture.

But I waited to see no more. Down from the rock I dashed, and turned towards home. Then, I composed myself, and walking quietly to the hotel, I sought my own apartments. My mother—gentle soul—attributing my agitation to Roger, tried to soothe me and I was too heart-sick to explain.

In a short time I heard his voice asking the servant if we were engaged, and regardless of consequences, I sent down word that I was too ill to see him, on that, the last evening we were to be together!

The next morning, before the ship sailed, I wrote a line to Mr. Roger Dermott, and returning a book which I had found awaiting me, I told him that he was free; our engagement

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was at an end. And, with quiet scorn, I warned him not to write to me, for if he did, I would burn his letters unopened. And Roger Dermott knew that I never broke my word. I slipped his ring into the envelope, and so, it was all over.

After that, we returned to our home in London; and there the fever seized me. I went down to the gates of death, but my feet were stayed at the portals; so I came back to life, with its duties and stern realities.

One blow followed another in quick succession. Hardly had I regained my strength, when my mother set forth upon that last lonely journey that we all must take alone. With her dear hand in mine, I watched her as she "fell in sleep." She died unconscious of what had come between Roger and me, and our two names were the last upon her lips. Died! And we, who had always been together, were parted forever now!

I stood alone in the world now. God help the poor woman who has that to say of herself, and with a woman's precarious chances of earning an honest livelihood.

I was fortunate in finding a friend, and just at the blackest hour of my night (the hour before the day-dawn), just when my heart had failed me, and desolate and alone I felt "hedged in" by all the pitiless world, a kind hand was stretched out to save me from despair.

An old-time friend of my father offered me the charge of a circulating library, and too thankful for words, I wrung his hand in gratitude, and turned my face in the direction of my work.

It was the beginning of winter, and glad was I of the employment which would secure me from want during that inclement season, and I was ready for the hardest and most irksome task.

Mr. Lee, my employer, was a genial old gentleman, a perfect "book-worm," and I soon found my labours engrossing. Among books I could not be very lonely; and so the days wore away, and at last I grew quietly happy.

Some three years had elapsed since my mother's death, when one day, going into an unused room, I stumbled over a small wooden box.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Lee, "if there isn't that box of second-hand books I purchased a fortnight ago! They comprise some valuable works, and are worth something!"

So saying, he removed the lid from the box. I assisted him in assorting the contents. Almost the first volume I touched was a copy of Longfellow's poems, with Roger Dermott's name on the fly-leaf. Well did I remember the book—which he had sent me the day before he had sailed for the Indies.

As I opened it, a folded paper fluttered from between the leaves to the floor. It was a letter addressed to me in Roger's well-remembered hand. Trembling like a leaf, I read these words:

"Darling Marian,—*Forgive me if I do not come as early as usual to-night. Little Milly Dean has begged me to do her a favour. The poor girl has a lover, an honest, steady fellow, but her father, who is a hard-hearted old man, is opposed to the marriage; and, as I have some influence with him, I have consented to try to induce him to consent. I send this note, darling, with the copy of Longfellow that I promised you. Please await patiently the coming of your* Roger."

The Spring sunlight stole into the little room where I sat, staring my own mad folly in the face. Bowing my head upon my clasped hands, I wept tears of bitter grief. So, we were separated for ever, and I, in my mad blindness, had done it all.

Two weeks later, I came back to the old home by the sea. Almost the first person I met was Roger Dermott, who had just returned from his voyage. I went swiftly up to him, and sturdily trampling my pride under foot, in a low, trembling voice, I told him the whole story, and begged him to forgive me.

Standing there in the sunset, with the waters of the old ocean at our feet, Roger took my hand in his.

"Darling," he said softly, "of course you are forgiven. Be my wife at once, and never doubt me again, Marian, never while you live!"

And standing there together, a happy faith and trust crept into our hearts—never to go away again—never any more.

E. B. Collins.

Your Editor Chats.

The Buried Stations Competition is now being checked and the result will be announced as soon as possible.

On page 15 you will find another list of letters in the Juggled Letters Competition. This competition will be complete in twelve lists.

The cover this week consists of a reproduction of the Clan Macfie Tartan, which will appeal especially to Scottish readers, though I am sure that readers of English and other nationalities will also appreciate it. Nine other Scottish tartans have appeared at various times previously; a list of them, together with the dates of their appearance, will be found on page 20.

I wonder whether any of my readers ever think of posting on to a friend their copy of *Short Stories* when they have finished with it? Such an action would be much appreciated by both the friend and myself. The friend would enjoy the perusal of the little paper, and very likely might wish to become a subscriber, which would be a benefit to me and also to yourself, as every fresh subscriber means that I can spend more on the production of the paper, and thus you will get a better paper for your penny than you do at present. I shall be glad to hear from readers what they do with their copies of *Short Stories* after they have no further use for them.

We are getting near the time of year now when the towns become oppressively hot. The sun seems to scorch up whatever little vegetation there is, and the narrow streets and alleys become almost unbearable. It is at such a time as this that those town-dwellers who are able arrange to go away to the seaside or country to escape from some of the heat.

Now there are many town-dwellers who cannot afford to go away even for a day. Adults, of course, can stand the summer heat very well, but the children are not yet acclimatised, and it is for them that the Fresh Air Fund appeals. Ninepence pays for a Whole Day's Outing for one child. That isn't a very big sum, is it? If you save threepence a week for three weeks you will have it; then what you should do is:—Procure ten stamps; put nine inside an envelope, together with your name and address; then address the envelope to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., affix the tenth stamp to it, and place in the nearest post-box.

Of course, if you can spare more than ninepence, so much the better; the larger the sum the more children will be able to go away. All amounts will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. The Hon. Sec. will send collecting forms on application.

Your Editor.

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A DECEITFUL WOMAN.

The Story of how Love Made Amends.

The festivities were in full swing at the charming little villa of the Honourable Mrs. Norton, the rooms were crowded to excess, the floor perfect, and the champagne all that it should be, the girls charming—the pick of the season's beauties always found their way to little Mrs. Norton's informal dances; and last, but by no means least, the larger proportion of the men were first-rate waltzers.

Through the long French windows—which opened on to a lawn sloping to the river-side—one or two couples had found their way into the cool, sweet-scented garden, gay with Chinese lanterns, the lights on the river gleaming softly through the evening haze, while the low murmur of the water formed an accompaniment to sweet voices and more manly tones.

"They look like business, don't they?" said pretty little Lady Vi to her husband, glancing towards a pair of tall figures. "I wonder if he'll propose to-night—what do you say?"

"Given a sufficiently pretty woman, a more or less romantic spot, and there's no knowing how great a fool a man will make of himself, especially after supper, and when the champagne is as good as Pollie Norton's. The girl's not bad-looking, is she Vi?" he added, pointing to the tall, straight figure of a woman, evidently too engrossed with her companion—a dark, eager-looking man, with the unmistakable carriage of a soldier—to pay any attention to the notes and comments of the bystanders.

"For my taste I think Angela Carlisle too tall and big—altogether too much in evidence," said Lady Vi, who was a sparkling little brunette. "It is funny what so charming a man as Douglas Lyle can see in her. By-the-bye, I never rightly understood who or what Angela was. Did Mrs. Norton ever tell you where she picked up her *protégée*, Lionel?"

"Cousin, I believe," he returned laconically. "I heard something about her being an heiress; anyway, she's a beauty, and Pollie Norton is not the woman to 'take up' an angel without evidence of her occupying a decent position in celestial society. Come, Vi, it's too damp for anything out here; let's go indoors."

The two figures at the bottom of the garden, apparently impervious to damp, continued to gaze upon the river—the silvery Thames, that has seen innumerable lovers come and go.

"The water sounds dreary to-night," said Angela dreamily. "It always has a peculiar fascination for me; it seems so exactly to give voice to everything one feels."

"But you don't want to voice anything dreary, Angela? You are the very incarnation of life and laughter!"

"Not always," she answered, in a low voice.

He turned towards her quickly.

"Something is troubling you, Angela; you are not like yourself to-night. I have so counted on this evening, dear; so longed for the opportunity to tell you that which already you must have guessed, and now, when at last I have you to myself, I find you changed, cold, almost constrained."

"Not changed," she said, "but——"

He interrupted her.

"What is it, Angela, that has lately come between us? You know, you must know, how dearly, how fondly, I love you. I had thought you were not altogether indifferent to that love, though you have so often, so cruelly denied me the chance of telling it. Put an end to my suspense, Angela. Answer me one way or the other. Tell me here and now, will you accept my love, my name, become my wife?"

The mist was rising from the river, hovering about them like a soft white cloud and *shutting out the lights*, the sound of the music, the soft laughter, and gay voices; they two seemed in a world apart.

The girl stretched out her arms towards the river. Her face, raised to the cold white moon, looked pale and wan. She stood silent for a moment, and then, with a quiet gesture, she laid her hand in his.

"Yes," she said, "I will be your wife." But even as she answered him she felt a thrill akin to fear run through her; he was so strong, so determined, so masterful even in his love, that it seemed impossible that he could ever be tolerant of weakness, of indecision; and yet he loved her very much, and she saw his eyes light up with passion, while his strong arms trembled as he held her close, and his voice sounded strangely tender, gentle beyond belief.

"You shall never regret your choice, my darling!" he whispered. "You shall have all my thoughts, all my devotion, all my love!"

"But your people, Douglas?" she asked, after a while. "Will they be willing to receive me? You know, dear, I am not your equal in wealth, though I have a fair income—£2,000 a year at the least—and——"

"Do you suppose it matters to me whether or not you have a penny, Angela?" he interrupted hastily. Her words jarred upon him; it seemed so incongruous to mention her income in the middle of a conversation of such vital importance.

"I thought I should like you to know," she said almost humbly; "things get so exaggerated, and Pollie Norton is always fond of drawing the long bow; besides, I have heard so much about your people's particularity—how do you know your mother will like me, Douglas?"

"My darling, how could my mother help liking you? She is as ardent a worshipper of beauty as I am; the only stipulation she ever made with regard to my wife was when she laughingly told me to be sure to choose 'a beauty and a lady.' Imagine my being attracted by anyone else?"

"What do you call 'a lady,' Douglas?"

"My dearest Angela, I beg of you do not propound any more conundrums. Those pretty lips were never meant to tantalise your lover in so cruel a fashion. I will answer all your questions, sweetheart, with a kiss," and, stooping a little, he held up the winsome face and pressed her lips—not once, but twenty times.

"My own, tell me you love me?" he demanded, in his masterful sort of fashion; but she broke from him, and, with a little laugh, disappeared through the mist. He followed, somewhat perplexed.

Douglas Lyle, soldier as he was, strong-willed and stronger-hearted, was all too simple-minded to understand the manifold perversities with which a woman encompasses her love, and Angela's varying moods puzzled while they enchanted him. But as he stood in the porch, smoking a cigarette rather disconsolately, a pair of arms wound themselves round his neck, soft, clinging lips were laid on his, and a low voice whispered: "Douglas, I love you!" Then before he had time to seize and hold her, Angela had vanished.

The news of their engagement leaked out somehow, as engagements always do, and many were the covert allusions,

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sly smiles, and pretty speeches directed to the young couple for the rest of the evening. It seemed to Angela as if it would never come to an end, and when the last "good-bye" had been said, and the last carriage rolled away, she felt hardly able to keep up any longer.

Later the two—Pollie Norton, as her intimates called the widow, and Angela Carlisle—stood facing each other in the pretty little room, half library, half boudoir, which did duty for the latter's private sitting-room in the riverside cottage. Now they were left alone a strange sort of stiffness seemed to fall between them, quite different from the easy relationship of hostess and girl friend.

"Captain Lyle proposed to me to-night," said Angela coldly, staring straight before her into the glass above the mantelpiece.

"I suppose you accepted him?" queried the little widow.

"Yes," replied the girl.

"Well, you are to be congratulated. Douglas will come in for a title at his uncle's death and a rent-roll of about £10,000 a year, besides his own property, which brings him in quite another fifteen."

Angela nodded, but vouchsafed no further information. The elder woman looked at her somewhat curiously—a tall, straight figure with curling chestnut hair, clear, pale skin, and large, mournful-looking, velvety-brown eyes. Then, somewhat irritated at her silence, she spoke again.

"You're playing rather a dangerous game," she said. "Douglas is as proud as Lucifer, and his mother is a good deal worse. Once let him discover that he's been deceived, and all the marriage ceremonies in the world won't keep him by you. It's your own business, of course, but, as I say, it's very risky!"

"It is more than likely I shall tell him all the truth," replied Angela.

"You appear to have forgotten our arrangement," said Mrs. Norton spitefully; "I, on my side, undertook to do certain things for you, for a consideration; you, on your part, gave me an understanding to the effect that you would not reveal the terms of our engagement, at any rate while you remained with me, and I presume you wish the marriage to take place from here?"

"Yes, if you have no objection."

"None at all, provided you keep to the agreement until after the event."

"I will remember," said the girl, with a heavy sigh. "I think I'll go to bed now—if you don't mind," she added; and, with a ceremonious sort of greeting, the two parted, Angela to read a letter which, directed in a neat and clear handwriting to "Miss Angela Carlisle," contained another in an unbroken envelope, addressed, in coarsely-formed letters, to:

"MRS. CARLISLE SMITH,
Care of Messrs. Martin and Harvey,
Furnival's Inn,"

a letter which caused her, judging by the tears in her eyes, much vexation of spirit; while Pollie Norton sat wrinkling her pretty brows far into the night over a collection of bills. Apparently, however, she came to a satisfactory conclusion concerning them.

"Thank goodness!" she ejaculated fervently, "the wedding will put me straight. I shall ask her for a cheque for £1,000—and cheap at the price, I call it. Anyway, Angela's not mean!" with which comforting reflection the little widow blew out the candle and fell asleep.

The London season was coming to a close. Most of the "smart set" had already left town; those who were still detained, feeling called upon to apologise for their presence, discussed the fashionable engagements which always form such an engrossing topic of conversation at the fag-end of the season's gaieties, none being more spoken of than Angela Carlisle's. She was alternately described as "simply lovely," "horribly made-up," and—the most delicate flattery of all, from a woman's lips—"rather nice-looking," for when was there ever yet a beauty who was not so designated by her "dearest friends"? Indeed, her approaching marriage with Douglas Lyle formed a nine days' wonder. "What can he see in her?" "Very designing girl, I fear," were among the least unfavourable of Society's comments; while the fact that the wedding was to be very quiet did much to increase its unpopularity.

It was Angela's special request that they should be married without any fuss, and the arrangement coincided exactly with Douglas' views on the matter. Mrs. Norton contented herself with a few sarcastic speeches relative to the habits of the ostrich; some people, as she averred, being like that remarkable bird, inasmuch as they imagined it possible to deceive Society as to their intentions by doing things "on the quiet." Having so far relieved her mind, she devoted her energies to Angela's trousseau, displaying, in fact, a great deal more interest in the matter than the girl herself.

The lovers had been one afternoon to visit Mrs. Lyle, a charming but somewhat formidable old lady, almost too devoted to her son, whom she was convinced no woman could fully appreciate, "her dear boy's" manifold perfections rendering it impossible.

The visit had not been an unqualified success. Angela felt she was being "appraised," and did not improve under the process, while Douglas, seeing that they did not "hit it off," made matters worse by well-meant but somewhat clumsy efforts at creating a diversion.

"I feel sure I have seen you before, Miss Carlisle," said Mrs. Lyle's companion, a person chiefly remarkable for an unpleasantly retentive memory, and an unfortunate knack of recounting her various recollections at singularly inopportune moments.

"Now I come to think of it, it was at the flower-show at Petersham; you looked so *very* sweet, I remember. Don't you recollect it?"

"Hardly," said Angela coolly, "considering I was never there."

Now, as a matter of fact, the companion was perfectly correct, but Angela's answer was accompanied by such a contemptuous, not to say scowling glance in her direction, that the poor little woman collapsed, and muttering something about "most marked resemblance," subsided for the remainder of the afternoon.

But the incident prevented any further friendly intercourse; and Angela rose at last to bring her unpleasant quarter of an hour to an end.

"Good-bye, my dear," said her hostess. "I shall hope to find in you a daughter, and you must look upon me in the place of your own mother; poor child, it is very sad for you to have lost her so young!"

The old lady's voice was kindly, and she looked at Angela with genuine affection in her keen grey eyes, but the girl did not respond as was her wont to the show of sympathy. Indeed, she was almost repellent in her manner, and effectually checked any further advances on the part of the elder woman.

She was singularly quiet, almost absent, all the way home, and when at last they reached the little villa Douglas ventured on a slight reproach.

"Angela," he said, "I wish you could make up your mind to like my mother. She is quite prepared to be proud and fond of you."

"I always told you that your people would prove the stumbling-block, Douglas," she answered, "but if I have behaved in any way contrary to your wish towards her, I am sorry."

Her voice sounded very tired, and her eyes were fixed and sad.

"Forgive me, darling. I was a brute to say anything to annoy you! Kiss me Angela, and say that you forgive me?"

"Do you really love me.

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Douglas? I mean, is it for myself? Would you care for me if you were suddenly to learn that—that I was Jane Smith, for instance, of plebeian family instead of——"

"You are a goose, dear!" he laughed. "You don't suppose I love you because your name is Angela? I should be as capable of affection if you were Jane; but it's rather a useless sort of imagining, isn't it, dear? No one could picture you as a member of a plebeian family."

She murmured some unintelligible answer, and, pleading a headache, left her lover somewhat abruptly. Throwing herself upon her bed, she hid her face, and her form shook with convulsive sobs. Whatever it might be that Angela Carlisle was hiding from her lover, she was paying a high price for the deceit.

* * * * *

Early the next morning Douglas Lyle called to see his beloved. She was not at home, the housemaid informed him, considerably to his astonishment, and had not left word when she might be expected.

Douglas was troubled at the intelligence and not a little mystified. That Angela should break an appointment he had made was an unheard of thing, and he had arranged that morning to call for her a little after ten.

Twice in the course of the day he returned, each time to receive the same answer, "Not at home."

And all the time Angela was upstairs in her room, listening with aching heart to her lover's voice.

"I can't see him, I daren't see him!" she cried. "I am afraid—afraid——" She walked impatiently to and fro, her eyes feverishly bright, her small hands clenched convulsively. At last towards the evening she grew calmer, and, sitting down, wrote a note to Douglas, asking him to come round then and there and wait for her in the garden.

"I have much, so much, to tell you!" she wrote. "Come, for this last time, come to me!"

Considering that she had denied herself three times that day to Mr. Lyle, this proceeding seemed a strange one; indeed, the neat little parlourmaid whom Angela dispatched with the note thought the young lady must be a little mad.

Douglas arrived almost as soon as the maid. He made his way down the garden path, and there, overlooking the river, in the very spot where Angela had promised to become his wife, he found her, with eyes dull from weeping, her proud head drooping, her face pale and haggard. She looked strangely unlike his fair, proud Angela.

"Dearest," he said softly, laying his hand upon her shoulder, "what is troubling you?"

"Don't speak to me or touch me till I've told you all!" she said. "You cannot guess what it is I have to say to you."

"Wait a moment, Angela," he said quietly. "If there is anything that you would rather not tell me I am quite prepared to promise forgiveness without confession on your part. I trust you so implicitly, dear, that I leave you the choice absolutely."

"I must tell you, Douglas. I could not marry you unless you knew. And yet it is so hard—so hard—to tell!"

And then, with many a pause, in a voice broken with sobs, she told him all. How, as a young orphan, and a considerable heiress, she had been left to the care of an old friend of her father's of the name of Smith, a man of considerable scientific attainments, but in the ordinary affairs of life as simple as a child. His wife had died at the birth of his son, who had grown up a good-looking prodigal, a disappointment to his father, and all else beside.

Her guardian, dreading the responsibilities attaching to the care of a young girl, married his housekeeper—a kind-hearted, loving woman, who in spite of her want of education took the place of a mother to poor Angela.

"When I was but nineteen," said Angela, "my guardian died and left me to the care of his wife, the woman whom I call 'mother,' and who has been loving and tender as ever a mother could be. But she is not—not like the people you are used to, Douglas. She is unlettered, uneducated, but——" she paused. "I can't give her up," she said, "even for you!"

In the dim light she cast a glance at her lover. His face was turned from her. She seemed to read the stern, set look in his eyes, the contempt with which he heard the tale. A great fear clutched at her heart; for a minute she was tempted to end the story there.

There was another chapter, but he would never know, unless she told him. He might forgive her for loving this poor, ignorant woman who had so loved her. But the rest of the story.

Clenching her hands Angela forced herself to speak.

"Before my guardian died," she went on, "he warned me against his son Carlisle. He was not a good man. Guardian saw he was attracted to me, and feared I cared for him. His warning was all too late. I had married Carlisle secretly a year before."

She glanced piteously at Douglas as she spoke; but he made no sign.

"After my guardian's death I went with 'mother,' as I called her, to the village of Petersham, where I took my rightful name—Mrs. Carlisle Smith, though I had not seen nor heard of my husband—husband in name only—since the marriage. I sorrowed for him, Douglas. I was but a young girl, and he had seemed all that a girl could wish. But, as time went on, I thought less of him; I grew bitter towards him, and when at last the news reached me that he had been killed in a street fight out in San Francisco, I felt no grief. I welcomed my freedom. I could not bear to retain any trace of my foolish marriage, so I dropped the name of Smith and called myself Miss Carlisle. And then I determined to destroy all connection with my old life. I arranged with Mrs. Norton—a distant cousin of my mother—to launch me into Society—she knowing my story. I even kept my whereabouts from the woman whom I loved so dearly, for fear people should find out my past through her. Then I met you, Douglas, and at first I meant never to tell you; but I've learnt to love you so dearly that I could not bear to deceive you, and now—now you will cast me off."

With streaming eyes and outstretched hands she turned towards him to receive her sentence. She had deceived him. It was just she should be punished. Yet——

With a swift movement he put his arms about her.

"Angela, have you so little faith in me? Now that I have heard your story, I shall ask you once again to be my wife. Dearest, it isn't new to me. I knew it all along. My mother's companion wasn't the only person who saw you at Petersham. I was there, too, and straightway fell in love with you. I learnt your history from Mrs. Smith; had I not pledged her to secrecy she would have told you."

"Why did you want to keep it from me?"

"I hoped that you would tell me yourself, Angela. I waited sometimes impatiently for you to give me your confidence, but at last, at least, my patience is requited."

"And you can care for me, Douglas, in spite of my deceit?"

His answer was inaudible, but apparently satisfactory, for Angela straightway threw her arms round his neck, and in a voice thrilling with happiness, cried:

"I am a wretched and deceitful woman, Douglas. But I love you so—I love you so, perhaps 'twill make amends."

And apparently it did.

John K. Prothero.

"My face is my fortune, sir," she said. "That's plain enough," he replied abstractedly. Then it took him three hours to explain.

"There is one thing that I must say for Blowhard and that trombone of his." "What's that?" "He has driven all the cats into another neighbourhood to do their serenading."

Some time ago a worthy farmer and his wife had a visit from their minister, who was asked to stop to tea. Their servant, Mary, who is a Highland lass, had newly come from that locality, and her mistress put her in charge of getting the bread-and-butter ready for tea. Mary, thinking the minister's visit was of unusual importance, came and whispered in the guidwife's ear: "Will I butter the bread on baith sides?"

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Supporting a Theory.

Telling of why a Girl was a Flirt.

THE house-party at Westwood were dawdling over their coffee on the moonlit verandah.

It was a merry crowd; everybody knew everybody else, and there was much laughter and talk, but suddenly a silence fell. Then it became patent to all that the couple seated on the steps leading to the lawn were engaged in a quiet but bitter altercation.

The girl's listless air was in striking contrast to the man's eagerness.

"Your idea is an absurd one," he exclaimed.

"Oh fie!" she said, "to speak so rudely to a woman."

"It is not rudeness, but truth."

"Then they are apparently synonymous."

"I can't help it; it exasperates me to hear an intelligent girl like you——"

"Now, where," she broke in, "did you pick that up? I am not the least bit intelligent! If I were I would know better than to argue with you; it is so perfectly hopeless"—sighing—"and you do get so excited."

"And who wouldn't? Listening to such impossible theories!"

"You don't have to! I never asked you to talk to me. I came out here to be by myself, and you deliberately followed me. Why didn't you stay with the others? They are all pleasanter than I am."

"Humility," he said, "is a cloak that fits badly on your shoulders."

"My sleeves are too large, perhaps! But really you misunderstand—I have an excellent opinion of myself. I can be quite agreeable, when I choose, but I am not in the mood to-night."

"Then according to your theory you ought to be most attractive."

"What is your theory, Kate?" called her cousin.

"One you have heard me express thousands of times before."

"Shall I tell him, Miss Danbury?"

"Certainly."

"She says that a man doesn't like to feel too confident of a woman's affection; that it is the element of uncertainty in love affairs that makes them interesting; that he enjoys being puzzled and played with, and that a clever woman has only to appear indifferent to first pique and then attract him."

"Heresy!" exclaimed a chorus of manly voices.

"Mr. Stewart has omitted an important clause," said Miss Danbury. "I add that to do this the woman must necessarily be good to look at and not lacking in this world's goods."

"Oh Kate, Kate" sighed her cousin, "would you insinuate that the masculine fancy is influenced by worldly advantages?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I have stated my case; you can make it what you choose."

The hostess, who had been listening idly, now put in a word.

"The trouble with you all is that you analyse too much," she said. "Why not take things as they come, without worrying over their possible causes? It is so much more simple and healthy."

Miss Danbury turned round.

"Isn't Madge charming?" she said amiably. "To hear her you would suppose that she had never seen the inside of a drawing-room. She always gets like that when she comes to the country; something in the air, probably."

"And you?" said Stewart, when the laughter following her speech had died away; "has it no effect on you?"

"The country? Oh, yes, it makes me—if that is possible—more indolent than usual," and she leant her head against the pillar and looked not at him, but past him to the stretch of rosy sky.

"What an actress you are!" he said; "you are not the least bit indifferent really, but it has amused you to pose as such so long that now it has almost become second nature."

"To pose as anything involves a certain amount of personal exertion."

"Well, doubtless you find it worth while if your audience is appreciative; and it usually is, I fancy."

"Have you noticed those two clouds?" she said. "It is curious to watch how they keep floating first towards and then away from each other, like people who are playing at cross purposes."

"You were evidently not listening to a word I was saying."

"Oh, yes, I was. You were scolding me, but you generally are, you know, and you said something about my posing. You have told me that often before, and so——"

"And so—apparently there was no need for listening to me. I had no idea I was such a bore."

She looked at him, saying:

"Now, you see, you are angry again! Don't you think," leaning towards him confidentially, "you ought to do something for your temper? It may get you into trouble some day. Not everybody is as amiable as I?"

"Still wrangling?" asked Carl Ainslie, lounging down the steps. "My dear young friends, it grieves me to the heart to see such a display of unchristian feeling. 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite.'"

"Blame Mr. Stewart and not me," said the girl; "you know, Carl, that I haven't the energy to quarrel with any one, especially in this weather."

"Of course not. Miss Danbury only says the things that make other people want to quarrel."

"A charming character you have given me; after that, I think I will abandon the field to you. Come, Carl," with a quick change of manner, "let's go down to the lake for a row."

Stewart watched them with wrath in his heart—the girl was talking gaily, her soft laugh floating back to him.

"There goes a living denial of her theory," he thought. "She is kindness itself to Ainslie and he is devoted to her. Indifference, indeed! I'd like to see the woman who could attract me by that. As for Miss Danbury, she is a heartless little flirt, and I don't intend to fret myself about her," and he climbed the steps and stalked gloomily off to the smoking-room.

"Kate," said young Ainslie, resting on his oars, "I'm your cousin and have a right to tell you when I think you are doing wrong; so I say—do leave poor old Stewart alone."

"Leave poor old Stewart alone!" indignantly. "I think you had better suggest his leaving me alone."

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"Of course, now, you know very well what I mean. It's all right for you to trample on Herbert and Reade and myself, we're used to it—been broken in too long to protest—but Stewart's another sort; he cares awfully about things."

"Oh, indeed, so he 'cares awfully,' and the rest of you, I suppose, are only amusing yourselves."

"How you tease a fellow! No—what I mean is that he is so terribly 'all there,' don't you know, that if he lets himself be hard hit it would knock him out completely to have you throw him over."

"So terribly 'all there'—what a graphic expression. Yet undeniably true in this case; but why do you take it for granted that I will throw him over?"

Mr. Ainslie's face expressed the utmost consternation.

"Well, really, I don't know, but I thought, I somehow concluded——"

"What?"

"Why," a brilliant idea striking him, "that you didn't care for anybody, and wouldn't until you had seen more of the world, for you are very young, Kate, in spite of your many experiences."

"Carl," said Miss Danbury solemnly, "the Bar has lost a shining mark in you, but I am proud to claim you as a relative."

* * * * *

It was a fortnight later; the house party would disperse on the morrow, and Miss Danbury, to whom Westwood was dear, was taking a farewell stroll through the gardens. She was idling down a path, when, catching sight of Stewart over the tops of the rose bushes, she ostentatiously put up her parasol and turned in the other direction.

But he was not to be so easily thrown off; with a curl of the lip (for he had recognised the manœuvre) he hurried towards her.

"Miss Danbury!" he cried. "Will you spare me a few moments?"

She turned her head.

"I am not in a pleasant frame of mind. Uncle forwarded me my dressmaker's bill this morning, with certain pungent comments of his own appended, and my best manuscript has just been returned to me as 'unsuitable,' so the atmosphere is not rosy."

"Never mind about that. I will not detain you long," and he pulled up a chair.

For a few moments there was silence, for now that he had gained the coveted interview Stewart did not seem to know what to say, and Miss Danbury, with the point of her parasol, sketched triangles and circles and all sorts of impossible devices in the sandy path. While looking the picture of careless inattention, she was in reality curious to know how long her companion intended to continue staring in front of him. When he finally did speak his remark was so different from what she expected that she almost started.

"I suppose you know you are very beautiful," he said. "Doubtless your mirror has told you that already, so I need not weary you with repetitions, but I feel sure that you do not realise how absolutely charming you are."

She looked at him wonderingly; it was a favourite method of hers, and usually worked well, but now it failed to produce the effect she intended.

"Don't look like that," he said, "or I shall think you are not sincere, and I don't want to think that. I want to carry away the kindest thoughts of you."

"You have changed," she said. "Ten days ago you told Mary Fair I was thoroughly heartless."

"Did I? Well, that only shows I was a fool. I know you better now; and what is more, I understand you."

A slight pause.

"I heard up at the house that you were engaged to your cousin, and while the news could not but hurt me, it was in one sense a relief, for I knew at once why you had avoided and almost ignored me. You wanted to save me pain. Experience has taught me that if a man saw much of you he generally cared for you, and you tried to ward me off. But you cannot keep the moth from the candle, and I loved you in spite of your coldness. It almost looks as if there was something in your theory, doesn't it?"

Miss Danbury gathered herself together. Stewart did not know it, but she was summoning courage to tell him the truth about herself. She loved to be well thought of, and it was a genuine sacrifice to speak, but she could not, in common honesty, allow him to remain under his delusion.

"You must not think too well of me," she began.

"I could not," he cried. "One rarely sees so much youth and beauty and simple goodness united as I find in you."

Simple goodness! The words scorched her.

"You are all wrong," she cried, with burning cheeks. "I am not the least bit like that. Don't you see? Can't you understand? It vexed me to have you laugh at my theory, so I determined to make you an example of its truth. It was from no good motive—not to 'ward you off' or 'to save you pain,' but with the distinct intention of making you care for me, 'that I pretend to be indifferent.'"

Stewart got slowly to his feet.

"And so," he said, "in support of a theory, for the sake of proving yourself in the right, you could play havoc with a man's heart and make havoc of his life. Fool, fool that I was, not to understand!" and he struck one palm sharply against the other. "Well," with sarcastic courtesy, "the point is gained, the poor dupe at your feet. I hope you are content."

"Content!" she cried. "I was never so sorry in my life. It seems strange that I should care, doesn't it? And, as you say, I have gained my point—and yet——"

"Yes," he said, "and yet?"

Instead of replying she turned her head swiftly away, but not before he had seen that her eyes were full of tears. He stood irresolute, overcome by surprise; then he approached her.

"Don't cry like that," he said. "You never meant to hurt me; it was a pretty bit of acting to you, and if I was stupid and overdid my part you are not to blame. There, look up. What will your cousin say if he learns I distressed you?"

"What is it to me what my cousin thinks?"

Mr. Stewart stared.

"Pardon me, but I thought that being engaged to him—"

"I am not engaged to him. Nothing is further from my intention."

A silence followed. Then Miss Danbury rose to depart, but Stewart, whose mind had been adjusting itself to the changed situation, put out a detaining hand.

"Kate," he said, "if you are not going to marry your cousin, perhaps there might be a chance for someone else."

"Perhaps."

He drew nearer.

"I know I'm a perfect fool to rush on my fate, but what's worth having is certainly worth asking for. Kate, will you marry me?"

She smiled, but her eyes were very tender.

"I believe you do love me," she said.

"Well, a little."

"And if I marry you, I know I shall be happy. You are so strong and true, and have my confidence so utterly, but I have been horrid to you, so rude and disagreeable that I don't see how you can stand me."

"Why, you are going back on your theory."

"The girls will certainly laugh, and Carl will never leave me alone about it, but I don't care," lifting her face resolutely, "I love you, and there's no use pretending I don't."

A little while later she looked up.

"I always said I would never care for anybody," she remarked, "what will this prove?"

"That you are a woman," he said.

C. A. Ashborne.

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Seven more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

FIFTH LIST.

49. AFHLMOTU .....
50. ABILRRTUY .....
51. AADGGNR .....
52. BEHRRSSUWY .....
53. AEILPSY .....
54. AADILMVY .....
55. ABDMORR .....
56. CEEEILRST .....
57. ACEEGHKNOR .....
58. ACHLLSSS .....
59. AABCNNRU .....
60. AEEKNOSSV .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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The Saving of Felicia.

How a Man Worked Out his Redemption.

There was no brighter room in the house than that which Felicia Nelson called her den. It was really her bedroom, but everything about it was so bright and cheerful that she often preferred to sit there rather than in the more formally furnished drawing-room.

All things combined to make the apartment pleasant; it caught more of the sunbeams than any other chamber, Felicia had that happy faculty of making a place look pretty and restful by the style in which she distributed the trifling ornaments and knick-knacks, and Felicia herself was like a ray of light. If she were not reading or otherwise absorbed, she was singing, and everything about her seemed gay.

The contrast between the usual aspect of the apartment, and that which it presented one evening in early summer was very striking. It was as war and desolation compared with peace.

The sky was dark with the raging storm, except when it was rent from end to end by vivid flashes of lightning; the thunder pealed continuously, the rain descended as if another deluge were imminent.

The windows of Felicia's den rattled, shaken by violent gusts of wind, the air appeared to have been changed from sultriness to wintry coldness. The room itself was dull, chilly, desolate, for all the life had vanished from it, as if driven away by the shadow of a great trouble.

Felicia lay stretched on the floor by the side of her bed, motionless, except for an occasional convulsion of the body, such as may be observed in certain children and adults after a violent fit of weeping and sobbing.

A shudder passed through the girl's frame as a flash of lightning passed before the eyes which had opened spasmodically. She felt that the storm of the elements without was a counterpart of the storm of emotions that was going on within her.

"*That* storm will cease and probably leave no trace behind it, but it cannot be so with the tempest which is raging in my heart!" she moaned, shutting her eyes once again. "If I had any room for doubt, if he had been charged on circumstantial evidence I could smile at it; for, terrible as that would be, I should be assured of his innocence, and, when the trouble was over, we should be happy together, happy in the love we bear to each other, and in the consciousness of innocence. But it is too true! He has admitted his guilt!"

She made an effort and rose to her feet, slowly and painfully, as one who is recovering from a weakening illness. She tottered to a chair, and let herself fall into it.

"He has done this!" she cried, a little more animation coming into the tear-dimmed eyes. "He has done this! My love for him, his for me, his own sense of right and wrong, the thought that he would bring disgrace on all of us—all this is not sufficient to maintain his steps in the path of integrity, and he is admittedly guilty of theft. He has stolen money from his employer. He is a paltry thief!"

The fountain of tears was dry; the lovely blue eyes, generally so soft and liquid, were hot and hard. She had given her love to a man who had descended to theft in order to meet liabilities incurred through the vice of gambling.

Her lips curled slightly; her hand clenched, as if to crush out the tiny spark of love which persisted in keeping alight in her breast.

Why are we so perverse? Philip had done that which must kill the love of the woman to whom he was betrothed. Felicia Dixon tried to put out this flame, yet it remained just alive, just a spark, and would not die away!

When the engagement was announced, many people shook their heads. It was natural enough that Philip Harding should fall in love with such a winsome lassie as Felicia, seeing that everybody was in love with her.

It was natural, too, that Philip's manly figure and handsome face, aided by his ingratiating manner, should make him a favourite with the fair sex. Yet, on the closer acquaintance that must have preceded the actual engagement, Felicia should have been able to detect the weakness of the man's character, as shown by the want of solidity about the jaw, and the feebleness in the appearance of the mouth.

"I know all that you are going to say!" she declared haughtily to a lady who desired to put her on her guard. "You are insinuating that he may fall into error. Thank you! But, supposing that your estimate of my lover is correct, I am confident that my love for him will make him strong! Yes, I even feel a sense of pleasure in the thought that I have an opportunity of proving how much the love of a woman can do for the man of her choice!"

The lady, an elderly woman, and a friend of the family, desisted in her benevolent attempt to warn Felicia. This conversation came back to the girl's memory very distinctly, and she passed her hands over her face, pressing them against her cheeks, temples and forehead in the futile effort to drive it away.

"He will not be prosecuted, they tell me," she thought. "He must go away. Will he try to see me? Will he come to beg my pardon for the wrong he has done me? Or is he too weak, too bad, even for that?"

She could not analyse her own feelings; she could not decide whether she wished him to come, or to go away without seeing her. In a dulled state she prepared for bed, not noticing that the thunder and lightning had ceased, but that the rain was still descending in torrents.

Sheer exhaustion made her sleep soundly, and the heavy slumber was Nature's restorative.

She awoke later than usual on the following morning, and felt stronger to meet the sorrow of a love that was worse than lost, because it was disgraced—stronger by far than she had anticipated.

"He is going away; he will not be prosecuted," she repeated several times. It was something to be thankful for! "Will he—will he try to see me?"

She hardly knew whether she wished him to do so or not. At first she curled her lips in contempt at the thought that Philip would venture to stand before her; her tall, graceful figure drew itself up to its full height, her beautiful face lost its sweetness, and assumed a look of sternness, her head was thrown back, and she had the appearance of a veritable goddess inflamed with indignation and wounded feelings.

Then a strange alteration took place. The tiny spark of love flared up for the moment, and she imagined Philip Harding in front of her, penitent, beseeching her to have mercy.

She fancied that she could hear the speech from Shakspeare's great play—"The quality of mercy is not strained." She

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remembered the beautiful prayer which her dead mother had taught her as a little child, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that——"

She could not finish it, even in thought; a softened look came into the lovely eyes, and slowly the attitude and look changed till Felicia resembled a pitying angel of surpassing beauty. If Philip Harding had come at that moment!

"He is gone!" she murmured in the afternoon. "It is a wild day, the rain and the wind have it all their own way, and it a fitting environment for an exit in disgrace and misery! Truly, our sins find us out!"

"Felicia!"

The name was uttered in a hesitating, pleading voice. She had sunk into a reverie, but the sound electrified her into life.

"Philip!" she cried, springing to her feet. "You here? Have you—have you dared to come here, to face me?"

Her voice had grown in fulness as she spoke; the volume of sound had increased as her indignation grew. He quailed before her glance, and his eyes dropped.

"Yes, I have dared!" he replied sadly. He no longer ventured to use her Christian name. "I have come to tell you how much I sorrow over my own downfall and over the effect upon you. Oh!"—he cut himself short as he was about to add "my darling!"—"Oh, you cannot realise how deep is my sorrow, how I loathe myself for this weakness!"

He lifted his eyes to meet hers, hoping to see in them some sign of forgiveness and compassion, but it was the figure of the indignant goddess that met his gaze.

"How entrancingly beautiful she is!" he breathed. He could not fail to observe it, although his own death sentence, the words that would rob him of the last grain of hope, was upon her lips.

"You have robbed me of my happiness in life!" she told him, her body quivering with the scorn of wounded love. "You have deprived me of that which a woman prizes above all things, the love of a worthy man! I gave you my love, the affection which should have caused you to do your utmost to be worthy of it!

"A man should be strengthened in the path of integrity by the thought that a woman has intrusted to him something which is beyond price to her, something which should be held as a sacred charge—her love!

"You have forgotten to guard the treasure; you have brought upon yourself the punishment of the common criminal! Your punishment and debasement recoil upon me! And that is the return which you make to me for the love which my heart poured out to you! Go from me! I wish to be alone!"

"So be it!" he said gravely and firmly.

As the words of his sentence fell on his ears, they had brought out all the strength that lay within him. He recognised the justice of the condemnation, but he waited in vain for a trace of mercy.

The severity of her manner stiffened the weak lines of the mouth; his figure straightened itself, and, although his appearance still indicated penitence, there was more manliness and determination in it than Felicia had ever seen.

The fact struck her and kept her silent.

"I accept your decision. I admit that you are right in all you say, yet——"

He stopped, as if waiting for her to encourage him to go on, but she remained mute. He continued, quietly at first, but with a passionate ring showing itself in his voice as he proceeded.

"I had hoped for some mercy. I have been weak! I have been a fool and a coward to bring this upon you, but it will be a terrible lesson to me! It will be a beneficial lesson, for it shows me my inner self and teaches me how to act and guard myself in the future. "Is there no chance of redemption for a sinner? Am I to have no opportunity of atoning for this miserable slip, and holding my head aloft again, even in this town? Surely, a first fault, a false step in a weak moment, is not to blast my whole life and crush me! If man is so hard, then a Higher Power is more merciful. Tell me, Felicia, is there no hope of redemption?"

His very passion dragged the name from his lips; he held out his hands appealingly. His heart was reflected in his eyes, and she could see the depths of this man's agony. Had she the right to be so hard? *Could* she be so obdurate when that tiny spark of love was threatening to burst into a flame? Could she drive this man from her, telling him that redemption was impossible? Again there came the transition from the indignant goddess to the compassionate angel. He observed the beginning of this change.

"Felicia," he pleaded, "give me a little hope that I may redeem myself in the future! If it is impossible to regain your love, let me at least take with me the consolation that you do not think me utterly bad!"

He knelt before her, taking her hand and gazing with intense earnestness upwards at her exquisite features. How much he had lost!

"Give me a little hope! I have wronged you, but I will do all that is humanly possible to make amends. Do not drive me from you with the thought that nothing remains for me except death or a long life of misery!"

At the window appeared the face of a little child.

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He kissed her hand passionately. She tried to speak, but she had momentarily lost the power of articulation. How strangely Philip had altered! This man breathed a spirit of latent strength which she had never suspected! Was it just that he should be sent away hopeless? Is there no redemption? Oh, yes, yes!

"Shall mortals deny that which their Maker grants?" she said gently. The voice was so tender that it startled Felicia herself; it was not like her own voice, it seemed to be that of someone speaking for her. "Do not kneel before me! I am not worthy of homage, for I, too, have a lesson to learn—the lesson of forgiveness when real repentance is shown.

"Philip, there will be opportunities of redeeming yourself, either by some noble deed or by years of steady work! Go away with that hope! I do not know whether we can ever again be to each other what we were a few hours ago, but we can be true friends, and in the distant land to which you will make your way, you will be gladdened by the thought that at least one person is watching the working out of that redemption!"

He kissed her hand reverently. He still held it as he rose to his feet; he gazed at her earnestly, longingly, for a brief space, then he gently relinquished her hand and passed from the room, turning at the door to take a last farewell look.

The sun shone through the clouds and shed a bright ray across the figure of the girl, and Philip Harding went forth with renewed hope. His last look was indeed upon a pitying angel.

To the other inhabitants of the place the appearance of the sun had a more prosaic meaning, for it betokened the cessation of the rain and relieved many well-founded fears concerning the capability of the river bank to withstand the force of the swollen torrent.

If the rain stopped the threatened danger might be averted, although many people had their doubts. The wind did not drop, that was the disquieting factor, and it might agitate the water to an extent that would encompass the mischief.

It was an hour later when a frightened maid ran to Felicia and gasped out the news.

"Oh, miss, the river bank has given way and the water is flooding the Malling Dale!"

"Is it serious?" demanded Felicia, forgetting her own trouble and thinking only of the danger to other people. "Is the break a wide one? What is being done?"

"The water is flowing along about a foot deep, miss; I haven't heard if the gap is a big one, but the water is rising, and it will knock the wooden houses over and sweep them away if it goes on!" responded the servant.

Felicia required something to take her out of herself, so she hurried to put on her hat and light cloak. It had left off raining, but the wind was so high that it was difficult to keep one's feet at times. Another thought had come to her. Felicia's father was a doctor, and he had intended to call on one of his poor patients in Malling Dale; her child was ill. Had he been caught in the flooding of this sparsely inhabited valley?

Felicia hastened onwards. She lived near the end of the town—it was an old family residence, and the doctor had stayed there—which was not a great way from the Dale; she was therefore one of the first to reach the spot.

Malling Dale extended for about half a mile, from the river bank to a point beyond the town, where it widened into a common. The point at which Felicia reached it was about the centre of its length.

Felicia found the Dale flooded, as the girl had said, to the depth of twelve or eighteen inches. The people were scurrying from their houses or taking to the upper storey; the latter was hardly a safe proceeding, as the rickety places were likely to be washed from their foundations by a strong flow of water. They were mere huts of wood, most of them, and quite a number of them had only one storey.

The unfortunates and their rescuers were wading through the water with some of their belongings. One house stood alone, not a soul being visible, and Felicia recognised that it was the abode of Mrs. Dawson, whom her father intended to visit.

"I am glad that he is not there, and that the poor woman has got away with her child!" thought Felicia thankfully. "The water has burst open the door, so the furniture must be floating about downstairs. Heavens! What is that?"

She might well ask. At the window there appeared the face of a child, and it was easy to see that the little one was crying and in great fear. What could have happened? Perhaps the poor woman had left the child while she went into the town for something she wanted, and the bairn was left to the mercy of the waters!

There was no one near her, but Felicia did not hesitate; drawing her skirts together so that they should not impede her movements, she waded to the hovel and entered. Her anxiety for the child made her deaf to the dull roar that had arisen in the distance.

"Poor little thing!" she said soothingly, as she picked up the little girl of five. "Has mother gone out? Don't be afraid, I will not let the water come to you!"

She pacified the child, keeping her high in her own arms so that her wet clothes should not touch the little thing, and turned to leave the wooden structure dignified by the name of a house. But she started in dismay as she reached the door. The water was rushing along at a great rate; she knew that a larger gap had been made in the river bank and the Dale would soon be a mighty torrent!

Felicia's heart seemed to stand still. She was forced to retreat into the room or the rush of water would have swept her away on its bosom; but the protection of the hovel could be only temporary.

The water was rising, rising, and she had to get on to the bed in order to keep well above the surface. The wooden structure rocked under the force of the water dashing against it.

Felicia's face grew white; she was no poltroon, but this meant death unless a speedy rescue were effected, and who knew that she was in the house?

"I must get to the window and shout!" she said aloud in her anxiety.

She got off the bed and pulled it with all her might near to the window. She mounted it again, threw up the sash, and cried aloud for help. Her face at the window, with the child's face near it, at once became the object of amazed and pitying eyes directed to the house.

Swish! A great force of water rushed against the structure; it rocked and swayed. A loud cry of fear came from the onlookers, and Felicia felt herself thrown against the wall. The wooden home of the Dawsons had been torn from its base, turned on its side, and was being carried down the roaring stream to the common! It would be dashed to pieces against some stronger erection before it had gone far!

Felicia scrambled to her feet to find that she could sit on the edge of the overturned bed and hold to the window frame, the side of which was now the bottom. The overturned house was floating on its side, the roof acting as the stem of this strange craft. The interior was comparatively free from water, as the house was now on the surface of the racing torrent.

Who would save them? Would they be saved? They were drifted from those who might have aided, and their case seemed hopeless.

She leant as far as she could out of the window; she saw the tops of some small trees as they went past; she looked in the direction from which she had come on the surface of the water, and she saw a man in a boat, coming also with the flow of the stream and rowing at the same time in an effort to go faster. Her eyes dimmed as the well known form met her eyes; it was Philip Harding, and he was risking his life to save hers!

Yes, he was making a heroic effort, the noble deed that would work his redemption! She remembered her words to him only a short time previously.

Would he succeed? He was gaining, gaining, but every now and then a concussion of the overturned house against

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some weaker object reminded her of what might happen. The house swayed and rocked fearfully, even as it floated along.

Bump! Felicia was nearly dragged from her hold on the window by the shock, but she felt thankful when she recovered. Her craft was stopped by a brick built house, and its progress arrested without danger!

She looked towards Philip; he was coming now at a great rate, but her gladness changed to horror as she looked. Close upon him was a huge mass of floating trees, parts of wooden houses, and other débris, the whole forming a formidable mass that would crush anything so frail as a boat or the overturned wooden structure which sheltered her—crush it to matchwood! And this mass was coming direct towards her!

The position of Philip's boat was such that by a few powerful strokes he could have sent it beyond the width of this mass and saved himself; but he saw that Felicia was doomed unless her strange vessel could be got away from the empty brick house that detained it. The mass would then dash against the brick and would probably be arrested. Otherwise, the overturned house would be simply smashed between the brick house and the mass of floating débris!

Felicia understood it all, and she watched Philip pulling hard to get to her before the floating débris could crush her and the child. It was a race for life! Philip must increase the space between himself and the mass in order to gain time enough to cause the overturned house to swing clear of its barrier.

Nearer and nearer he came in his cockleshell of a boat, the mass coming swiftly after him. Would he reach her in time? It was doubtful! And what of Philip himself? He was courting death! Would he reach her before that all-crushing mass ground the life out of her and the child?

Nearer and nearer! Oh, at last he reaches the window! There is time to drag them out! He gave a mighty push with his right-hand oar against the overturned hovel, while his left-hand oar was placed against the brick wall at his back, to act as a supporting base. Hurrah! It moved! He pushed harder; the mass was upon them. A mighty effort and he saw the overturned structure clear of its obstruction and disappearing behind the brick house as the rushing water carried it along once more.

And Philip? Felicia, with glassy eyes and a feeling that she had been turned to stone, saw the mass crash against the frail boat as she passed at the back of the house, and then her view was mercifully obstructed!

Felicia was saved; and Philip, by an act of heroism and self-sacrifice which has scarcely been equalled, had worked out his redemption!

F. Brewster.

SISTER ANNE.

The Tale of a Sacrifice.

"If my thoughts are true," said Wistful Doubt, "he will ask me very soon, perhaps this evening, and I can't say 'No' to him, for I love him above all the world. I couldn't live without him."

"It would not make any difference to Nell," said Sisterly Love, "she could live with us."

"He won't mind that when I tell him of my promise to mother," said Tender Heart.

"But I may be mistaken," cried Wistful Doubt; "why should he love me?"

"I am old, nearly thirty years old," said Despair, "and I am neither beautiful nor rich. And I am not clever."

"They say every woman is beautiful to the man who loves her," suggested Wistful Hope, "and he is as old as I am. And Cupid does not consult the birthday book."

She was so much absorbed in her thoughts that she did not hear the door being opened. Nell entered the room and looked quickly round until she saw the figure of her sister who sat by the window.

The firelight danced fitfully across the floor and seemed to throw out welcome and encouragement to Nell, but it could not reach to the other corner. Anne sat amid the twilight and wove the shadows and the fireshine into her dreams.

It was apparent that Nell had come on a difficult errand. She stood by the door for several minutes, still holding the handle, hesitating whether to enter the room. Then she seemed to muster up courage and walked forward on tip-toe. And at last she stood behind the arm-chair, and, stooping swiftly, kissed her sister upon the cheek.

Anne turned in an instant and looked up with her eyes still warm and tender. And Nell took encouragement from that look and opened out her heart.

"Sister Anne," she murmured, using the old title of nursery days, "I want to ask you something. No, don't turn round, stay just as you are, or I shall never be able to tell you."

"What is the matter?" cried the elder sister in some alarm.

"I want to ask your advice," said Nell doubtfully.

"Yes, but tell me, what is it about?"

Even with the shadows, and the fact that Anne was looking the other way, Nell could scarcely explain herself.

"It's about me," she said, and then added with a sudden glow of courage, "and—and somebody else."

"Yes?"

"Supposing I had fallen in love with that somebody else?"

"Is that what you meant, Nell? Is it really?"

"Yes," said Nell, and was too much occupied to notice the delight with which Anne had received the news.

"Who is it, tell me at once?"

"It's Jack Hamilton."

The hand that Anne had raised to place round her sister's neck fell back upon her lap. She turned and stared stonily through the window, seeing nothing, only conscious of a numb sensation as though her heart were freezing. And Nell, gaining courage now she had made the great avowal, continued her story of happiness.

"He hasn't asked me yet, but I think he will. I've liked him ever so much for a long time, but I thought, somehow, that it was you he came to see."

There was no reply from her sister. Only her hand crept forward again in the darkness and drew Nell down, until their faces lay together.

"I did not know I loved him until yesterday," she continued, "when we met in Barker's Lane. He said he was coming to see us to-night and had something very important to ask me.

"I guessed what he meant, because he's been here so often

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lately, and he's been so kind to me, and seemed pleased to be with me. But I'm only twenty years old," she added wistfully, "and I may be mistaken. Do you think it is so, Anne, and do you think I ought to say 'Yes' to him?"

Then for an instant a picture flashed before Anne's eyes. The picture of a woman who lay dying, and who, with her last breath, confided her younger daughter to the care of the elder one.

"Since you love him," she said quietly, "there is no reason why you should not say 'Yes' to him. And you must try to make him very happy, Nell, for I think he deserves it."

And in this way, quietly and unostentatiously, Anne made the great renunciation of her life.

During the evening the front door bell rang. Nell's arm tightened suddenly round her sister, she quivered for an instant, and then was still. They heard the housemaid passing along the hall.

"Come," said Sister Anne, "let us go to the drawing-room."

Ten minutes later she was back in her former place by the window. She had made some trifling excuse and left them to their happiness.

In that ten minutes the firelight had sunk into a smouldering lethargy with only an occasional leap and sparkle.

As Anne crossed the room and entered the grim shadows that surrounded her chair, she felt as though she, too, had sunk into lethargy, into a life that for the moment was all darkness. And if the Recording Angel noted the tear that presently rolled down her cheek and splashed upon her hand, it was only that it might be made another jewel for her crown of self-sacrifice.

Meanwhile Jack Hamilton closed the door of the drawing-room, and then hurriedly returned to his seat.

"Nell," he said, leaning forward, "will you do something that will help to make me very, very happy?"

"I don't know, it depends."

"It's just this. I've fallen in love with the best and the dearest girl in all England; but I'm afraid to ask her, I'm diffident all at once, and I want you to help me."

"How can I help you? What can I do?" murmured Nell.

"You can tell me if you think I have any chance. Not that I shall cease to love her whatever you say, but if you tell me your sister does not dislike me, or perhaps even likes me a little——"

"My sister—Anne?"

"Yes, do you think——" and then he stopped, for Nell turned suddenly and faced him with a look in her eyes he had never seen there before.

Anne's fondness for dreaming in the twilight, her sudden silence when she heard the name of the man whom Nell loved, her great self-sacrifice for the girl to whom she had been both mother and sister for so many years.

"Oh!" muttered Nell, with a sob in her voice, "I was blind—I should have known! Anne is in the morning-room," she cried, turning to Jack with all her soul shining in tenderness from her eyes. "Go to her now. Ask her. I think she loves you."

Jack was halfway across the room in an instant. Then he turned suddenly and came back and kissed Nell:

"You will live with us after we are married?" he whispered.

"Yes; but go now—she is alone."

Jack made his way to the morning-room. It was almost dark, even the fire had smouldered away. Anne sat alone by the window, and the moonlight creeping in, illuminated her with its own glory. Jack advanced upon tiptoe without knowing why he did so.

Nell was aroused from her reflections five minutes later by hearing the front door closed. She sprang to her feet, ran to the window, pulled aside a corner of the blind. The sudden suspicion that had come into her mind was verified. Jack Hamilton was walking slowly down the steps, with his head bent and his arms swinging listlessly.

She was out of the room and after him in a moment. He turned hurriedly at the sound of her footsteps.

"You were mistaken, Nell," he said gently.

"No, come back with me." She almost dragged him into the drawing-room. "Wait, I will fetch Anne; you must not let her say 'No'—make her say she does not love you."

"She has already said that," said Jack.

But Nell did not hear him. She ran into the other room. It was empty. Anne had disappeared, and the chair by the window looked like something incomplete.

She hurried upstairs to her sister's bedroom, and there she found Anne, and assumed a masterful tone at once.

"You've sent Jack Hamilton away," she protested, "and nearly broke his heart and your own. He loves you, and nobody else, so the sooner you say 'Yes' the better."

"But you?"

"Pooh! Rubbish!" said Nell sturdily; and then she broke down for an instant and flung her arms round her sister's neck and cried, and laughed, and cried again. "You dear old Sister Anne, did you think I would accept such a sacrifice after I knew?

"Won't you let me have my turn now and you say 'Yes'? and, oh! you will make a lovely bride, Anne, with your beautiful brown eyes and your straight nose and the curve of your chin.

"If I were a man, I'd fall in love with you myself. As for my features, they're all right in their way, but they're 'hodd-uns,' as old Thompson told me yesterday. So come downstairs with me at once"—she was coaxing Anne out on to the corridor by this time—"and sit down by the drawing-room fire and we can talk matters over;" they were halfway down the stairs now. "But, of course, it's understood that I won't accept Jack at any price!" and, with this remark, Nell opened the door and ushered her sister into the drawing-room.

She heard two cries of astonishment as she closed the door, and then she ran up to her own room, and was seen no more for half an hour. At the end of that time she descended the stairs, armed with all her native cheerfulness, and solemnly informed Jack that she thought of buying a black tabby to console her for the loss of Sister Anne. **Wal Frank.**

SHE: "Do you believe that too many cooks spoil the broth?" He: "Yes; far too many."

BERTHA: "And so Edith has made up with Fred? How did it happen?" Albert: "Oh, you see, it was the only way she could have another quarrel with him."

SHE: "But he has such a delightful way of saying things—quite a poetic temperament." He (a rival): "Yes, he has soarings after the infinite, and divings after the unfathomable, but he never pays cash!"

"THERE is only one reason," he said, "why I have never asked you to be my wife." "What is that?" she asked. "I have always been half afraid you might refuse." "Well," she whispered, after a long silence, "I should think you'd have curiosity enough to want to find out whether your suspicion was well-founded or not."

A GENTLEMAN admires a charming widow over whose head seventeen summers have passed at least thrice. "Oh, yes," said one of his friends, "she's very charming, I know; still, you must admit that she is wrinkled." "Wrinkled!" echoes the chivalrous lover. "No, sir. There may be the indelible impression of a smile upon her face here and there, but that is all."

The following Tartans have already appeared on the covers of "Short Stories":

No. 1.—MENZIES ...	*Issue dated August 2nd, 1902.*
No. 2.—MACPHERSON ...	*" " August 16th, 1902.*
No. 3.—MACLEOD ...	*" " September 13th, 1902.*
No. 4.—ROB ROY ...	*" " October 4th, 1902.*
No. 5.—MACMILLAN ...	*" " October 25th, 1902.*
No. 6.—MACDONALD of SLEAT	*" " November 29th, 1902.*
No. 7.—ERSKINE	*" " January 3rd, 1903.*
No. 8.—CLERGY ...	*" " February 7th, 1903.*
No. 9.—BRUCE ...	*" " April 25th, 1903.*

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Below is Our Great New Serial.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor s son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
MARY MASON, Lady Maitland's maid.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Good-bye, Sweetheart! Good-bye!"

It was the day of the *bal masqué* at the Manor, and just two days after Lady Maitland had spoken to the foundling, Ivy Strange, about the honour done her by the new master of the "Rest," in wishing to make her his wife.

Since the occasion when the girl had taken the two letters into the spinny to the waiting man, she had not been up to the Manor, and Muriel and Jack who had called at the lodge had been informed that she had caught a chill. But the second time Jack was not to be sent away when Mrs. Parkins met him with the same excuse.

"Is Ivy in bed, Mrs. Parkins?" he said quietly.

The woman hesitated.

"No, sir; she is sitting in the parlour by the fire. But she seems queer-like—the ghost of her bright self—for all the world as though she 'ad something on 'er mind."

"Then I must see her." Jack spoke firmly; a sense of foreboding stealing over him. It was so uncommon for his bright, winsome little sweetheart to be laid up, that he felt there was something behind it all.

"If she is well enough to sit by the fire, Mrs. Parkins, she is well enough to see me, her future husband."

He strode past her, into the tiny sitting-room that Mrs. Parkins always called the "parlour," and flushed with pained surprise as he saw the face of the silent, listless girl sitting in the one armchair. It had been the face of a happy, joyous child before, now it was the face of a saddened woman; and in the large, violet eyes there lurked a frightened, furtive, look that changed to one of startled love, as they fell upon the figure in the doorway.

"Jack!" she murmured, rising from the chair, and putting out one tremulous hand to steady herself; "you should not have come here!"

He came forward quickly and took her in his arms. "Indeed! That is a very tall order to issue from the lips of my 'princess' to her 'Prince Charming.' I shall begin to think that you don't consider me worthy your heart and hand now, beloved, and have bestowed them on another."

He was not prepared for the result of his tenderly-playful reproach upon the silent girl in his arms.

With a slight cry, she broke away from him, and faced him with quivering lips. "You are right," she said, speaking quickly and in a low, distinct voice; "I have changed my mind. You must not think of me as your—'princess' any longer—only—only—as the girl at the lodge!"

"Ivy! Ivy!" he exclaimed, in bewilderment. "Do you know what you are saying? That you don't love *me*—your lover! Oh, my darling! You must be playing some cruel joke on me! Testing my love for you!"

She shook her head, dully. "No, I am not joking," she said steadily, speaking with averted eyes. "I am in earnest; I can never—never—marry you. You must not ask me for any reason," she went on hurriedly, "only go—Jack! Leave me, and—forget me!"

He laughed shortly.

"It's not so easy for me to forget as it is for you to cast me off. I have a right to know why I am being treated like this," he said passionately. "I can't believe that two days have changed your love into hate, unless there have been some strange things happening to turn it into another channel!"

"Ah, no!—don't say that!" she cried. "Nothing could ever make me cease to love you; but you must be to me like a beautiful dream I once fancied real."

He went up to her swiftly, and put his hands on her shoulders, looking down into her face with tender eyes.

"Ah, sweetheart! You admit that you love me! What then can come between us? What can ever prevent our love from continuing in the same sweet way as formerly? You are ill and unstrung, my dearest," he went on soothingly; "but you will cheer up when I tell you that you may soon expect some news about the quest you intrusted to me."

She shuddered and drew away from him with frightened eyes. "Don't! Oh, if you have any love for me at all," she cried, clasping her hands together feverishly, "you will do as I ask you in this as in the other thing. In future you can be nothing to me, and I have decided not to—to—trouble about the past. I am content to let things remain in—in oblivion."

She turned away and looked out of the window with misty eyes. She could not trust herself to gaze upon the misery a cruel Fate had demanded that she should bring into the life of the man she loved. It was enough if he let her pass out of his thoughts without the agony of listening to his reproaches.

His voice disturbed her. It sounded harsh, and the ringing note of yesterday had gone from it.

"Then I am to understand that, in spite of your having professed to love me, that it was all pretence—a fraud—of which you are now tired; and that even the parents you longed to meet have lost their value in your eyes, and you have ceased to wish that the secret should be solved?"

She bowed her head, dumb with pain. She dared not let herself speak, unless the agony in her heart betrayed itself in her voice.

"At least," he went on, white with pain, "at least, you will give me some reason for this cruel conduct? Is—is there *another* man?" And his jealous young eyes were keen to note the wave of colour that scorched her face.

She turned proudly. "Why do you make it harder for me? Can't you see that it hurts me—as much as it does you! There is no other man that I shall ever love—I swear that!"

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

she cried passionately; "but I mean it when I repeat that in future our ways in life lie far apart, and—and there is no mystery to be solved now!"

"No mystery!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean, Ivy? Have you heard——"

"I have heard enough to convince me that I need seek no further!" she said wearily. "Oh, why don't you leave me? I—I can't stand much more!"

"What have you heard?" he said doggedly. "I will not annoy you any further, as soon I know. But all the same I will do what I vowed I would—seek out this mystery for myself!"

"No, no!" she cried piteously. "For my sake, Jack, don't! I know that—that—my father——"

"Ah, Jack! Is that you?" said a clear, musical voice behind them, and, turning quickly, the eyes of the girl and her lover fell upon the radiant figure of Lady Maitland.

"I am surprised to find you here," she said graciously. "I imagined that Ivy was too ill to see anyone. I called to say that I think it will do you good to appear to-night at the fancy dress ball." And her eyes rested on the white, mute face of the girl near the window.

"I came to see Ivy, thinking I had a right to do so!" Jack replied impatiently.

"Ah?" And Lady Maitland raised her brows.

"I have told—Jack——" the girl said slowly, "that our engagement does not exist any longer. I think it wiser for us both to break it off."

A gentle sigh fluttered to the lips of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife.

"But," said Jack, his voice ringing once more with determination, "I will not recognise that decision, Ivy. There is someone behind you, urging you on. I mean to find out who it is! You love me; you have just confessed that you can never love another man; and with that knowledge I mean to fight out this mystery by myself. Good-bye, little sweetheart!" he said tenderly; "although your lips deny me—your heart does not!"

With one lingering look he turned on his heel and left the lodge, his love wounded more than he cared to own before the cold, proud wife of his father.

"Come," said her ladyship sharply, after a long pause; "don't mope in that way, girl! I wish you to come up to the Manor to-night and enjoy yourself. It will do you good!" She hesitated, then said slowly, "I hope you have told nothing of the confidence I have reposed in you, to—Jack?"

The girl flushed. "No," she replied, in a low voice, "I have told him nothing, Lady Maitland. Of course, knowing what I do, I would never marry him to bring disgrace upon him."

"But," said her ladyship slowly, "I would strongly advise you to marry Digby Scarlett, because he not only happens to know of your parentage—but he loves you, in spite of it."

"Oh, please, Lady Maitland!" cried the girl, "don't talk to me about anyone else—just yet. You don't think what this has cost me. I—I—can't stand any more now!"

"Very well!" said Lady Maitland gently; "I will leave you to think over what I have said, and I expect you to be at the Manor this evening. Remember, Ivy, I will have no nonsense; shake off this foolish infatuation, and be thankful that you have the chance of marrying well, in spite of your—unfortunate birth!"

She sailed out of the room, said a few smiling words to the curtsying Mrs. Parkins, and, stepping into the carriage that had waited for her, drove away.

As she leant back against the padded sides of the luxurious brougham, Lady Maitland smiled grimly.

"I am glad this has happened, after all," she murmured. "My star is in the ascendant once more. I had begun to fancy otherwise! The girl will be like wax in my hands, and *he* will win the rustic bride he covets!"

The drive was thickly studded by huge trees on either side, and the late December afternoon was dark and gloomy, causing her ladyship to draw her fur closer round her with a slight shiver.

Suddenly, from out of the darkness, a shadow seemed to spring. It paused a moment by the side of the carriage that had come to an abrupt standstill, owing to the shying of the horses, and a long, lean hand flung a piece of paper into one of the half-open windows, where it fluttered on to the knee of the woman seated among her furs.

"What is the matter, Denton?" said Lady Maitland sharply to the coachman. "Has anything happened?"

"No, my lady," replied the man; "only a tramp frightened the 'orses."

She sank back with a sigh, then her hand came in contact with the scrap of paper on her knee.

"What is this?" she thought idly; and under the light of the carriage-lamp she opened it slowly with dainty fingers.

A few moments later, when the brougham stopped in front of the entrance hall of the Manor, the woman who stepped out of it looked strangely pale and worn, while in her eyes there shone a haggard, desperate gleam.

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.
Lady Maitland's Double.

The *bal masqué* was nearing its height at eleven, and every beautiful room in the Manor was flooded with brilliant electric light, and the notes of the Blue Hungarian Band floated through the windows out into the grounds. A temporary marquee had been erected outside the porch of the Manor, in order to shelter the guests from the gale as they left their carriages.

Sir Trevor Maitland's lovely wife was, as usual, the belle of the ball. Never before had her eyes shone so softly, or her low laugh been so infectious. Over her pale green tulle gown she had a domino of turquoise blue brocade, the daring combination of colour setting off her imperious style of beauty, and drawing all eyes upon her.

Heriot North came up to her as, for a brief moment, she stood alone, gazing upon the moving mass of faces with an absent smile.

"You seem to have gathered together a bevy of fair women and brave men," he said, lightly, his eyes lingering on the curves of mouth and throat of the woman he had met too late in life.

"Fair women are easy to find," she laughed. "but brave men are becoming more rare each day!"

"Don't say that!" he broke in eagerly. "I am ready to prove myself brave, if you wish it!"

"Perhaps I may test you—soon," she answered lightly, an undercurrent of earnestness making her voice slightly uneven.

As he moved away unwillingly, to claim a partner, Lady Maitland sent a strange look after him.

"Perhaps—to-night, even," she murmured under her breath. "But how to make him understand, without betraying—all! I must think of a way out! Fool that I was to have sent that letter to the wretched convict! Now he is doubly blackmailing me! But to-night will see the end of his triumph!"

"May I speak to you, alone, for a few seconds?" said someone behind her, and although in the costume of a gentleman of Louis XVI.'s reign, and masked, she recognised the voice of Digby Scarlett.

"Is it important?" she answered shortly.

He smiled: "Does Lady Maitland imagine that I would seek a private audience with her for a frivolous reason?"

"Follow me," she said coldly, replacing her mask; and, preceding him, she slowly moved among her guests, exchanging compliments and graceful speeches with one and the other, until she reached her boudoir.

Digby Scarlett closed the door softly.

"Tell me," he said abruptly, "have you persuaded that girl to give up her boy lover?"

She bowed her head: "Yes; I put it to her that with her

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ignominious birth it would be wrong to let him marry her. She apparently has fallen in with my suggestion!"

A peculiar smile lit up the evil eyes of her guest as he said, slowly:

"So you impressed her with her obscure parentage, did you? That—that was clever of you! Did you also say that it would be advisable for her to look upon me as her future husband?"

"Yes," she replied coldly; "but I think—if I may suggest it," she added maliciously, "that you would stand a better chance of winning the girl were you to wait until she has got over the—the break with her lover! She is young, and her first love affair is sure to harden her heart against the second—at first!"

"Ah!" he sneered, his white teeth showing in a sarcastic grin, "I presume you speak from the wine-press of your own experience, Lady Maitland! But I don't choose to bide my time. I have spent my life in too much dallying. Now the last leaf in the laurel of my patience is nearly mine!" he cried exultantly. "I have done with waiting!"

She looked at him curiously.

"Why have you set your heart on that foundling? I should have thought a man of your nature would have wished to make a good marriage. There is Muriel, for instance."

He laughed harshly: "Don't be afraid, Lady Maitland, I am more than satisfied with my choice—more than proud of the lovely foundling. But," he went on, in a lower tone, "don't you dare to play me false; stick to your part of the bargain, my lady, and I will stick to mine. Is the girl here? I want to see her!"

Lady Maitland opened her mouth to answer him, when suddenly, through her mask, her eyes grew fixed with horror, and the words on her lips died away in an incoherent gurgle.

"What's the matter?" said Scarlett quickly; "can I do anything for you?"

"No—no!" she murmured, waving him off. "I am subject to these attacks; they seize me suddenly. You asked me if the girl was in the Manor," she went on hastily; "yes, she is. I told my maid to give her a domino and mask. She is probably with Muriel in the ball-room."

When he left the room Lady Maitland went up to the window and stared through with anxious eyes. The blinds had not been drawn, and only a moment ago she fancied that a sallow face with cruel, mocking eyes, had been watching her. It had vanished as soon as she had turned her head, but the memory of it made her shiver.

"Suppose he had seen it!" she muttered. "He would have recognised it as the face of the beggar he had seen that same day he met Ivy in the wood! So my blackmailer is growing bolder!" She shut her teeth with a sharp click. "To-night, at half-past eleven! I can easily slip away; we do not unmask till twelve! I shall be back by that time!"

She mingled among her guests for a brief period, then glided to her room. On the threshold she met Ivy, looking white and sad-eyed.

"You here still, child!" she said in surprise, noting with vexation the girl's listless manner.

"Yes, Lady Maitland," the girl murmured, flushing. "My head was aching and I stayed here to be quiet, and finished mending the lace you gave me to do."

Lady Maitland looked at her suspiciously.

"Have you been talking to Jack?" she said coldly.

"I have not seen him," Ivy replied, lifting her head and flashing a proud look into her ladyship's face.

"That is well," she said slowly. "I am glad you have shown some commonsense, because Mr. Scarlett informs me that he desires to marry you as soon as possible!"

"No! no!" the girl gasped hoarsely. "I cannot marry him! I cannot!"

"Hush, you little fool!" said her ladyship, in a low voice. "If you do not choose to marry him, then resign yourself to ruining the life of the man you profess to love!"

Ivy raised her head, fear shining out of her pain-stricken eyes.

"What do you mean?" she whispered. "He, my—the man in the wood—has been nearly paid—now!"

Lady Maitland made a gesture of contempt. "The man in the wood is not the man to fear—for Jack. But," she lowered her voice cautiously, "Digby Scarlett holds a certain paper of Jack's that, if he produced it, would bring sorrow and shame on Sir Trevor. Now you know why he has been silent about it, because he fell in love with you!"

"Surely Jack would do nothing wrong?" the girl panted; "he is the soul of honour!"

A sneer played round the mouth of her ladyship. "Most men are till they are found out! But you—the foundling, brought up by charity instead of being sent to the workhouse—ought at least to sacrifice yourself for the sake of the man who has given you the education and surroundings of refinement."

"How cruel you are!" the girl moaned; "cannot you pity me also? Am I not suffering as well?"

"You are young," replied the older woman coldly, whose beauty was just a trifle more mature than that of the girl before her "and youth can survive a great deal! But come," she continued in a kinder tone "you must remember that I have made you my confidant and that I look to you to help me to keep Sir Trevor in ignorance of what might be a fatal shock did he get to know! Now you must go downstairs and mix with the guests; but first have you a domino to wear?"

Ivy shook her head. The grim irony of decking herself up for a fancy dress ball while her heart was aching and burning with the intensity of suppressed emotion, struck her with a sense of unreality.

Lady Maitland rang her bell: "Félice, bring out a domino for Miss Strange, and a mask."

The maid looked puzzled: "Dere is none dat I can find, milady" she said "only ze one like dat your ladyship 'as on!"

Her mistress' eyes dilated with a sudden thought.

"Ah! Then bring it here for Miss Strange. It is lucky that I thought about having two!"

When the woman had helped the silent girl into the fellow to the domino that her mistress was wearing, Lady Maitland laughed softly.

"Now you really look something like *me*, Ivy!" she exclaimed. "Here is your mask and here is a string of pearls to wear! Go down," she continued. "and I will follow you shortly. And," she touched the girl's arm warningly, "remember I trust you to try and listen to Mr. Scarlett, should you see him—for Jack's sake—and his father's!"

When Ivy had left the room, Lady Maitland laughed again.

"That girl is a most useful 'dummy'! In that cloak and mask she will effectually pass for my double, and I fancy I have frightened her into submission this time!"

She turned the key in the lock, then hastily took off her blue domino and exchanged it for a black ulster; then from a drawer she drew a dark wig, with which she covered her own bright hair; afterwards winding round her head a black woollen hood that partially concealed her face.

She went to the door, then turned back.

"They say it is unlucky to turn back!" she thought; "but not in my case. I shall take my luck with me!"

She opened another drawer—this time in her escritoire—and took out the small, shining thing she had kept so long in her possession.

"You will help me—perhaps—who knows!" she murmured. Then, with whitening lips, she switched off the electric light, opened her door, stole swiftly along the corridor, and down the kitchen stairs that led out by a side door into the garden.

* * *

"Ivy, darling, I have waited to speak to you—hung round here in this miserably gay house just for the chance of meeting you, my cruel little love, and to implore you to tell me that you were joking with me this morning when you said that all was over between us!" And Jack Maitland,

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cloaked and masked, as the occasion demanded, drew the shrinking figure of his sweetheart into the conservatory.

"Don't, Jack!" said the girl, in a low, frightened voice, nervously playing with the mask in her hand. "I told you this afternoon that it could never be the same between us—never; and—and—I do not wish it to be!" she added slowly. "I made a mistake in thinking that it could."

"Then you care for someone else?" and his cold, even tones struck a chill to the heart of the girl.

"No!" she murmured, "but—but—oh, Jack, can't you see that I have a strong reason to make me break my word? Don't torture me, dear. I have enough to bear without that."

He released her slowly. "And you won't tell me your reason for refusing to let me go on with the inquiry about your parentage?"

"I cannot," she said faintly. "It will be useless; don't ask me any more. I—I——"

She paused, a sudden movement among the palms stopping the words on her lips.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Shot in the Night.

"MISS STRANGE is engaged to me—now, Maitland," said a voice behind them, and Digby Scarlett, mask in hand, stepped forward into the light.

"You?" said Jack, speaking thickly. "You lying scoundrel! How dare you, after the lesson I gave you some time ago, trespass upon this lady and myself? If you don't instantly apologise I shall kick you out!"

"Then I appeal to Miss Strange," the other man laughed sneeringly. "She will inform you that I am no lying scoundrel in saying she is to be my wife!"

Jack seized the girl with trembling hands. The veins on his brow were standing out like cords, swollen and discoloured.

"Deny this man's presumptuous lie, darling," he gasped. "Prove that he is wilfully insulting you!"

"I cannot!" she moaned. "It is not a lie!"

Digby Scarlett laughed exultantly. "There you are, Maitland! Ivy has told you that I am perfectly right in claiming her as my future wife. You had better apologise for your rudeness!"

"Does this mean that you love—that creature?" Jack said in a low voice, to the girl leaning heavily against him, and whose cold hands clung wildly to him.

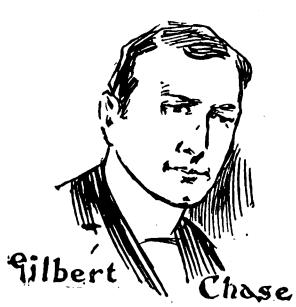
"No!" she gasped. "I don't love him—but—I am going to marry him. I love you, Jack—now and always!"

Her hands fell from his, and she would have fallen had he not caught her to him and held her tightly.

"Come," said Digby Scarlett roughly, "she has owned to being my promised wife, it is my place to take her from you if she has fainted!"

He took a step forward, but the light in the boy's eyes made him hesitate.

"I am taking her back to the house," said Jack, in a strained, peculiar voice, "but I shall have much pleasure in meeting you in the wood afterwards, and giving you any satisfaction you may desire. I am more than willing to risk my future chances of salvation, to save the woman I love from a living death with a man she hates!"



Across the body of the unconscious girl he shot a defiant look at the man who had stepped between them, and the meaning of that glance sent a cold shiver through the man who had betrayed his friend a second time.

"As you will!" he said, with a sneer. "It matters not who takes her now. She belongs to me, and will do so to the end! I will meet you in the wood later, and we will there finish our discussion satisfactorily!"

He left the conservatory by the door leading into the grounds, and disappeared in the shadows that led up to the Manor. As he entered the hall a quiet-looking man gazed after him.

"So that is Mr. Digby Scarlett, is it?" he muttered. "I don't remember his face, but the moment the woman 'Mason' mentioned his name the other day, I knew where I had heard it before. It's strange his coming down here after all this time! I wonder if he ever thinks of the occasion when his evidence sent his friend to 'chokey!'"

Some moments later, Gilbert Chase met Jack Maitland clad in ordinary garb walking down the drive.

The ball was at its height, and the dominos and masks lent an aid to wearied souls in escaping from the gaiety that cloyed.

"Ah, I just wanted a few words with you, Chase!" he said. "I don't think there is any necessity for you to stay longer in Melton now. I am more than half inclined to give up the inquiry on which I started you!"

"How's that?" ejaculated the detective shortly. "Do you mean, sir, that I am to throw it up?"

"Yes," said the young fellow impatiently. "I—I—am no longer engaged to Miss Strange, and she has requested me to cease seeking out the past."

Gilbert Chase was silent. He was thinking of a few nights ago, when he had overheard a conversation between a man and a girl. Then, when they had gone, he had searched about with the aid of matches, and picked up one or two pieces of paper now in his pocket.

"Let me see, sir?" he said slowly. "What is the name of the young lady?"

"Ivy Strange," Jack replied curtly.

"Ah! So she does not wish you to look any more for her parents?" the man went on slowly. "It sounds almost as though she may have heard something—or just knew something—not quite nice about them! On the other hand, sir, she may have someone behind her, making her break off with you, to serve some purpose of their own!"

Jack clutched the detective's arm tightly.

"By Jove! that's it, Chase, and I believe it's that brute Scarlett who is at the bottom of it all!"

"Humph!" murmured Gilbert Chase. "Then you think that Mr. Scarlett is after her, and frightening her?"

"I do," replied the boy firmly. "And I have changed my mind now, Chase. We—you and I—will fight this out for ourselves, and find out whether there is any false play going on. For marry Scarlett she shall not! I would kill him first!"

"I don't think we need go so far as that, sir," smiled the detective, "but I certainly agree with you in satisfying ourselves."

Jack laughed recklessly. "Leave no stone unturned, Chase. Digby Scarlett can know nothing about Ivy Strange. He only came here a little over a month ago, through my wretched instrumentality," he said bitterly. "Fool that I was to bring him! But to-night I have something to say to Mr. Scarlett—alone!"

As he strode away the detective sent an anxious glance after him. "Hot-headed and impulsive! I hope the boy will do nothing rash! It's just as well that I did not tell him all I heard in the spinny! As to my old friend Mike Holland being a loving father, well, I must find out a little more before I express my opinion!"

He stood for a moment looking through the window into the ball-room, where all was brilliancy and laughter. "It's well to be Lady Maitland," he said. "All this wealth and her own beauty should make any woman happy!"

As he walked thoughtfully away he murmured, "Yes, she is a very fortunate lady! It's strange I haven't seen her since that day outside the post office!"

Suddenly he stopped.

What was that loud, sharp report that sent an unexpected thrill through the lean body of the detective? Surely there were poachers in the spinny, or—and a damp moisture burst out on his brow.

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"He could not have been so mad—so reckless!" he muttered. "There was nothing to gain by it, yet I saw him go off in the direction of the wood!"

He hurried his steps into a quick run—the old instinct of the hound and fox gaining the ascendency. As he neared the spinny, some ten minutes later, a second shot rang out clearly, then a third, and an instant later a shape, blurred and shadowy, collided with that of the detective.

It was pitch dark, and he could only distinguish a mass of hair under a shawl, and hear the panting breath of the frantic creature as she tried to drag her arm out of his grasp.

"Who are you?" he said loudly. "What are you doing here, and why are you running away?"

The woman did not speak, and the man's hand still held her wrist firmly, while he attempted to strike a light with the other. Suddenly the woman bent her head, and before Gilbert Chase knew what had happened, her teeth had met in his flesh, sending a sharp, stinging pain up his arm, and he involuntarily let her go, with an exclamation. As he did so she swiftly ran into the darkness and disappeared, leaving the baffled detective ruefully binding up his hand with his handkerchief.

"All right!" he muttered grimly. "I'll have you yet, my black-haired vixen! I managed to leave a mark on your soft arm that I shall recognise anywhere!"

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

"I Claim your Promise."

THE hour of midnight had struck, and instantaneously the word went forth, "Unmask!" In the centre of the ballroom Sir Trevor Maitland's lovely wife stood, receiving the congratulations of her guests, and listening to their flatteries and platitudes. Only a very close observer would have noticed the slight quiver of her short upper lip, and that the blue domino rose and fell with her quickened breathing almost as though the mistress of Maitland Manor had been hurrying.

"I'm sorry you felt faint a short time ago, dear!" said Sir Trevor, coming up to his wife solicitously.

"How did you know that, Trevor?" she replied, smiling on him archly. "I thought I had kept it a secret!"

"So you had," he answered, "but I saw Jack coming out of your dressing-room and closing the door, as I was passing along the corridor. I stopped and asked him what was the matter, and he told me he had taken you to your dressing-room, as you felt suddenly faint, and did not wish to be disturbed for a short time, so I went downstairs to entertain our guests."

Lady Maitland could have laughed aloud as she listened to her husband's words. Her trick had succeeded even better than she had anticipated, for in the fellow domino to her own, and masked, she guessed that Jack had had a scene with Ivy, who had fainted, and in desperation the boy had carried his sweetheart into her dressing-room, the blue domino, like her own, aiding him in shielding the girl from his father's questions! So he had innocently proved an alibi—should she require one!

She looked round keenly, but among the unmasked faces of her guests she failed to see either Digby Scarlett or Jack.

Where were they? she wondered, with a quickening of her breath. Had the faint of that girl been brought about by a quarrel with the two men, or were they in the supper-room?

She moved slowly towards the door, attracted by a small crowd that seemed to have collected, and as she drew nearer she heard such expressions as "Give him air!" "Send for the doctor quickly!" and calls for some ice.

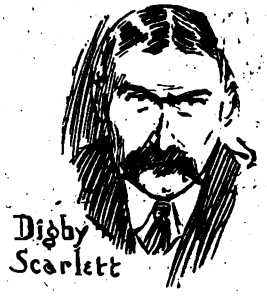
"What is it?" she said hurriedly, parting the crowd with hasty hands, and leaning forward, she saw, lying still and white, with an ugly wound on his temple from which the blood was trickling down his face and matting his hair, the elder son and heir of her husband!

"Jack!" she exclaimed; "oh, my poor boy! How did this happen?"

She knelt down and took his head on her knee, looking a lovely picture of the "ministering angel," as she bent over the prostrate form.

"Where did this awful thing happen?" she said again, raising her voice. "Surely poachers would not dare!"

"No, my lady," said a respectful voice behind her; "it was no poachers that did this to Mr. Maitland. I heard the shot myself, and found him unconscious in the spinny."



Lady Maitland slowly turned her head; her eyes were partially veiled by the fringe of dark lashes, and the sudden contraction of her pupils at the sound of the voice that had come from the group of sympathisers, was unnoticed. She saw a slim, insignificant-looking man, with gentle blue eyes and a deprecating manner, yet in the firmly closed mouth there lay a suspicion of dormant strength of purpose.

Sir Trevor Maitland's wife shivered—then smiled. She recognised the man as the stranger whom she had seen some time ago entering Jack's den.

"Ah," she murmured quietly. "Then you *have* an idea regarding the personality of the creature who did this?"

The man smiled strangely. "Yes, your ladyship," he replied, "I have an idea that it was no man who shot Mr. Maitland."

"No man?" she exclaimed bewildered. "Then whom do you suspect?"

"A woman, your ladyship," replied the man calmly, reaching out his hand, round which was a dirty handkerchief, and speaking in a clear, ringing voice; "the same she-fiend that did this to *me*, struck at Mr. Maitland!"

Beneath the burnished curls on Lady Maitland's white brow a few drops of moisture trickled, cementing the tiny chestnut rings of hair on to her forehead.

"I am distressed to hear this!" she murmured regretfully; "I can hardly imagine that my step-son would have an enemy. But if you have a clue to this woman's identity, I hope you will do your utmost to track her to her punishment!"

The group of frightened guests had gradually melted away, and carriages soon bore them down the drive from the scene of the tragedy; and only a few servants lingered in the vicinity of the stricken family, awaiting the arrival of the doctor.

Suddenly, above the sound of voices, there rang out a cry that startled and thrilled the hearers with different emotions; and before the amazed listeners could intervene, a slim, girlish figure in black, with a strained, white face, and fear-laden eyes, had flung herself down beside the prostrate body of Jack Maitland.

"Oh, my dearest!" she cried wildly; "they tell me you are dead—dead! And I was not by your side to receive one look of pardon, one glance of love! They have killed your body, as they killed our happiness! Now I shall have two horrors to haunt me—a murdered heart, and a murdered love! Oh, my dear! my dear!"

Her words trailed off into a moan, and her hands sought the still face of the boy who had been her lover. Suddenly she spoke again, and this time her words arrested the attention of the man who had brought Jack Maitland to the house.

"Forgive me, dear! I know who killed you! I know who has taken you from me! Now I will tell——"

"Child!" And a firm white hand on the girl's shoulder made her glance up fearfully into Lady Maitland's face. "Come, dear," her ladyship continued gently; "you are unstrung and shocked by what has happened; but your fears are exaggerated. Poor Jack is not dead, only very dangerously wounded; and you will make yourself ill if you do not control your grief."

Under Lady Maitland's even tone of reason the girl was silent, but the mild blue eyes of Gilbert Chase saw a strange light flash into her fevered eyes as she shrank beneath the

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gentle touch of the low-voiced woman who sought to comfort her.

"Not dead?" she murmured. "Jack not dead! Tell me, are you playing with me, or did——"

She stopped suddenly, as on her delicate shoulder she felt the slight fingers of her ladyship's hand.

"I will see that you are told everything that is wise and right for you to know, dear," said Lady Maitland slowly; "only you must obey me, now, and go to bed. Muriel will let you share her room, and I will have a message sent down to the lodge that you are staying with us. Come!"

She half led, half carried the resistless girl from the room, followed by the puzzled glance of Gilbert Chase.

When she returned from handing Ivy over to Muriel, she found the doctor had been and pronounced the wound to Jack's head serious, with possible complications, but luckily, though there was danger of brain fever ensuing, everything depended upon quiet and good nursing.

Lady Maitland gave all the necessary orders with a promptitude and conciseness that filled everyone with admiration. As she returned to the now deserted ball room, she came face to face with Gilbert Chase.

"The doctor is here," she said graciously; "would you not like to have your hand attended to? It may be a bad cut!"

He smiled, flattered by the interest of the great lady.

"Thank you, your ladyship; I don't fancy I shall feel it after a time. It is not a cut, but—a bite; which I shall not forget!"

Before she could make any remark, he said. "Could your ladyship tell me if there was a woman that bore Mr. Maitland a grudge?"

She shook her head. "I cannot. He was a most lovable boy! I can imagine no one wishing him harm. But are you certain that you passed no one else in the spinny besides that woman you saw? The neighbourhood has been troubled with burglars lately."

"I shall visit the spinny to-night, my lady," he said gravely. "I am Detective-Sergeant Chase of Scotland Yard," he introduced himself formally, making the announcement of his calling with a quiet dignity; "and no stone shall be left unturned to clear this up!"

"The spinny to-night!" she murmured; "but in that case, Mr. Chase, I insist upon your having some sandwiches and something to drink first. You may have a long ordeal awaiting you, and your strength needs keeping up to the mark."

She touched a bell, and gave instructions for the detective's refreshment, which he had not the courage to refuse, but as her ladyship was preparing to leave the room, the voice of Gilbert Chase recalled her:

"Forgive me, your ladyship; but may I ask if that—that young lady was anything particular to Mr. Maitland? She struck me as being unusually upset."

Lady Maitland smiled slightly. "Oh, that is the child of the lodgekeeper. She has been brought up a great deal with my step-children, and feels their troubles as her own. I do not fancy there is anything between them. She is apt to get hysterical at times and exaggerate matters."

Once outside the door, Sir Trevor Maitland's wife raised her right arm for an instant, moved a piece of black velvet that was fastened just above her wrist, and smiled slightly, before once again dropping it behind the folds of her domino, which she was still wearing instead of putting it on one side with her mask, as her guests had done.

"Please, your ladyship, Mr. Scarlett would like to speak to you," said a voice suddenly, and Mason, who seemed to have sprung from the earth, stood in front of her mistress, with a demure expression on her hard face.

"Where is Mr. Scarlett, Mason?" she said. "In one of the supper-rooms?"

"Yes, your ladyship," the woman replied; "I left him in the blue supper-room."

"Where is Sir Trevor?"

"With the doctor and Miss Muriel, your ladyship."

As Lady Maitland moved away, the woman looked after her with a vindictive gleam in her black eyes. "You're a sharp one!" she muttered, "those who wanted to catch you napping would have to sit up all night! But I'll get even with you one day, my lady!"

"Ah!" said Digby Scarlett, coming forward quickly, as Lady Maitland entered the room that had so recently been the scene of so much life and gaiety. "I am glad you have been able to spare me a few moments. I have come to ask you to convey to Sir Trevor my deep sympathy with him in the sudden bereavement that has fallen upon him!"

He spoke loudly, and Heriot North, who had hurried into the room excitedly, was struck by the apparent feeling in the voice of the man for whom he had entertained so little liking.

Lady Maitland turned quickly. "Ah, Mr. North," she said prettily, "will you go and see whether the man who brought poor Jack in wishes to make any more inquiries in the house before going back to the spinny?"

He assented readily to do her bidding, and she followed him to the door, leaving Digby Scarlett in the centre of the room, glaring after them with a sinister expression in his eyes.

"Keep that man in the Manor on *any* pretext!" she whispered; "until I have seen you in my boudoir. I will not be long!"

With a glance of tender chivalry into her face, he bowed his head, and Lady Maitland smilingly turned again to Digby Scarlett.

"I think there is a slight error, Mr. Scarlett," she said slowly. "Jack was carried in with a fearful wound in his head, and——"

"Is dead?" he interrupted quickly, his eyes glittering with a strange light.

She shook her head, and approaching him swiftly, said in a low tone: "No, he still lives, and good nursing will pull him through—perhaps! *Someone* bungled to-night, Mr. Scarlett!"

He started, and his dark face grew livid with a momentary fear and rage as he read her meaning.

"Not dead!" he muttered; then burst into a bitter laugh.

"I see, my condolences came too soon! But what makes your ladyship so anxious for him to live? Out of the way, my path—and yours—would be clearer; and the heir would be—your son, Woolf!"

For an instant their eyes met, hers with a fearful understanding in them—those of the man with the smile of the tempter lurking in their depths.

Suddenly she flung out her hand, as though to beat off the presence of evil.

"No, no!" she gasped, with trembling lips. "Not that—not that! I——"

She stopped, and her eyes gazed fascinated upon the lace ruffle of his fancy coat that he was still wearing, that of a gentleman of France.

"What is that?" she said hoarsely; "that stain!"

With an oath he tore off the ruffle and flung it into the fire; then turned to her savagely.

"I upset some claret a short time ago!" he snarled. "Your ladyship seems haunted by the colour!"

She shuddered and drew back.

"What do you mean! What—colour?"

He laughed, and leaning forward, whispered. "We are both in the same boat, my Lady of Maitland Manor! If you betray me, I can betray you—*doubly!* You hear! Doubly! So I warn you to remember that you and I run side by side; neither can get ahead of the other; we are comrades in——"

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The last word was barely breathed, but the face of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife grew strangely haggard and pale as she listened.

"I am going now," Digby Scarlett said abruptly; and without waiting for a response he left the room.

Outside the window a pair of gentle blue eyes looked curiously at the woman standing under the electric light.

"Her ladyship seems to feel it very much," the owner of the eyes muttered, walking away. "She's got a tender heart for others. But I wonder where I could have seen a face like hers before? I shall remember soon—that girl——"

He stopped, and drawing under a light that fell from one of the windows of the still brilliantly lit Manor, he opened a small notebook and read something that appeared to puzzle him.

"Now that young lady who said such wild words is what I should have imagined his sweetheart to be like! But this description of the girl I have sent up to town is that of the one I saw standing in the window! Quite pretty, but ordinary looking! And it will be some time before I can talk to him about the affair, poor chap—if I do then!"

* * * * *

"You see, I have waited as you commanded!" And Heriot North advanced towards Lady Maitland with an eager smile, that faded as he saw the white, pallid face of the woman who gazed up at him with burning eyes.

"Ah!" he said quickly, "you are ill; this untimely accident to poor Jack has been too much for you."

She made a gesture of impatience. "I am not ill," she replied slowly, "and it is not of—Jack—that I am thinking; but of something far more important, something that means life or death—honour or dishonour—and I look to you—the one man I can trust—to turn the tide of my misfortunes into the waters of peace and honour again. Do not refuse me!" she cried passionately. "You have given me your word—your sacred promise—you cannot withdraw it. I claim it now, and for all time!"

Madly, and with all the fascination of which she was so completely the mistress, she flung her appeal at his feet, and, dazzled, bewildered, wholly carried away by the force of her speech and the beauty of her face, he yielded, and listened to her words of wild intreaty.

"Why am I to do this in the dark?" he said. "Won't you give me your confidence—fully?"

She smiled wearily. "One day—you shall know—perhaps. I can say no more now!"

Just when the dawn was breaking in a dull, cloudy sky, two men were stooping in horror over two different things that struck a chill to their hearts, and sent a clammy moisture to their brows.

One was Heriot North. He was burning some things in a paper, and as the heat of the fire opened the parcel, he saw a handkerchief, dirty with dark stains, and a pair of pale green evening slippers, caked with mud, that he remembered having seen in their pristine daintiness.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "I am mad! This cannot be—it's monstrous!"

Then, with a sudden fear, he dug the poker into the flames, and stood over them till nothing remained in the grate but ashes; and with them was a man's honour, lying charred with the blackness of a harrowing doubt.

The other man was Gilbert Chase; and in the sullen grey of the early morning he recoiled from some inert bundle he had come across in his wanderings in the spinny. He stirred it with his foot; it was strangely unresponsive; and, with a tightening of his breath, he turned it over, where the light could fall full on it.

Then, with a stifled cry, he started back. For the face of the "thing" he had found so strangely was the face of the ex-convict, Mike Holland—hideous and awful in death, as in life; and by his side, the brown earth was stained a dark, ominous red!

(Another long instalment next week.)

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The Real Ending.

The Story of a Shattered Romance.

"So this winds the thing up, does it, Miss Angus?"

"It does, Mr. Penton."

"And you haven't any explanation to give?"

"What explanation do you want? I have told you I wished to break off the engagement because it has become irksome to me. Isn't that enough?"

Algernon Penton, with a low bow, turned upon his heel and walked out. When the door had closed upon his retreating form the young woman sank nervelessly into a chair.

"The stupid wretch!" she exclaimed. "He ought to have had more sense than to take me at my word!"

Suddenly she stooped to the floor, picked up a small ivory tablet that had dropped from Algernon's pocket, pressed it passionately to her lips, bowed her head upon her hands, and sobbed aloud.

* * * * *

Years had passed. The afternoon sun was gilding the pretentious spires and cupolas of a small town when a middle-aged man with a bag in his hand opened the gate in front of a modest, but neat and well-built house, walked briskly up the steps and knocked at the door.

A lady answered the knock—a lady well-preserved but no longer young.

The stranger bared his head. His hair was beginning to turn grey, but time had evidently dealt with him leniently, and care had left no deep traces on his brow. He spoke:

"Is the gentleman of the house—am I dreaming? Isn't this Elsie Angus? Or, rather"—and he smiled, "isn't this the lady that was once Miss Elsie Angus?"

"I am Miss Angus," she answered, "and you are Algernon Penton. I recognised you as soon as I saw you. Won't you come in?"

"Well, well!" said the middle-aged traveller, as he sat in an easy chair in the front parlour a few minutes later, and looked with interest at the face of the lady, "who would have thought of meeting you here? And you tell me you are still Miss Angus? Is this your home?"

"It is my brother's. He is a widower. I keep house for him."

"And you have never married?"

"No."

"How have you prospered?"

"I—I have no reason for complaint. And you?"

"I have had a great many hard knocks, Elsie—Miss Angus—since we last met. By the way, we parted rather unceremoniously, didn't we?"

The lady sighed.

"And I have always felt that I owed you an apology," he continued, "for not sending your photograph back after you had returned mine, but the fact is," he went on awkwardly, "I—er—couldn't find it. It had got lost somehow."

Miss Angus sighed again.

"That reminds me," pursued Mr. Penton, "that I lost a little book-slate the last evening I was at your house. I must have dropped it out of my pocket in some way. It wasn't of any particular value, and I don't know when I have thought of it before, but the recollection of it happened to occur to me just now. It was a little black book-slate, with——"

"I think it was an ivory tablet."

"No, I am quite positive it was a little black book-slate."

"I am sure it was a white tablet."

Going to the mantel she opened a plush-lined jewel-case and took out a little ivory tablet.

"Here it is," she said.

"And you have kept it all these years?" exclaimed Mr. Penton.

"Yes."

"I see I was mistaken. But to change the subject. Do you consider yourself—aw—settled in life? Have you no—no plans for the—for the future?"

"Why, I——"

She paused, and her visitor proceeded:

"In a sense, I suppose you are a fixture here? Your brother's children are to some extent dependent upon you?"

"Of course, but——"

"Then permit me, Miss Angus, for the sake of old times," said Mr. Penton rapidly, as he opened his bag and took out a number of documents, "to call your attention to the fact that life is uncertain, disease and death stalk abroad in the land, fatal accidents may happen at any time, and it is the part of wisdom to provide against contingencies by securing those who are or may be dependent upon us against want. In the policies of the Limpinlazarus Life Insurance Company, which I represent, and for which I have travelled for the last seven years, you will find the most perfect system, the surest guarantee, the most absolute security offered by any company in the world, and either on the ten-year, the endowment, or the life plan, as you may prefer, you will find the premiums smaller in proportion to the gilt-edged character of the insurance afforded than in any that has ever come under your notice, while the non-forfeitable features of the policies, peculiar to our company alone, together with the dividends that accrue after the third year, thus steadily decreasing the annual premiums, while at the same time——"

"Was this your object in calling, Mr. Penton?"

"It was, Miss Angus. I've just begun to work this town."

Opening the little ivory tablet he began jotting figures down in it with great rapidity.

"Now here, you will see," he said, "that on the ten-year plan—let me see, what is your age, please?"

"You will please excuse me, sir. I have some bread in the oven that I must go and look at, and I don't need any life insurance. Neither does my brother. I wish you success, Mr. Penton. Good afternoon."

Miss Elsie Angus sat in pensive silence a minute or two after her caller had departed, then picked up the little ivory tablet, put it back into the plush-covered jewel-case, took them both out to the kitchen, tossed them into the fire, and went about her work with a firm and decided expression on her face.

Three weeks afterwards she married a bald-headed dentist, fifty-seven years old, who had been making love to her unsuccessfully for about ten years.

Arthur Charles.

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Johnny Couldn't Have Seen.

"Mary, Johnny tells me that when he went into the dining-room last night he saw Mr. Bliff with his arms round your waist." "What a story, mamma! Why, the gas was out."

No Need to Worry.

Mr. Nuwed (gloomily): "My salary has been cut down ten per cent." Mrs. Nuwed (cheerily): "Oh! don't worry about that, dear! Silk, Ribbons and Co. are advertising perfectly lovely things at a reduction of twenty per cent."

Pity to Spoil the Look.

Mrs. Luneleigh (shopping with her husband): "Oh, George, look here! Doesn't this showcase of diamonds look perfectly beautiful?" Mr. Luneleigh: "Yes, love. It would be a shame to take anything away from it, wouldn't it?"

Plenty of Time Yet.

"Better not wait for Charley any longer. You know what it is when a fellow is calling on his girl." "Ah, there they are now! He is just bidding her good-night." "All right; let us go and have a game of billiards. We'll just have time."

Thinking of the Lost.

Maggie: "Marie's engagement has been broken off." Minnie: "Is that a fact? Poor girl! I saw her sitting at the window as I came by." "Yes; she likes to sit at the window and admire the hieroglyphics she cut on the glass with the ring she had to send back."

An Unpleasant Reminder.

Mr. Spooner (on being introduced to Adored One's Mother): "Pardon me, madam, but have we not met before? Your face seems strangely familiar." Adored One's Mother: "Yes; I am the woman who stood up before you for three miles in a tramcar the other day while you sat reading the paper."

Is a Nobleman a Man?

Mr. Graves (Chicago soap merchant): "I say, Elfrida, you've got to break off with that Baron Sourcrout." Miss Graves: "Why, p-p-papa?" Mr. Graves: "Well, a fellow this morning told me that I won't be any more of a baron than I am now after your marriage, and if I ain't a-going ter be a noble ye'll 'av' ter marry a *man*."

A Bit too Nervous.

A youthful typine had just been engaged by a prominent lawyer. She had never done regular work before, and was somewhat nervous. The lawyer settled himself back in his chair and began dictating a brief. He talked for about five minutes, when the girl stopped with a horrified look on her face. "What's the matter?" asked the lawyer. "Would you mind saying that all over again?" the girl asked, her eyes full of tears. "Why?" "I forgot to put paper in the machine."

Knew the Symptoms.

Young Man: "Doctor, I have no appetite." Doctor (diagnosing case at a glance): "Then why don't you marry the girl?"

The Price of Memory.

"I'm afraid that if you marry my daughter she'll learn to forget me." "If you feel that way, you might let her see your name on a cheque about once a month."

He Wasn't Acting.

She: "Take your arm from about my waist at once, sir! I never saw a man act so in all my whole life!" He: "You mistake me, dear. I'm not acting, I'm in earnest."

She had Dared Him.

Mother: "I saw him kiss you; I am terribly shocked! I did not for a moment imagine he would dare take such a liberty!" Herself: "Nor did I, mamma—in fact, I bet him he daren't!"

Not in the Cold Storage Trade.

"Could you not, if you tried, grant me a place in that icy heart of yours?" "My heart may be of ice, as you say, Mr. Sopleigh, but all the same I am not in the cold storage business."

Earned, Not Won.

She: "He was desperately in love with her. Why, he sent her costly flowers and presents nearly every day for two years." He: "Did he finally win her?" She: "No, he earned her."

His Sight was Bad.

He: "Do you know that for the last hour I have been watching for a good chance to steal a kiss from you?" She: "Indeed! Don't you think it might be well for you to consult an oculist?"

Danger Ahead!

"Do you know," said an extremely vivacious young lady to her excessively bashful suitor, "do you know, George, that young ladies like to be told they are pretty and attractive, whether they are or not?" "I would not think of telling you any such thing," said George gallantly, "for your looking-glass tells you better than I could that you are as handsome as a picture." "Oh, George!" "You have the prettiest face and the smallest waist I ever saw." "The smallest waist? If my waist is small, it is certainly not because of having been squeezed, George." George fainted.

The Vow not Broken.

He: "I hear Maud Watkins is going to be married." She: "Yes, and not a great while ago she told me she had decided never to marry." He: "Oh, that goes for nothing. You women can't keep a vow any better than you can keep a secret. And you, my dear, you have no cause to talk about Maud. I remember you said to me once you would not marry the best man living." She: "Did I say so?" He: "Of course you did, and in less than six months you had married me—ha, ha, ha! There is something amusing about the make-up of a woman." She: "I don't see where the laugh comes in. I can't see that I broke my vow."

Forgiven.

"Clara," said William Wharton, as he placed his arms round his wife and looked down into her eyes, "I have a confession to make to you, and I want you to promise, before I begin it, that you will forgive me." A wild fear took possession of her. She placed a little white hand upon her heart, and would have fallen if her husband had not held her up. Her face became livid, and she could only gasp: "Tell me—tell me what it is!" "I cheated a man out of £50 to-day," he said. "Can you, darling—can you forgive me?" The colour came back into her cheeks, her lips parted in a glad, sweet smile, she rested her head against his breast, and, looking fondly up to his eyes, said: "Oh, Will, dear, how you frightened me! I thought you were going to tell me that you had kissed your typine!"

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Neuralgia

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Does She Know Her Own Mind?

"I AM very much in love with a girl of seventeen," writes "EDWARD." "She owns that she returns the feeling. Do you think at her age, she knows her own mind, or is it merely a passing fancy?"

* * * * *

It depends so much on the girl. If she is a flighty girl, then it is very likely as she grows older that she will develop other fancies. If she is quiet and domesticated, and not too fond of the men generally, you might depend on it that she is true in her professions towards you.

Should a Girl Pay Expenses?

"SHOULD a girl pay her own expenses when out with her sweetheart?" asks "S. P.," who often takes out a certain young lady, and always insists on paying everything himself. The girl, however, protests, as she says she can afford to share expenses, being herself in a good position, earning a good salary. They have known each other for three or four years now.

* * * * *

I certainly think this is a case in which the girl might well pay her own expenses. She says she can afford it, and therefore ought not to depend for everything on you, who no doubt have many expenses of your own to deal with. Certainly in the matter of fares, and meals, if you have them together, it seems fair that you should allow her to share. You know each other well enough, I suppose, to be able to make such an arrangement without misunderstanding each other's motives.

Shabby Sweethearting.

"DOT" and "MAUDE" got acquainted with two young men from a neighbouring town, and in time grew affectionate with them, giving them their photos. After having won their regard, the two men wrote and said they had finished with the girls, but refused to return the photos or letters when asked. The two girls are being ridiculed over the affair, and wish to know how they can get back their photos and letters.

* * * * *

The men acted in a very shabby way towards you, and deserve very severe reproof. In this case a girl is better off if she has a brother, or a male relative she can trust, who would not mind taking up the matter for her. If the two young men were all along trifling with you, and secured your photos under false pretences, you have a right to demand them back—not legally, of course, for they were gifts—but you could request the photos to be returned by a certain date, and unless this were done, your brother or father would take the matter up. Men who deceive girls, and allow them to write intimate letters in good faith, and who finally act as these two have done, lay themselves open to severe handling.

Etiquette Questions.

"ETIQUETTE."—Yes, you should always escort a lady walking yourself on the side nearest the road. The reason is obvious. In the event of any accident, or splashes of mud from passing vehicles, the man is supposed to bear the first instalment of trouble. Another problem from "B. F." asks: "When entering a railway carriage with a lady, who should enter first, and supposing there to be a vacant corner seat, who should take it? In the same way, who should leave the carriage first?"

* * * * *

The girl should, of course, enter the carriage first, the man holding open the door, and shutting it after her. As to the corner seat, if it is next the door by which people enter and leave, the man ought to take the corner. He is then there to open or shut the door or perform any other courtesy that may be necessary, such as opening or closing a window. On leaving the carriage, the man steps out first, and helps the lady to descend—at some railway stations a very practical service, where the carriage step is very high above the platform.

How Can a Girl Help with Moneymaking?

"WILLING" is a nurse who is engaged, but to a man who has only a very small, unprogressive salary. She asks me how she can help towards preparing their home by work on her own account until her sweetheart has improved his position.

* * * * *

I am afraid the only ways open to a girl nowadays for earning money to save require a certain amount of education. For instance, a girl who can undertake typewriting in her spare time can often make a good deal, or if she is musical and able to play any instrument or sing fairly well, a little money can be made in that way. But without some kind of accomplishment there are very few chances to add to one's income.

* * * * *

All I can recommend to "WILLING" is that she should try to get a better situation than she has at present by making herself a really competent nurse, and to apply for situations in better families. There is always room for a good upper-servant in good families, and if "WILLING" got some such place she ought to be able to save the necessary money.

Church Choir Overtures.

"O. B." attends a church regularly, and while there has taken a great fancy to one of the choir girls. He, however, has had no introduction to her, or any mutual friends. She always stares very hard at him, both in church and out of it. Is "O. B." to take this as a sign that she wishes to know him?

* * * * *

I am afraid it is a habit with many girls—especially in choirs—to stare at young men worshippers, often meaningly, and often otherwise. Under the circumstances you must use your own judgment. As you belong to the same congregation, and presumably are neighbours, it should not be very difficult to get to know her family.

* * * * *

Perhaps you know the vicar, curate, or some of the churchwardens, who would be able to introduce you to the girl's family. That would be better both for her and you than to start a casual acquaintance. As another resort, why not join the choir yourself—provided that you can sing, and they have men's voices. I have known lasting attachments spring up through people being associated with each other in choirs and other church matters.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, London, Henrietta Street, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 758.] Week ending July 11th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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(A Dramatic Incident from the Story "Won Without Wooing." See inside.)

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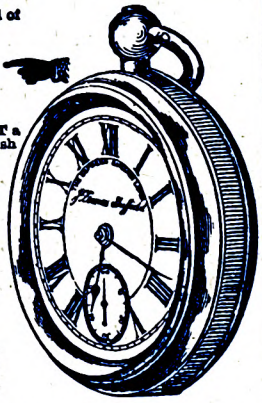

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SHORT STORIES

No. 758.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 11th, 1903.

WON WITHOUT WOOING.

A Summer Afternoon Episode in which a Houseboat, a Pretty Australian Girl, the Law, and Two Young Englishmen, Play Parts.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"Now, see here, Sadie, you know me. When I say a thing's got to be, it's got to be. Your old dad don't want to be angry with you, but he's fixed up his plans and they can't be interfered with. So you get that little word said this afternoon to the Honourable Mark, and then I can arrange the financial side of the business and make a move for Melbourne, where I ought to have been a week ago."

"And suppose the Honourable Mark doesn't ask me?"

Sadie Leland sat back among the cushions of her wicker lounge-chair, put her hands behind her proud young head, and looked at her father. One of her small feet, dainty in their low white shoes, tapped the snowy deck of the smart modern houseboat.

There was an English viscount's coronet over the crest on the stern of the flat, broad vessel, and on that of the trim steam-launch in waiting, but the flag of an Australian colony flew from the flag-staffs of both, in compliment to the country whence Mr. Peter Leland, of Melbourne and Sydney, had brought the wherewithal to rent the two craft from their noble owner.

Peter Leland coughed. He was a short, bluff, clean-shaven Colonial. His deep jaw and the habitual twinkle in his grey eye spoke of mingled good humour and obstinacy.

"Well," his daughter was told bluntly, "I fancy Lady Jane has attended to that. At all events, she helped me pack everybody else off fishing or punting, or doing something equally unnecessary, and she herself is coming with me in the launch to—to—ahem!—to see a little riverside place I am thinking of taking. You have a slight headache and prefer to read, Abington is writing letters, I believe. Once we clear off, he'll probably pop out and improve the shining hour."

Sadie rose and began to put her father's tie straight with caressing fingers.

"Dad," she said, "where's the hurry? Let me come with you and Lady Jane, I don't want to tie myself up yet. Why should you go home just now? Can't Mr. Merivale go?—it wouldn't be the first time he'd settled things 'down under' as well as you could yourself."

Peter Leland had suddenly become very interested in the set of his trouser-legs over his boot-tops.

"There are some things," he answered evasively, "a man can't trust the best secretary on earth to do for him. And, besides, Merivale isn't my secretary any longer."

His daughter stared. "Mr. Merivale not your secretary any longer?" she repeated slowly. "Oh, dad, what has happened?"

The Australian flushed. "Oh, well," he said, "it's a roundabout story, Sadie, and it wouldn't interest you. Leastways, it oughtn't to. Richard Merivale was only a promising young chap I gave a chance to, and—and, well, I'm disappointed in him. Don't you waste another thought on him."

He put his daughter gently into the chair from which she had risen and stood looking at her.

"Sadie," he added, "you understand me, there is to be no fooling about this business of Abington's. I've given you every help to get fond of him on your own. After all, you're your mother's child and she was as sentimental as a yellow-back novel, bless her. But sense or sentiment, it's got to be. Abington is young, smart, well-bred, and the next heir to a title. He's a cheap lot, from my point of view, and he's dead nuts on you."

Sadie Leland frowned. "Yes," she retorted, "he'd rather have me with three hundred thousand than anyone else with four. But won't you please tell me about Mr. Merivale. I thought he was only detained in town on business."

She met keenly her father's shifting glance. "Dad," she said, "you spoke of being disappointed in Mr. Merivale. What did you mean? You must be mistaken; I don't believe Mr. Merivale——"

Peter Leland interrupted her. "Another time, Sadie," he replied, hastily; "here is Lady Jane, come, I'll be bound, from a quiet palaver with her Honourable nephew. Ta-ta, Sadie."

He nodded significantly to his daughter and hurried off along the deck, to hand down into the waiting launch a tall and somewhat angular person in a spotted foulard gown and severely plain hat.

Lady Jane Abington—as her "style" and bearing showed—belonged to an old school of English gentlewomen, and it was well understood in Society that she only consented to introduce the Lelands into that magic circle for the sake of her nephew's interest in the pretty Sadie.

The Abingtons, however, if an ancient and exclusive family, were an increasingly impecunious one, and though Mark

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Abington was separated merely by a single ailing life from a historic title, he had not been snapped at in the marriage market. Possibly he had not wished to settle down; in his time he had been reputed more than a trifle "wild," and it was whispered that his mother's small fortune had been swallowed up at his majority by gambling debts and other dubious claims.

But years and necessity had moderated his extravagances, and Lady Jane herself, the impecunious widow of a needy peer, had hailed with genuine pleasure the chance of assisting him in a good match—good for the Honourable Mark Abington, good for the family whose wealth and influence had been on the wane for so many generations.

Sadie glanced after the launch as it sped away down the river in the yellow haze of the summer afternoon, her chaperon's white tulle parasol conspicuous in the stern-sheets beside the Colonial's Panama. Sadie heaved an abstracted sigh, for she did not dislike the stiff, lonely Englishwoman.

"Poor Lady Jane," she observed aloud, "I wonder if she was ever really happy, if she ever knew what it was to have a heart. And yet she was an earl's daughter. Heigho!"

"A very poverty-stricken earldom, I assure you," said a slow, amused, slightly harsh voice. Sadie started. A typical man-about-town—heavily built, heavily moustached, scrupulously groomed, a little lethargic in his movements, Mark Abington had come out unperceived upon the deck, to overhear and answer her self-communing. She blushed.

"I—I ought to beg your pardon, Mr. Abington," she began. But Mark Abington checked her with a gesture.

"Not at all," he said, sitting down near her; "like yourself, I have the habit of dissecting people, my own relations not excepted. As for Lady Jane, I doubt if she knows what happiness, in your sense of the word, means. She is a wheel in the English social system, that is enough for her."

Sadie smiled gravely. Mark Abington was not without a kind of cleverness; his talk, cynical, crisp, and often daring, seldom failed to interest her quick wits.

"May I smoke?" he asked. Sadie nodded. As he took out his cigar-case and lit a fragrant Muria, she studied him with a certain keen, almost painful attention. He was polished, tactful, experienced, well-bred, still young, and the bluest of blue blood ran in his veins. What girl would not be responsive in some degree to the presence of such a suitor? Even Sadie could not deny him distinction and good looks.

Mark Abington blew out his vesta and threw it over one of the canvas rail-screens that inclosed the deck into the river. He himself was studying Sadie.

Shrewd, gay, red-lipped, dark-haired and dark-skinned, yet with the clear, fine complexion of a true brunette beauty, and a slender elasticity all her own. Sadie Leland, her father's fortune apart, was just the woman to fascinate the selfish, sensuous, world-weary man at her side.

His glance dwelt upon her with cold, yet profound passion, and she felt it, as women do feel such things, without analysing it. Perhaps it is better so.

"Yes," went on Mark Abington, withdrawing his cigar from his lips; "Lady Jane is rather terrible, isn't she? But she doesn't suffer from having no heart; what troubles her is having too many nerves. I am afraid I helped to shatter a fairly large selection of them in my time. My mater died when I was at Harrow and she's been a sort of step-mamma to me for years."

"A pretty trying post, I fancy, where you were concerned," said Sadie Leland, drily.

"I daresay it was," admitted her companion, "for, to tell you a secret, Miss Leland, though I am as easily to be led as the proverbial lamb, nothing on earth can drive me. Small wonder that my aunt failed where—where another woman might have succeeded."

Sadie's pulses beat a stroke or two quicker. The tone in which the last words had been spoken was noticeably serious. With great deftness Mark Abington had turned the conversation into a tell-tale channel.

"I suppose," he continued, "that I *have* been rather a rolling-stone. But, do you know, Miss Leland, it's been as much bad luck as anything else. If I had only happened to meet some clever, charming woman—like—like you, I believe I should have settled down with the best will in the world."

He had leant forward, and though he was talking with more tact than fervour, his voice had gained a note which could not be mistaken. It was not only fortune that made her a desirable possession; she had beauty and youth and their flower had captivated his sensuous, selfish spirit.

"It isn't very fashionable to fall in love nowadays," he added; "but the most hardened bachelor may meet his fate at last and I have met mine."

His fingers sought her own. "Sadie," he said, "can't you see, don't you understand? I love you!"

Sadie Leland did not answer. Her eyes were fixed apparently upon vacancy, and she swayed slightly as she sat in the wicker-lounge-chair. Suddenly she drew a long breath and put her hand to her side.

Mark Abington's brows contracted. Her set, white face was more of a rebuff than any words could have been. Yet the abruptness of the change in her demeanour vaguely alarmed him.

"Sadie," he exclaimed; "Miss Leland, you are not well—you——"

"No—," was the faltered answer; "I—I feel very faint. I shall be better in a moment."

The colour was coming back to her cheeks, but their pallor was still almost ghastly. Mark Abington started up.

"I will get you a little brandy-and-water," he said, "it is the heat. And I—I surprised you, confound my clumsiness." And he hurried down the covered staircase that led to the saloon below.

As he disappeared, Sadie Leland rose, tottered to the rail near where she had been sitting, and bent her gaze upon the species of lush green hedgerow that fringed the bank by which the houseboat was moored. She passed a hand across her eyes.

"Was it," she murmured aloud, "was it a kind of dream? It couldn't really have been—been *he!*"

Even while she spoke there was a crackling of the underwood by the deserted pathway and a head was thrust out from among the foliage. A stalwart frame followed it.

The new-comer was young and personable, yet hatless, haggard and dishevelled. His wrists were fettered by a pair of bright steel handcuffs. Sadie Leland uttered a low, almost inaudible cry and recoiled into the shelter of the staircase down which Mark Abington had just vanished.

An instant the fettered figure stood surveying the scene, crouched into a low recess beneath a flight of open wooden steps that connected the upper deck with the stern of the vessel. From this haven he peered out cautiously, and finally as though dissatisfied with the concealment it afforded, stole swiftly up the steps themselves to hide in an angle of the canvas-covered railing that fenced the deck above.

Scarcely had his head dropped below the line of sight than the foliage on the bank was parted and a couple of men in a blue, semi-military uniform stepped out.

As the fugitive had done, they looked up and down the bank, one of them moving along it towards a point from which he might have gained, through the gateway at the head of the steps, a view of the hidden man. Instinctively Sadie Leland sprang forward, and gliding before the crouching figure.

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stood looking at the blue-coated functionaries. The leader saluted her respectfully.

"Excuse me, miss," he said, "but do you happen to have seen anyone run along the bank? We're warders from Brixtow Prison and we were taking a remand prisoner over there for the assizes, when he gave us the slip at the station up yonder. We chased him this far and lost him."

The girl on the deck of the house-boat shook her head. "N—no," she replied, clearly answering the question with literal accuracy—"no one."

The warder saluted again, thanked her, and plunged back into the thicket with his companion. Sadie turned and glanced down at the crouching man.

"Mr.—Mr. Merivale," she faltered; "you—like this!"

The other straightened himself up unsteadily; he had pleasant blue eyes—eyes in which there was no shame, only acute sadness.

"I am innocent," he said, "but what is that to you?" He hesitated, and his sensitive, clean-shaven lips trembled. "Thank you for that kind lie," he added, "I am sorry I put you to it—I did not dream of finding you here."

Sadie did not reply. Instead she sprang in front of him, pushing him back into the covered stairway of the saloon. "Go down," she bade him imperiously.

He obeyed. A glance had shown him that the leader of the warders was emerging again from the thicket. Sadie went to the side and stood unconcernedly.

The man paused awhile with a puzzled air, then came to look over the river-bank and to scan its margin critically. After a few seconds of futile reflection he roused himself and departed, shrugging his shoulders. Sadie heaved a sigh of relief and turned to descend the saloon stairs. Half-way down she was arrested by a singular sight.

In the entrance of the saloon, and just visible from the curve in the narrow stairs that Sadie had reached, was Mark Abington. At his feet lay a broken glass, from which the brandy-and-water he had been to fetch had spattered the floor of the short corridor. His eyes were starting, and his mouth was agape as he confronted the dishevelled and hand-cuffed new-comer. Some words burst from his lips and reached the ears of Sadie Leland, words spoken in a husky, shaking whisper.

"Merivale! What—what do you want with me?"

There was a ring of superstitious dread in the broken syllables. They were answered by a low, fierce laugh from the fettered man.

"I'm no ghost," he said, "though your conscience makes you think me one. I have escaped from the gaol—or, rather, from the gaolers to whom your dupe, Mr. Leland, consigned me. Liar and coward! Oh, if I were not chained!"

Sadie heard him grind his teeth in a passion of impotent indignation; she had drawn back up the staircase and stood listening, a hard, shrewd light in her girlish face.

Mark Abington pulled himself together, glancing at the broken glass by his feet.

"Escaped!" he repeated. "Escaped! And you come here to threaten me with the badge of your imprisonment upon you. A discreet proceeding, truly! I have but to give the alarm and you will be seized and detained till the police can be sent for to re-arrest you—under her eyes, for she herself is here."

Richard Merivale took him suddenly by the throat with his chained hands.

"You hound!" he said; "now I am sure that you put the notes in my pocket yourself. You read my secret, you were jealous of my nearness to her, of her simple kindness to me. You laid a fiendish trap and you triumphed. But you shall not taunt me and go unmarked."

He grasped his struggling prey and shook him like a rat.

Mark Abington closed with his antagonist and tried to throw him, calling in a hoarse whisper for assistance. But he was no match for Richard Merivale—indolence and good living had overweighted and handicapped his once athletic frame.

There was hot coloured blood in Sadie Leland's veins—it had stolen into her cheeks, and was glittering in her eyes. She crept down the staircase a pace or two more, and stood peering round the sheltering curve.

"Let me go," gasped the half-strangled man in the thin, breathless syllables that were all he could compass. "I'll give you money, money, to get away with—it's your only chance. You—you can't hope to prove your innocence. And, after all, you could never have married her."

His voice grew fainter. "Great Heavens," he whispered, "you won't kill me; you—you——" Speech failed him; he could say no more.

"Why not?" demanded Merivale, for a cold ferocity had taken possession of him; "you did worse than kill me. Why not, I say?"

Sadie Leland roused from her quiescence to glide down the stair and lay a soft hand on the shoulder of Richard Merivale.

"You need not kill him," she said. "I have heard everything. I am your witness before the law and the world."

* * * * *

And that is why Peter Leland did not come back to find his daughter betrothed to the husband of his choice. Instead, to his profound bewilderment, he discovered his late secretary seated composedly in the dining-saloon over a dainty high tea, in which cold chicken figured conspicuously.

Naturally, being still hand-cuffed—for the official form of fetter is not a thing to be easily tampered with—Richard Merivale could not feed himself with overmuch grace, but Sadie, busily making the delicate white meat into sandwiches, did not seem to mind.

The Colonial gazed incredulously at this amazing picture, and blinked deliberately several times. Sadie went to him.

"Dad," she said, "it is Mr. Merivale himself. He has escaped, as you see, and is very hungry."

Peter Leland choked down his astonishment. He was too disconcerted to inquire by what means Richard Merivale had installed himself upon the house-boat.

"Sadie," he stammered, "I—I—we kept it from you, Abington and I, thinking it best. But that fellow there is a thief. He robbed your—your future husband of three or four hundred pounds in notes, about a fortnight ago, before we left town to come here. Mark was for letting him go, but I swore, after all I'd done for him, he should be gaoled for it. Don't you contaminate yourself by going near him."

Sadie's answer was to refill the fettered man's cup and deliver it to him with a bewitching bow.

"Go slow, dad," she retorted. "I overheard the dishonourable Mark talking to Mr. Merivale when he thought they were quite alone; they had tumbled across one another down here when I was up on deck, throwing dust in the eyes of the gentlemen from the gaol. I suppose you'll take my word for what I gathered?"

"Why—why, certainly," said the Colonial; "you can't do one thing, Sadie, and that's lie. But——"

His daughter came to him, flushing slightly. "Mr. Abington put the notes in Mr. Merivale's pocket," she explained.

"Great Scott!" cried Peter Leland. "But what on earth did he want to do that trick for?"

"That's what you won't have to ask too many questions about just now, papa," said Sadie sweetly. "I—I could make you understand it all much better

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alone. What you've got to do at present is to get these horrid hand-cuffs off Mr. Merivale and arrange things so he won't be carried off to prison any more."

The Australian looked at his ex-secretary. "So, Merivale," he observed drily, "it seems I've been spoofed. But why didn't you speak out man? It was your silence that made things so black."

Richard Merivale's fettered hands trifled nervously with each other.

"Mr. Abington had guessed a secret of mine," he said; "a—a secret that wasn't quite unconnected with Sadie—with Miss Leland. That was why he tried to ruin me. It was a clever plan, that of putting his notes into my coat-pocket and leaving his pocket-book on my desk. He knew that I should see it and return it to him. To 'miss' the notes, accuse me of abstracting them, and have me searched, was simplicity itself."

"The mean hound!" ejaculated Leland warmly.

Richard Merivale continued with a certain embarrassment: "I could prove nothing," he added; "as Mr. Abington told me in Miss Leland's hearing, and, besides, I thought that she cared for him. So I held my tongue. Had she not been a witness to his taunts and attempted bribery this afternoon, I should never have hoped for vindication. But liberty was sweet, and I made a dash for it, my second since my arrest—hence these hand-cuffs."

The Colonial frowned. "Why should Abington be jealous of you," he queried; "I could have told him that any time in the last two years you would have given your eyes out of your head for a smile from Sadie here. But I knew you didn't flatter yourself it could come to more than respectful admiration. Abington's got a lot of dirty work to do if he means to ruin every man who's sweet on Sadie."

Sadie put her head on one side and peeped saucily at her father.

"Perhaps Mr. Abington guessed more than a single secret, dad," she said softly; "perhaps he guessed a secret of mine—a secret that I had scarcely dared to guess myself."

Peter Leland started. "Sadie!" he exclaimed. "Richard!"

Sadie put her hand over the Australian's mouth.

"Papa," she said, "they used to call you Peter the Just at home. Mr. Merivale is an honest man, yet he is still hand-cuffed, and the police are looking for him. Don't you think that is the first thing to attend to?"

Her father took up his hat. "You're right, Sadie," he admitted reluctantly. "I'll go to the police-station at once."

His daughter turned to touch Richard Merivale's fettered fingers with a shy, maidenly tenderness.

"Will anything ever console you for the shame of it all?" she murmured. Merivale managed to clasp her hand.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it proved to have been worth it," he replied sententiously. And it did.

But Lady Jane will never quite understand what happened during that momentous afternoon, an afternoon which, for Mark Abington, included also a trying interview with Peter Leland and a hurried trip to town in the Colonial's charge.

More than one high police authority within the next two hours listened with polite contempt to his confused explanation and withdrawal of the accusation against Richard Merivale.

It had been too hastily made, he faltered, with the Australian's stern eye upon him, probably the notes were loose in the pocket-book instead, as he had thought at first, in an inner compartment. That being so, they might easily have slipped out into the secretary's pocket when he placed the book there for delivery to its owner. On reflection he regretted the precipitation with which he had come to a conclusion detrimental to Mr. Merivale's honour.

When Sadie Leland was married to her father's penniless secretary, Mark Abington was lost in amazement.

"And that is the little fool who rejected you, Mark!" Lady Jane exclaimed to her nephew. But Mark Abington only growled.

R. Norman Silver.

A STORY IN LETTERS.

Telling of the Decline of a Love Affair.

New Eden, Feb. 10, 1903.

My Angel,—I am in Paradise! The thought of you is a constant source of delight. I never knew what it was to be happy before; but now the whole world is running over with joy. Everything speaks to me of *you!* Since we parted I have seen your face everywhere—in dreams, in the sky, in the trees, in the flowers. The birds sing your name, and the wind whispers it in the grass. Oh, my darling, I have found Heaven at last, and you have led me into it. How I long to hear your voice again, to look into your eyes, to clasp your hand. Believe me, there is not a moment of the day when your image is not in my thoughts. How shall I manage to exist until we meet again? Do you think of me always, love, as I think of you? I know you do. And now farewell for a few hours. A thousand kisses, sweet! Do not fail to answer all my letters promptly.—Your devoted, faithful lover,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 12, 1903.

Sweetest,—I have just received your letter—the very breath of your presence in it, the delicate perfume of violets! How good of you to write so soon. I dreamt of you all last night, and I am dreaming of you now. The fellows laugh at me for my absentmindedness. What do I care? I have something better to think of than logarithms and Greek roots. But I must study a bit, I suppose, or our secret will be suspected. So, good-bye, for now. I enclosie a leaf from the inmost heart of a rose. Kiss it for me, as I have kissed it for you.—For ever, your

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 15, 1903.

Darling,—You are too unkind. I know that I have missed a day; but examinations are close at hand, and those two weeks, while we were finding our Heaven, have made such a gap in my work. You say that I love you less than "my nasty old books." That is just like a girl. Why can't your sex have a little common-sense? But there goes the bell.—Hastily,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 20, 1903.

My Dear Jessie,—Why can't you keep your temper? I have not been lecturing you, and I have not neglected you. One charge refutes the other. I simply asked you to have a little charitable common-sense, in view of the hard work that is crowding on me just now. Of course, I am just as fond of you as ever I was; but I can't write love-letters and grind mathematics at the same time, and no reasonable girl would expect it. You know that I love you. Why should you insist upon my repeating it every *single* day?—Lovingly,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 25, 1903.

My Dear Miss Northcote,—I am sorry you feel as you do. I thought you truly loved me. Love is always willing to make sacrifices. Besides, a man cannot give up his *whole* time to sentiment. It is different with women. This is a fact which you do not seem to have taken into consideration at all. I shall have more time after the present week, and will write you at length my views upon this subject. Then, perhaps, you can consistently claim that I am lecturing you!—Ever sincerely,

Clarence.

New Eden, Feb. 27, 1903.

Miss Northcote, Dear Madam,—I beg to acknowledge receipt by Parcel Post of the package containing ring, letters, photograph, etc. I return, also by same means, like articles of yours in my possession. Kindly acknowledge upon delivery, and oblige, yours respectfully,

Clarence Murchison.

Gerald Harward.

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TOBY'S RIVAL.

Telling of a Union Between Youth and Antiquity.

The girl felt a drop of rain on her nose. She looked down hastily at her frock, and saw three audacious rain-drops settle on it. Her thoughts flew to her big picture-hat. Overhead huge black clouds gathered threateningly.

She was wearing her smartest and prettiest summer costume, and her umbrella was neatly folded up in the hall-stand at home.

When one finds oneself in such a position, the hospitality of a near neighbour becomes the most valuable thing in the world. So the girl caught up her light skirt with both hands, and ran down the road until she came to the gate of the Crib, where she turned in.

Flushed and breathless, she shot past the drawing-room windows. A man sat in the shadow of the curtains with his arm over the back of a chair. She saw the colour of his sleeve, and on this slight evidence, turned her smiling face towards him and nodded as to an old friend.

"Toby Atkinson," she thought in the porch. "how often have I advised him to give up wearing those horrid checks."

As she followed the housemaid across the hall she carefully flecked the rain-drops off her sleeve, and tilted her hat to the proper angle.

Delighted greetings met her in the doorway, for the girl was a cheerful creature, and much beloved by her friends. Toby stood by the window immovable, and quite unusually silent, and she half turned to greet him.

"Ah!" she said over her shoulder, "there you are again in that fright of a coat!"

There was no response. Thinking he had feigned offence, she turned an amused smile on him and met the astonished gaze of the gravest and most melancholy grey eyes she had ever seen in her life.

The girl gave a little start of horror. The coat might certainly have been Toby's, but the wearer of it was very different. In height he was well over six feet, and his iron-grey hair, and pale, handsome, almost severe face, were in lively contrast to Toby's youthfulness and exuberance. An introduction quickly followed, and she sat down on a low chair in the window.

The rain was falling heavily now, and although the girl was by no means an easily discomfited person, she was glad to follow the frolics of the weather with her eyes for a few moments. So this was how she and the man of learning met.

They did not seem destined to give each other much pleasure for some time. The girl rapidly recovered her equilibrium, and sat on the edge of her chair looking quite ready to enjoy herself if only she might.

The man of learning, as grim and grey as his college walls, gazed straight before him, and maintained a heavy silence. He was not used to the society of such careless, happy-looking beings, and was, in truth, somewhat alarmed.

The girl shot quizzical little glances at him once or twice from under the curves of her hat.

"Rather handsome," she decided quickly. "Not really stern, I should think. Good mouth and chin, and I like the cut of his boots."

This was as far as her conjectures led her at present, and she wished he would speak. She could not bring herself to begin a conversation with him, while he looked as if nothing short of an earthquake would make him open his mouth, or turn his gaze from the opposite wall to her.

The ripple of laughter and chat that ran through the room only reached her in fascinating snatches. She was too far off to join in it. A white-haired lady crocheting on a not very distant sofa, sometimes made purring remarks to the cat curled up on the cushion beside her, but took no notice of anyone else.

At last the girl essayed a couple of gentle remarks across to her, and tried to include the man of learning in them. But her soft appeals were all in vain. He never moved a muscle. He didn't in the least know what to say to her.

"Oh, dear!" she thought, with a little sigh. "I think I know now what Robinson Crusoe felt like before Friday came. Toby, dear, I'm very sorry I ever took such a creature for you!"

"One, two, three," murmured the white-haired old lady over her needles.

"One—two—three. Now, ought I to slip one, or lift one?"

The man of learning crossed his legs.

"I declare, he's alive after all!" thought the girl.

"I have observed," he said, turning slightly to her, "that your neighbourhood is exceeding rich in archæological remains."

"Yes, indeed," was all she could find to say, but she thought, "If he looks like that at me much longer I shall bolt."

"No doubt you make a deep study of them?"

"Well, no, I'm afraid I don't. You see"—his grave eyes demanded an answer—"I—I—haven't time," with sudden relief.

"Yet you live on classic ground," he said severely.

The girl laughed outright, and was so pleased with herself for laughing under those tragic eyes that she laughed again. He wondered vaguely when he had heard a sound like that before.

"I've a great mind not to talk to him at all," she thought. "What does he go on like this for?" But it had never been her habit to remain silent for long at a time, and presently she spoke.

"I don't think it matters what kind of ground one lives on," she said serenely, "so long as one has a good time. I couldn't endure messing about among those horrid old things. I imagine people who do, just get as musty and fusty themselves. But I don't know any of them, and I don't think I want to."

She leant back in her chair without the slightest suspicion that she was talking to one of the foremost antiquarians of

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the day. Of one of his peculiarities she was equally ignorant.

Although an abnormally shy and silent man, and the despair of his hostess on any rare occasion that he ventured into society, he had been known when touched on his own particular subject to begin at ten o'clock, and continue talking till midnight.

He turned to her now, and, without in the least knowing that he was doing anything unusual, poured out a volley of antiquarian lore in his low, monotonous voice. He gave her a learned disquisition on the Græco-Roman style, and warming up to his subject, turned to the history of Anglo-Norman fortifications, and flooded her with terms she had never heard before.

She tried to scramble after him when he talked of barbican and portcullis, drawbridge, donjon and moat, but she felt as much out of it as if she had been drowned in the lowest depths of the one, or securely locked up in the other.

"Is he paid for this kind of thing?" she thought irritably. 'Does he get his living by befogging people like this? I do wish it would stop raining."

Silence fell at last. The man of learning gazed dreamily out of the window, lost in thought.

"I won't speak a single word to him," she said to herself eagerly. "The probabilities are he would start again."

Five minutes passed. It got monotonous to watch the rain clearing off, and she stole a cautious glance at him. He sat in exactly the same position, his thoughts absorbed and far away.

"I believe he has forgotten my very existence!" she thought indignantly. It was too much. She coughed slightly. No use. Then she began in a small voice:

"The picnic is to be in the Abbey ruins, I believe?" This was a safe remark. It bore clearly on the subject, and lay well within her own range of knowledge. He caught the word "Abbey," and burst forth afresh.

Again the girl was assailed with a torrent of technicalities. Her brain reeled in a maze of lights and traceries, cross-vaults and flying buttresses, arches and pinnacles, and all the paraphernalia of Gothic architecture.

His life had been that of the solitary student and scholar, and his vocabulary was as unintelligible to her as her dress-maker's would have been to him.

At the end of fifteen minutes the girl rose and shook out her flounces.

"Do you see that cat?" she said, pointing to the innocent pussy asleep on the sofa. "It knows just as much about what you're talking of as I do!"

If the man of learning had been surprised at her greeting when she came in, he was still more amazed at the nature of her farewell.

They met almost daily during the next fortnight, for the weather was glorious, and the countryside gay.

The girl had discovered her bearings meanwhile, and was somewhat scandalised with herself for her unmerciful handling of the scholar. Perhaps that was why she met him so kindly now, with a little shade of contrition and sweetness in her manner, which was an intense surprise to him.

She talked to him when others were afraid to, looked after him in the social gatherings where he felt so ill at ease, and, just at first, refrained from uttering half sallies that were on the tip of her tongue.

They became excellent friends. In his reserved and lonely life he had never met anyone so fresh, so unexpected, so interesting. Her first awe of him rapidly wore off, and she took to teasing and tormenting him, a process he seemed to enjoy immensely.

He never attempted to continue the lecture that had ended so abruptly on that first evening, indeed, the girl utterly refused to listen to him on any subject further back than the day before. The man of learning's education had begun in real earnest.

It was the evening of the picnic. They had been much together all day, and were standing by the stepping-stones on their way home.

"I believe," said the girl, trying to look severe, "that you aren't a bit interested in anything that is less than a thousand years old. I'm sure you're wishing at this very moment that I was an old yellow Egyptian mummy. Oh, I'm quite different!" in an exulting tone. "I love everything full up of life—brimming over," and she spread out her arms the better to express her ideas.

"You are very young, you know," he said, considering her gravely.

"You are very stupid, you know," she retorted. "You live in this delicious world, and never see anything a bit nearer than the Flood! But we really must go on, the others will be home before us."

He crossed the stepping-stones first, and helped her over. Between the last stone and the bank the gap was wider, and he held out both hands to assist her.

At another time she would have jumped easily across, but for the life of her she couldn't help keeping him standing in that unusual position a little longer than was necessary.

"It looks very deep," she said. "Should I be drowned if I fell in?"

"I'd fish you out."

She laughed delightedly. The man of learning had never been heard to use such language before. She looked down at the running water at her feet, then up at him, and back at the water in doubt again.

"You won't let go my hands in the middle, will you?"

"No, no!"

"And you'll think of me when I'm in my watery grave?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I'm really going now," she said, "and I'm certain I shall be drowned."

"Come!" he whispered, holding her hands closer.

Something in his grey eyes, in the smile that wrought such changes in his face, compelled her to drop her bantering words and obey him. She sprang lightly across.

"Well," he said, still holding her hands and smiling. "Now that you are safe will you trust me next time?"

"How can I tell?"

"Say you will! Promise!"

"There's a stone in my shoe," said the girl, struggling to free her hands. "I'm going to sit down here and get it out."

* * * * *

The man of learning lingered in the neighbourhood all through the wheat harvest, and for no avowed reason. He had exhausted the antiquities for miles round, and should have been back in town by now, at work on his book. But instead he grew daily more fastidious in his dress, and went everywhere he thought the girl was likely to be.

Meanwhile, Toby Atkinson wore a dejected air, and a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger expression that ill-befitted his tender years. One evening he went up the road past the girl's house.

"I suppose I needn't go in," he thought, "I should only find that ass jawing away as usual."

He came to a break in the line of heavy laurels that skirted the lawn, and paused a moment. Curiosity ran high, and the fence was low.

"I may as well turn in and see what's going on," he thought, and threw a leg over.

At that moment he caught sight of figures moving on the lawn, and stood transfixed.

The girl had stooped to pick a carnation from the border beside her, and turned with a laughing remark to fix it in her companion's coat. The man of learning laid his hands for an instant on her shoulders, and stooped down to kiss her forehead. Toby pulled his leg back hastily and fled.

The third friend to whom he related the story in strictest confidence that evening, remarked:

"And you actually saw him—er—kiss her?"

"Well, yes," snarled Toby, "if you can call a kiss, a kiss—coming from him."

Day Temple.

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THE WRONG MISS SMITH.

A Tale of a Mistaken Identity.

"WHAT'S in a name?" asks Shakespeare. If he had borne mine I think he would have found a great deal. My name has been a nuisance to me ever since I was a boy at school, and that other John Smith used to squabble over my hampers from home, pretending they were addressed to him. I don't believe he ever had a hamper sent in his life, but he always claimed mine, and (being a big boy) occasionally got them.

I do not so much complain of my surname; *that*, I suppose, was an inevitable misfortune. Being, unluckily, born a Smith, I suppose my father, with his large family and small means, could hardly be expected to incur the expense of changing his patronymic, especially as he might have offended aunt Anne (from whom we had expectations) by doing so. But my parents need not have christened me John. John Smith!

One might as well be described as "man" at once. I believe the world swarms with John Smiths. If I travel abroad I am always opening the letters of my namesakes at the *postes restantes*, and, what is worse, they are always opening mine.

I hurried back from a pleasant tour in Scotland on receipt of a telegram that my baby was dangerously ill, and after all it turned out that the message was not intended for me, but for another John Smith, who was coming to my hotel the next day.

I was pleased to see a letter from a fellow-sufferer (who signs himself "J.B."—I suppose for John Brown) in the papers this year. He complains that he got so confused by receiving letters intended for other J.B.'s during his travels that he felt puzzled about his own identity.

I can quite sympathise with him. It is terrible to be always haunted by those "doppelgangers"—to find yourself multiplied, as it were.

I repeat, I consider my parents acted cruelly in not giving me a distinctive Christian name at least. My father had one; *he* was called Erasmus. Why was I not named after him?

I have been more considerate of my children; if they have a common surname, I flatter myself their Christian names are peculiar enough. At present, I must confess, they hardly appear to appreciate my kindness.

Thucydides, my eldest boy, complains that his name exposes him to ridicule at school. Huz, the next brother, has actually dropped his real title, and calls himself Harry.

Keren-happuch, my eldest daughter, is very bitter about *her* nomenclature, arguing that if she marries she will change her surname, but that her "hideous Christian name" will stick to her for life.

I suppose when my youngest hopes, Arethusa and Polyphemus, grow up, they will grumble at me too. But had they only experienced the annoyance of being called by a name common to so many other people, they would know how to thank me.

When Thucydides travels abroad he will have no difficulty about identifying his letters, and Huz is not likely to be dunned for debts of a namesake, as I have often been. If my dear wife had been named Keren-happuch, instead of Mary, I should not have mistaken that telegram about the baby.

It would be tedious to relate all the adventures and annoyances to which my unlucky name has exposed me at various times in my life; how I have been deluded by false hopes of legacies bequeathed to luckier John Smiths; dunned for debts I never incurred; abused for things I had never written; claimed as a relative by people I never saw. But one adventure was a rather remarkable one, and I am tempted to record it.

I have mentioned that I am one of a rather numerous family. I don't mean that the Smiths are, for they seem to me to make up half the population of the earth; but I allude to my own personal branch of that extensive clan. I have a great many relatives, and, being fairly well-to-do, all my relations are friendly with me.

One morning a few years ago, as we were sitting at breakfast, I received a letter from my cousin Caroline, who is married and lives in the country. We do not often hear from her, and, in fact, it was a long time since I had seen any of her branch of the family.

"'My dear John,'" I read aloud, "'I am going to ask you to do me a great kindness——'"

"She wants to come and stay here," interrupted my wife, with fine feminine perception.

"Not exactly," I answered, running my eye over the rest of the epistle, "but she does want us to give a bed for the night to a young *protégée* of hers, a relation in fact—Caroline says a 'mutual cousin.' She is an orphan, poor girl, and passing through London to take a situation as governess in a family in Devonshire. She has been staying with Caroline, and must come to London to get on the South-Western line.

"As she has never been in town in her life, Caroline thought I would take her in just for the night, to save her going to a hotel. The trains don't suit each other, and she must stay a night in London. That's the gist of the letter, without all the apologies and thanks."

"I call it a reasonably cool request," said my wife, proceeding to make sundry severe remarks on the "unconscionableness" of country cousins, as town cousins are wont to do when their spare rooms are thus invaded.

"Poor girl! Caroline says she is an orphan and our cousin," I remarked.

"If you are going to take in all the orphan Smiths who say they are your cousins, you had better buy up the Wanstead Asylum to accommodate them," retorted Mrs. Smith as she left the room to give orders for the reception of our guest, while I turned to a postscript I had hitherto overlooked, and which, as is usual with ladies' postscripts, contained the most important part of the letter.

"You are always so good and kind that I venture to ask you to complete your good action by meeting our poor little cousin at King's Cross to-day at 4.30. She is so terrified at the idea of arriving in London alone. Her name is Smith—Jane Smith—and you will easily recognise her by her deep mourning. I have told her to look out for you."

There was no time to reply. I did not tell my wife of this last request, which certainly was a "leetle" cool. But, after all, it *was* an undertaking for a young girl, new to London, to arrive alone at a crowded terminus, and as we were going to act the good Samaritans, we might as well do the work thoroughly.

I therefore set out for King's Cross at the appointed hour, but, owing to my watch being slow, I arrived rather late in the station.

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The 4.30 train had come in, and the passengers had nearly all dispersed, but lingering on the deserted platform was a tall, graceful girl in deep mourning—evidently my unknown cousin. I hurried up to her.

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Smith?" She bowed, and I went on:

"I must introduce myself as Mr. Smith—John Smith—whom you expected to meet you. I am so ashamed of being late."

"Pray do not apologise," said the young lady, "it is very good of you to take so much trouble for a stranger, and I thank you very much for it."

Her voice was soft, rich and musical—just the voice I should have expected from her appearance, but *not* exactly the voice of cousin Caroline's family.

Caroline was a good soul, but—well, she was not remarkably aristocratic in appearance or manner.

Now this girl looked unmistakably high-bred. She was beautiful, decidedly so; but it was quite a different class of beauty from the rustic prettiness I had expected.

Her dress, too, though scrupulously plain, did not look like the handiwork of a rural dressmaker (as a family man, I know something of such matters); and the perfect fit and graceful cut of her crape-covered garments were certainly in the style of my wife's best modiste. Altogether my newly-found cousin looked rather more like a young lady whose footman and carriage were in attendance than a poor orphan governess going to her situation.

"You came from Yorkshire by this train?" I asked, as the possibility of a mistake crossed my mind.

"Yes, Mrs. Smith said she had written to ask you to be good enough to take me in for a night."

"Ah, I received her letter, and we shall be very glad to receive you. I believe you are a cousin of ours."

"Very probably," she answered, smiling, "ours must be a numerous family," and my mind set at rest regarding the identity of my fair relative, I called a cab, collected her luggage, and we drove away together.

My companion sat silent for a while; the cheerful tone in which she had greeted me had evidently been called up by an effort, for, as she now thought herself unobserved, I could see tears gathering in her eyes. Poor girl, she was very young to have to fight the battle of life alone!

"You are going into Devonshire to-morrow?" I said.

"Yes, of course, you know all about it. Oh, Mr. Smith, it sounds cowardly to say so, but I do dread it!"

"I don't wonder; going among strangers is, of course, a trial. But you must keep up a good heart, and you may find the ordeal far less terrible than you expect."

"Thank you for encouraging me," she said gratefully. "I am so glad you know all the circumstances. Of course, I feel it is my duty to go; and if I fail, I can but return to Yorkshire, though, of course, I shouldn't like to do that."

"Don't think about failing," I answered cheerfully, feeling that it must be very hard-hearted employers who would be unkind to such a gentle young creature.

"You must tell me all the Yorkshire news," I said, trying to give a different turn to the conversation; but my observation was an unfortunate one, for my fair companion's eyes overflowed as she said hurriedly:

"Don't ask me to talk about my old home just now; it is silly, I know; but I was never all alone in the world before; it is only three weeks since—since—my dear mother died."

I felt dreadfully ashamed of myself, and attempted to explain and apologise; but she stopped me with:

"You only meant to be kind; but, if you please, I can't talk about Yorkshire just yet."

As I was entirely ignorant of my new cousin's history, I thought it safest to forbear all farther allusions to her past or future, lest I should stumble on more unfortunate topics; but I *did* think Caroline might have let the girl stay a little longer with her after her bereavement, before sending her out into a situation.

My companion's sweet, pale face overcame my wife's preconceived prejudices at once, and she received as warm a welcome as though she had been an invited guest. I cautioned Mary to avoid alluding to Yorkshire subjects; and as the evening went on, the girl recovered her spirits, and looked brighter and happier.

"Must you really go on to Devonshire to-morrow, my dear?" asked my wife, as we were separating for the night.

"Oh, yes, now everything is arranged, I had better go. The longer I put it off the less I should be able to muster courage. And if I fail, Mrs. Smith has promised to allow me to stay with her until I can find something to do."

"If you fail, as you call it," said my wife, kissing the stranger as if she had been our own Keren-happuch, "you will come to us, and we will see about finding you a situation. Remember, my dear, there is a room ready for you here, if you need it."

"How good you are!" said the girl gratefully.

When alone together, my wife began to exclaim at the unkindness of Caroline in not allowing the girl a little time to recover from her trouble.

"Poor young thing! It goes to my heart to see her. Fancy the poor child starting off for a situation! I wish we could have kept her here for a week or two first."

"It seems to me, my dear," I remarked mildly, "that you, not I, are the person most desirous to open an orphan asylum for our poor cousins."

"Nonsense!" was Mrs. Smith's conclusive reply.

As I was dressing next morning, I was startled to receive a telegram. I detest those brick-red envelopes, but the contents of this one were of a surprising character. It was from Caroline, and ran as follows:

"*Jane Smith much surprised not to see you yesterday. Waited two hours, then went to Railway Hotel. Please go to her there; she telegraphs in great distress.*"

"What on earth does this mean?" I exclaimed, tossing the note over to my wife. "Why, Miss Jane Smith is in our house at the present moment!"

"John," cried my wife, with a sudden enlightenment, "*you have met a wrong Miss Smith*, depend upon it!"

"Impossible!" I answered, all the more positively, perhaps, because a horrible suspicion that such a mistake was possible occurred to me. "She told me her name was Smith, and that she came from Yorkshire."

"Yorkshire is a large place, and *you* ought to know how many Smiths there are," said my wife, hurrying downstairs.

Our guest was awaiting us in the dining-room.

"I have had such an extraordinary telegram just now," I said, with an air of affected jauntiness, although I was sure that some dreadful mistake had happened. "Mrs. Caroline Smith telegraphs to say that I never met you at the station, and that you are waiting at the Railway Hotel."

"Mrs. Caroline Smith? But I don't know her."

"Didn't you come from her at Helstone? Are you not Miss Jane Smith?" I gasped.

"Jane? My name is Blanche; and as for my surname——ah, Mr. Smith, you know all the circumstances; but as you wrote to me as Miss Smith, I thought you imagined it was better to keep to that name till I knew how matters would go in Devonshire."

"Keep to that name!" Had we then been admitting some deceitful character, disguised under an *alias*, to our family circle? But one glance at that fair face reassured

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me. That countenance never belonged to a doubtful character.

"There has been some dreadful mistake!" said the girl eagerly. "Are you not Mr. John Smith, a solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn?"

"I am Mr. John Smith, a tea merchant, of No. 32 Mincing Lane," I answered solemnly. Of all the disagreeable predicaments my name had brought me into, this was one of the worst; nor were matters improved by the young lady bursting into a flood of tears.

"Oh, what shall I do? What will you think of me?" she sobbed.

"My dear," said my wife kindly, putting her arm round her, "what does the mistake signify? It was foolish of John to make it," with a severe glance at me; "but after all, you have only spent the night here instead of with your own friends, and you will go on to Devonshire to-day just the same.

"John, you had better go and see about your real cousin, instead of standing staring," added Mrs. Smith rather sharply; and I was only too glad to escape.

I found the real Jane Smith at the hotel: such a contrast to our fair guest! She was a short, red-haired, snub-nosed damsel, with, so far as I could judge on this short acquaintance, a rather crusty temper.

She was anything but gracious in the manner of receiving my apologies, although I paid her hotel-bill, and also for her ticket to Devonshire, as peace-offerings. It seemed she had gone to the waiting-room, "as any lady would," after the train arrived, and so missed me.

After waiting two hours she telegraphed to Caroline, and (not knowing my address) went to the nearest hotel. I was sorry for her; but after all, the mistake had been an innocent one on my part.

"You had better make haste home, Mr. Smith," was Jane's valediction to me, as she took her seat in the train for Exeter; "for I feel sure that the person you mistook for me is no better than a swindler. Depend upon it, she only wanted to get into your house for the sake of robbing it!" And with this pleasant adieu she departed.

But I could not believe this. It was certainly an odd thing for a young girl of twenty to be travelling about alone under a feigned name; but if that guest of ours proved an impostor, I would never trust human countenance again. I hurried home, all anxiety to hear her explanation; but my curiosity was not to be thus gratified. My wife met me at the door.

"That poor girl is gone."

"Not with any of our plate, I hope?"

"How absurd you are!"

"Well, tell me all about it—who she is, I mean."

"Oh," said my wife, "will you believe it, John, I know absolutely nothing still, except that her real name is not Smith!"

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed, rather uneasily.

"You need not be so suspicious," said my wife warmly. "Whatever that poor child's story is, I am sure there is nothing discreditable to *her* about it. After you left I began asking her about herself and her plans; but she stopped me so gently that I could say no more.

"'You have all been so good and kind to me,' she said, 'and I do not know what you must think of a stranger whose name you do not know. But mine is a long, sad story, and I hardly think I ought to tell it—at least just now. There is nothing discreditable about it—indeed there is not; but if you will not think me very ungrateful, I would rather keep my secret a little longer. All depends on the success of my Devonshire journey.

"'I came to London, expecting to be met by a relative of the friend—a Mrs. Charles Smith of York—with whom I have been staying, and through his name being the same as your husband's all this mistake occurred. I am so sorry, so ashamed;' and that was all she told me."

"And she is gone?"

"Yes; she was so anxious not to miss the train for Taunton, so I sent her with one of the servants; and, poor child, as she said 'Good-bye,' she whispered, 'Please don't think badly of me because I cannot tell you all about myself now.' John, I am sure that girl is no impostor."

It was all very mysterious; but we expected to receive some enlightenment by-and-bye. Surely our unknown guest would write or take some notice, if only in requital of our hospitality.

But weeks and months rolled away, and we heard no more of our stranger, till by degrees we ceased to talk of her—doubtless to the relief of our friends, whom I fear we bored not a little at one time when our wonder was fresh.

A year passed, the "season" came round again. My wife and I are both fond of music, so now and then I launch into the extravagance of a couple of stalls at the opera when there is anything specially worth hearing.

We were sitting listening to the prima donna's solo, when I happened to glance at the boxes; and there, just above us, in a box on the grand tier, I beheld our fair incognita.

She was just as beautiful, but looked far happier than when I had seen her a year ago. Jewels sparkled on her neck and hair; her dress was costly although simple. She was certainly not gaining a livelihood as a governess. Beside her nodded an elderly lady, who seemed rather tired of the performance.

I was obliged to wait the conclusion of the song before calling my wife's attention to my discovery; and as the curtain fell amid rapturous applause, I caught a fragment of conversation behind me.

"That pretty girl in white with the grey eyes and fair hair—do you mean the one in the box with the old lady who has been asleep half the evening? Oh, that's Lady Blanche Lestrange, one of the beauties of the year. Quite a romance her story is.

"Father quarrelled with his family, and ran away under feigned name; he died; his elder brother died; this girl, the only relative left to the old Earl, her grandfather; grand reconciliation took place some while ago; old grandfather takes her into favour.

"She's staying with Lady Crayland now (that's the sleepy old lady by her), and being introduced to London life. She was presented this month; awfully pretty girl, and will have money too."

This was a revelation! But at this moment the young lady herself, leaning forward in the box, caught sight of us. She recognised us in an instant, a bright flush rose to her cheek, and she bowed and smiled, then, turning to her chaperon, spoke a few words which seemed rather to surprise that worthy lady.

A few minutes later a boxkeeper came with a request that I would come up to Lady Crayland's box. He produced one of her ladyship's cards, below whose name was inscribed in pencil, "Miss Smith."

Of course I went gladly, for I had felt such an interest in our pretty young visitor; and then, and at a subsequent visit Lady Blanche paid at our house, our curiosity was at last satisfied.

The gossip I had heard at the opera was true. Lady Blanche's father was the younger son of the Earl of Shires. By one of those freaks of Nature, difficult to explain, he had been from infancy the exact antipodes of his father.

The Earl was grave, reserved, and proud; his younger son was giddy, eccentric, full of crochets and visions for the rehabilitation of the human race—projects which necessitated a total destruction of all existing institutions as their first step.

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Probably there were faults on both sides, but the father and son never could agree on any subject; and when the young man crowned his enormities by marrying the daughter of his former tutor—a young lady of great beauty and merit, but hardly the bride his father would have selected for him—the family quarrel grew to such a height, that after a stormy scene the youth quitted the paternal mansion, vowing that he would never again hold communication with his family, or even call himself by their name.

Need I say what *alias* he assumed in compliance with this threat? Of course he shrouded himself under the title of Smith.

He had inherited a small property from his mother, and on this income, Mr and Mrs. Smith, as they chose to call themselves, lived abroad, for many years devoting themselves to the care and education of their only child, my visitor.

Lady Blanche grew up in perfect ignorance of her family history; but her father, although he had abjured his rank and family, was careful to educate her as though she were destined to move in the society he had voluntarily quitted.

Perhaps the knowledge that his elder brother was unmarried and an invalid, and that the succession to the earldom might one day devolve on himself, influenced him.

About a year before I met Lady Blanche this actually occurred. Lord Herbert, the elder brother, died, and "Mr. Smith" was now his father's heir.

He was too proud to attempt to open any communications directly with the Earl, but made his wife's health, which had long been failing, a pretext for returning to England, probably with some idea of making himself known. But an accident happened to the train on their journey, and "Mr. Smith" was among the victims killed on the spot.

His widow was utterly crushed by the shock. A sister of hers had married a veritable Mr. Smith, and was now residing in Yorkshire; and in her home Lady Lestrange took refuge, still calling herself by her assumed name.

A weak, gentle woman, she possessed all the obstinacy of a feeble nature; and no arguments on the part of her sister could induce her to call herself by her rightful title or communicate with her husband's family. He had wished to hide himself from them, and nothing should induce her to act contrary to his wishes.

But when her death, six months after that of her husband, left Blanche alone in the world, and examination of her affairs showed that the husband had embarked in unfortunate speculations, which left their daughter practically a beggar, Mrs. Smith, the aunt, again urged that Blanche should make her existence known to her grandfather.

It was decided that Blanche should visit him in person, her aunt rightly judging that her fair face would be her best advocate. On this errand she had come to London when I met her at the station.

Her aunt had written to her brother-in-law, a solicitor residing in London, asking him to meet Lady Blanche at the station, and receive her at his house for a night; and Mr. John Smith had duly kept his appointment. But Mrs. Smith, writing in a hurry, had mistaken the date, and requested him to meet her niece on the 26th, instead of the 25th, of the month, so that he arrived at the station exactly a day too late.

This curious chain of coincidences brought about my mistake. I need not say what was the result of Lady Blanche's Devonshire journey.

The lonely old Earl was only too delighted to own and receive her; and she was now the idol of his age, residing with him at his Devonshire estate, which she had just quitted for a short visit to London.

"But now I want most of all to explain why I appeared so ungrateful," concluded Lady Blanche. "You must have thought it strange that you never heard from me again; but it was not quite my fault. I was actually so foolish as to forget your address.

"Driving up in the cab, I never observed the name of your street; but I remember you did tell me your address in the City. In the worry and fright (for I was really afraid you would take me for an impostor) it went out of my head.

"Grandpapa had a London Directory, and we found the addresses of several Mr. John Smiths." ("I can believe *that*," I remarked aside.) "But when we wrote to them they were not the right ones. So, as I was to come to London in the Spring, I thought I would wait and try to find you out then; for I did so wish to thank you for all your kindness, and explain why I could not tell you this long story before."

It was a satisfactory termination to my adventure, and I am proud of my skill in physiognomy.

Lady Blanche returned to Devonshire, and I have never seen her since. The old Earl spends a great part of the year abroad; and even if they lived in London, we do not visit in the same circles, and would hardly be likely to meet frequently. But each recurring 25th of May brings a *souvenir* of my adventure, in the shape of a kind little note to my wife, and some pretty gift, "in remembrance of the kind reception given on this day to 'Miss Smith.'"

Lacy Hardy.

VIOLET CARYLL'S QUEST.

Telling of the Finding of an Ideal Man.

"Violet, what in the world have you been reading all the afternoon?"

The dark beauty in the hammock looked up with a little yawn, and, brushing away a fly that had made a post of observation of her piquant nose, replied:

"I've been reading a very stupid story entitled 'A Mad Marriage.'"

"Stupid!" exclaimed the blonde, opening her blue eyes to the fullest extent. "I don't think it so."

"Minnie Duncan," said Violet, "you are just the simplest-minded girl in the world."

"Violet Caryll," retorted Minnie, "I should like to know why."

"Why, my dear, you read this book, and thought it beautiful. I thought it stupid because the hero doesn't exist except in the imagination of novelists, who write for men as they ought to be, but not as they are."

"Oh, nonsense, there are good men in the world. You haven't happened to see any of them."

"Well, you must acknowledge, dear, that I've had plenty of chance to find them. I looked in vain for one in London, I saw none in Paris, I saw none in Italy, I saw none anywhere. I found the same old worn-out types, the man of fashion and the man of reason; but the man of noble soul I never met."

"I think I have met one," said Minnie softly, with a tender light in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, you are in love, and you think your lover a hero! Go on, marry him, then you'll find out your deity is only a little clay idol after all. Bah, I hate men!"

There was a step on the gravel walk, and, turning round, Minnie saw a bronzed and bearded fellow, her fair-haired cousin.

"Oh, Tom," she cried, "how glad I am to see you!"

"My sweet little cousin," he said, stroking her golden hair. "So you missed me, eh? But you took good care to console yourself by finding a resting place for this bright head. God bless you, Minnie, I hope you'll be very happy."

And he stooped and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"But, oh, Tom!" she said, "I am forgetting," and turning to where Violet Caryll lay half concealed by the corner of the house, she said:

"Let me present you to my dearest friend, Violet Caryll. Violet, my cousin, Mr. Neville."

Violet bowed without rising from her recumbent posture, and Neville smiled slightly as he thought: "Independent and saucy as she can be!"

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Tom Neville was a magnificent man, six feet one inch high, straight as an arrow, powerful in every sinew, with flaxen hair and beard, and a bright grey eye, but, nevertheless, the calm of this girl annoyed him.

"Tom," said Minnie, "I hear mamma going upstairs, and I want to speak to her. Excuse me, please!"

And Minnie ran into the house, leaving her cousin and her friend together.

"Miss Caryll," Tom said after a moment's silence, "what are you reading?"

"Dear me, Mr. Neville," replied Violet, "what a stupid question! Whenever I read, everyone who cannot find something else to say asks me what I am reading. I might answer you, like Hamlet, 'Words, words, words,' but I'll have compassion on your ignorance and tell you. I am, or was till you came in, reading 'A Mad Marriage.'"

"Do you like novels?"

"Yes, or I shouldn't read them. Nevertheless, I find many of them very provoking, especially those written by women."

"Why?"

"Because they create ideal men, such as we look for in vain in real life. But there are no such men."

"There have been men," said Tom, "who gave up all for love. Antony found it——"

"That will do!" cried Violet. "Poor Marc Antony has been dead and buried nineteen hundred years. Don't, for goodness' sake, don't drag him out and make him the scapegoat of your sex any more."

"Miss Caryll, I am sorry you are so bitter on my sex."

"What are you two discussing?" said Minnie, running out on the verandah. "It's growing dark, too. I hope you haven't been quarrelling."

"Oh, no," said Violet with a sneer, "it takes two people to quarrel, and they must both have some decided characteristics!"

* * * * *

Violet was sitting by the river one afternoon reading. Tom came in from rowing and went and sat down by her.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"The same old question," she replied. "I am reading the same impossible things about the grand love of man for woman."

"And you don't believe it?"

"No."

Tom sprang to his feet.

"Miss Caryll—Violet," he said, "this is too much. You know that I have not watched your every movement for the past six months for amusement. You know that I love you, that I worship you. Tell me I am not mad."

He stretched out both hands to her and stood still. But she rose with a laugh.

"Good-bye, Mr. Neville," she said and, turning she went up the path, leaving him alone.

Tom flung himself upon the greensward and stared blankly out upon the river.

A week passed, Minnie was standing on the verandah, and Violet was mounting her horse for a ride.

"Tom goes away to-morrow, Violet," said Minnie.

"Does he?" said Violet, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"Yes, poor fellow, your refusal has broken his heart."

"His is a—go on, King!" exclaimed Violet, suddenly striking her horse with her little riding whip.

She rode out into the woods among the hills. There was at her heart a dull pain she could not understand. She knew that since she had laughed Tom Neville's love to scorn something of the world's brightness had faded, and yet she told herself every hour, every minute, that she did not care for him, nor for any man. She rode on and on, heedless of the coming night.

Over in the silent west big, black clouds were gathering, and lightning danced across the sky.

But Violet was too deep in her thoughts to notice these things. And presently the storm burst upon her with all its fury.

At the first drop of rain she turned to go home, but the terrific flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening burst of thunder, broke down from the inky heavens, and a towering tree fell, splintered and blasted, immediately behind her horse. The terrified beast, mad with fright, dashed down the road at a wild gallop. Violet tugged at the reins till her little hands were purple and swollen, but to no purpose. On went the horse, faster and faster.

Turning another short curve in the road she saw another large tree lying directly across her path. Then she knew her fate. She had often heard of frightened horses running headlong into stone walls, and she knew her horse would not stop till he had hurled himself against the fallen monarch of the hills.

She closed her eyes in terror. Then she felt a sudden slackening of her horse's speed; and she opened her eyes to find Tom Neville holding the bit in an iron grasp, while the horse, still struggling forward, trampled under foot the manly limbs. But Tom never let go his hold till the brute stopped and Violet dismounted.

"Thank God, you are safe!"

"But you are hurt!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"I am—sorry," he said, with an effort, his face becoming pale, "to trouble you, Miss Caryll, but I fear—you—will have to go home—alone—and send someone—after me."

For a moment Violet hesitated, and then, remounting her still trembling horse, she rode away.

As soon as her back was turned, Tom Neville sank back senseless, for both his legs were broken.

When Tom returned to consciousness he found himself in his own room, in bed, with both his legs confined in a casing of plaster of Paris.

Violet came in after a while.

"Mr. Neville," said Violet, in a low, tremulous voice. "I have come to thank you for my life, and to ask you to forgive me."

"To forgive you?"

"Yes, for hurting you, first in your heart, and then in your limbs. If I could only give my life to atone for the wrong I have done you!"

And tears rolled down her cheeks while she buried her face in her hands.

For a few minutes both were silent. Then she looked up and their eyes met.

"Violet," he asked softly, "will you give your life to atone for my pain? Will you give it—to me?"

"Tom!" she cried, throwing herself on her knees beside the bed; "take me! I love you!"

A. R. Manice.

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THE END OF A FEUD.

In which Love Set All Things Right.

"But isn't she pretty, though?" murmured Mrs. Lambert.

Mr. Lambert responded by a look too full of gratification for words.

They were not quite in their dotage, these two old people, but they were very old, and the appearance of their long expected niece at their home had produced upon them an overwhelming sensation.

Not only was it a novelty to have a young person in the house, but such a perfectly radiant creature was rare in any house.

Such a face of roses and lilies, with burnished curls of gold drooping on the low brow—sweet eyes of dark violet and Heaven's own smile.

Nothing like Juliet Faye's beauty was ever seen at Arcott, and the old people were sure, with her gentle manners, that she was as good as she was pretty.

She was the youngest child of Mrs. Lambert's youngest sister, lately deceased, and she had come to the Lilies to reside permanently.

"Sixteen! Old enough to come out," murmured Mrs. Lambert. "And such a little lady! Lydia Bellingham has no such girl among hers!"

Now it had secretly vexed dear Mrs. Lambert that Mrs. Bellingham, her social rival, had always a crowd of pretty granddaughters and nieces at her house, making the place, since young ladies are irresistibly attractive, very popular. But not one was to compare with the lovely Juliet.

Juliet, escaping after two hours' examination, from her relatives' presence, was allured down the main walk of the old garden.

It was indeed a garden of lilies. Yellow day-lilies drooped in beds, white ones gleamed, and clumps of spotted tigers glowed in the sun, while the red velvety amaryllis burnt like fire among the green.

Coming at length to the water, the girl uttered a cry of delight; for, dappled with sunshine, shimmered hosts of lovely white water-lilies. She clasped her hands in ecstasy.

She was certainly charming in her azure dress and with pretty uncovered head, at the edge of the water; and perhaps the occupant of a little canopied boat up the river thought so, for silently the boat glided away from its moorings among the willows and came slipping along the dark waters of the pool.

"Would you like some lilies?" asked a baritone voice.

And, turning, startled, Juliet saw the handsomest young man she had ever seen in her life sitting in the stern of the pretty boat, his hat in his hand. The voice, the attitude, the courteous question, disarmed apprehension.

"Yes, I should," she replied, with only a natural constraint.

In an instant the young gentleman had changed his seat and shot among them. In a moment he had a great, fragrant, dripping handful, and the young girl's eagerness and delight brought a smile to his rather gloomy countenance.

"Oh, I never saw anything so beautiful!" she cried.

"I suppose they are pretty," replied the young man; "but I've seen them every June for five years, and they haven't the charm of novelty for me. Indeed, nothing here has. You are a stranger, are you not?"

He had pushed his boat among the rushes to hand her the flowers, and sat looking over his shoulder at the roseate face she turned to him.

"Yes, I have come to the Lilies to live. Mrs. Lambert is my aunt."

The young man gave vent to a soft, low whistle.

"Sorry," he said.

Then laughing, and with his usually wearied expression displaced by one of mirth, he was such a very handsome fellow that Juliet was lost in admiration; but in an instant the girl's expression changed.

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, you know," replied her companion frankly, "I haven't seen such a pretty girl as you are since I have lived here, and I would like to have an introduction and call at your home, if it was any other place. But at the Lilies—out of the question," he concluded.

Then, as she regarded him in perplexity, he lifted his straw hat, and with a pleasant parting glance, pulled away out of the pool and round a sudden bend of the river out of sight.

Juliet breathed in the delicious odour of her lilies pensively, and turned homewards. Her adventure had been a pleasure, but it left a regret.

"I never met anybody so nice," she said. "But he will forget me."

That evening her Aunt Lambert said:

"My dear, I hope you will be discreet as you are pretty—about making acquaintances, for one thing."

"Yes, aunt," murmured Juliet, with a little blush.

"Be choice—be select. Above all, don't admit the Brennans to your acquaintance."

"Who are they, auntie?"

"The Brennans are uncle and nephew, who live on the next estate, separated by the river. Colonel Brennan is very wealthy, and Roland, his nephew, is his heir. The former is a bachelor."

"Why mustn't I know them?" asked Juliet.

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"On account of a family feud which has existed for twenty years," replied the old lady solemnly. "Twenty years ago, my dear, you must know that my daughter, your cousin Emily, was a very pretty girl. She was engaged to Colonel Brennan—then only Lieutenant Brennan. He seemed fond of her; she adored him. Suddenly, without cause or explanation, he jilted Emily—dropped the engagement in silence, and she making her wedding clothes! It nearly killed my poor girl.

"Her father threatened to shoot him, but I said, 'No violence!' I preferred the dignified course. I nursed my poor child, dragged her about in travel—kept her from mourning herself to death—until I met Admiral Phillips, and I persuaded Emily to marry him. He was older than she, but he was rich and an upright man, and I knew would make her a good husband, and I knew she would learn to love him. She did; but we have never forgiven Colonel Brennan—your uncle and I—and we never shall!"

"Has he married?" asked Juliet, her blue eyes wide with this disastrous love tale.

"No. I never knew why," replied Mrs. Lambert.

Another afternoon found Juliet again in the garden.

Her footsteps strayed again to the lily pool.

Looking across the river, and seeing the walls of a grand, grey mansion rising among the green, a suspicion that she had already admitted one of the forbidden Brennans to her acquaintance crept into her heart.

Yet a blush and a smile illuminated her lovely countenance as she saw the pretty canopied boat float out from among the willows.

"Good afternoon," called out the young man across the lily pads, and indeed he looked quite vivacious; "I was in hopes you would come down here. Isn't it a lovely day?"

He pulled up among the bobbing pads.

"Would you like some more lilies?"

"Yes," returned Juliet, "but—but," she faltered, "I am afraid you are one of the Brennans, and I am forbidden to know them."

He looked up with an understanding glance and a smile.

"If I am, you will have to excuse me for it. We will have the lilies in any event," pulling at the long, glistening, pink-green stems; "now these are regular beauties—the finest of the season. Glad I can do something for you. It's very jolly to have a young lady down here. I was lonely. Do you want any more?" loading her hands. "Won't you come into the boat?" he added earnestly, seeming to apprehend that the meeting would now end; "it's nice here on the water, and very comfortable, and if I am a Brennan, I am respectable," he added.

He met her wistful eyes with sympathy.

"You want to come—I see you do. And, you see, you don't know that I am a Brennan," he laughed.

"No," faltered Juliet.

And the sunshine was so bright on the crystal stream, the shadows so golden-green under the willows, the distance so alluring, she set a little foot in the boat and in a moment was far down the river, winding between the rushes.

A heaven on earth followed, "for gay youth loves gay youth," and green and blue were glad together that afternoon. But when Juliet sprang upon the grass again the smile faded from her face.

"I know well enough that you are Roland Brennan," she said. "Thank you for a nice time, but please don't ask me to go boating again. My aunt is very kind to me, and I don't wish to disobey her."

"But what am I to do?" asked the young man quickly. "I never had such a happy afternoon in my life. Why, I'm terribly lonely. My uncle won't let me associate with Tom, Dick, and Harry, even if I wanted to, because we are rich and must keep up the dignity of the family. And he won't let me take up a profession or learn a business because he wants to keep me with him. He's a grand old fellow; but, oh, it's dreadful here for me. I suppose you think it cruelty, but I've come to almost hate the place, and now I like you so well you—you are going to throw me over."

"Oh, no," said Juliet, blushing. "I couldn't do anything so rude," innocently. "I—I presume we shall meet sometimes?"

"Where?"

"In society. I am to be at the picnic to-morrow; and my aunt is to take me next week to spend a few days with Mrs. Bellingham."

"Good! Then I see my way clear," exclaimed the young man, throwing up his hat enthusiastically.

At the picnic at Mrs. Bellingham's hospitable house, at parties and balls, this Romeo and Juliet met; and, though the girl's heart quaked sometimes under her aunt's proud old eyes, and a sorrowful shame filled her breast, Roland Brennan's tact staved off discovery until late in the autumn.

Juliet knew that by a word, a smile, she made this handsome lover very happy, and if a proud and resentful relative was to be made miserable by the fact that she loved this forbidden young man as dearly as he loved her, she could not feel quite altogether to blame.

If Aunt Lambert had been stern she would not have cared at all, but she was the most indulgent of guardians, and Juliet could not be altogether happy, though she lay among the roses and fed on the lilies of life.

Then Mrs. Emily Phillips came from abroad.

She was a pretty, blooming woman of forty, evidently with a perfectly sound heart. She had been a widow a year. She had a sunny smile, and Juliet liked her.

Juliet had committed herself to a secret skating expedition with Roland Brennan. The river was frozen for the first time, and both were passionately fond of the amusement.

She had run lightly down the snowy garden, and had caught Roland's arm with a merry salutation, when two figures, warmly wrapped in furs, stepped from under the pine trees.

Roland started violently; the little skates dropped with a clang from Juliet's nerveless hand.

"Juliet!" cried Aunt Lambert reproachfully.

"Mr. Roland Brennan!" pronounced Uncle Lambert stiffly.

The four eyed each other solemnly in the moonlight. Roland was the first to recover himself.

"Mr. Lambert," he said, "give me an opportunity to talk this over with you."

"No time like the present. Come to the house," said Uncle Lambert.

So the four marched into the dimly-lit drawing-room.

"I can never, never forgive Juliet!" sobbed Aunt Lambert, breaking down and throwing herself into an easy chair.

"But I fail to see," commenced Roland, manfully addressing both the old people, "where we have done any harm. How could I help loving Juliet, having first seen her by accident? I would die to save her a sorrow! Have a care, Mr. Lambert, how you slight so honest a love as mine for your niece, who, excepting you, has no other friend in the world, I believe. Am I so bad a match for her?"

"Your uncle, young man, treated my daughter very badly!" exclaimed Mrs. Lambert. "The family feud——"

"Here let it end," pronounced a pleasant voice from behind, and Mrs. Phillips and an elderly gentleman advanced into the apartment. "I have forgiven Colonel Brennan."

"I was lied to by a rival," interrupted Colonel Brennan. "I was induced to believe that Emily was to jilt me at the last minute. I denied myself ever seeing her again, but I have been a very unhappy man, my friends. When I had reason to believe I had been deceived, the woman I loved was far away. Before I could reach her she was married. After all these years she has forgiven me."

"We are to be married at Christmas, so let resentment against these young folks end. Let us all be happy together," said Emily with her sunny smile, which was so contagious that Aunt Lambert snatched weeping Juliet to her breast and kissed her.

Then all the women kissed each other and the three men shook hands. And there has never been a shadow of trouble in the family since.

Clara Aspen.

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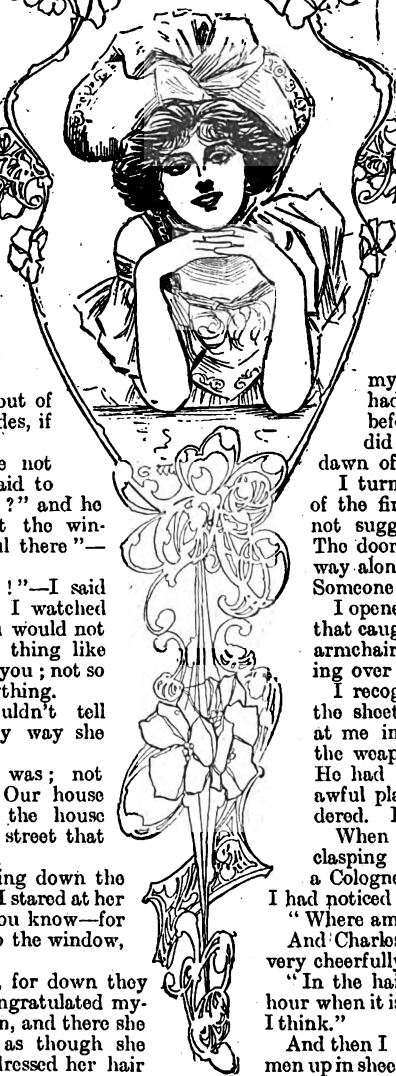
ONLY A MODEL.



The Story of a Jealous Wife.

SHE sat at the window constantly. I'm not a jealous woman but I must say I could not help noticing that from the first.

The window was opposite the dining-room window, and the dining-room was also our sitting-room. And there she was all the time Charles Augustus was at home. I did not see him look at her, but of course he did. Men are all alike. Besides, if I saw her, why shouldn't he?

If he had frankly owned it, I'd have not thought of the matter; but when I said to him, "That's rather a pretty girl, isn't it?" and he said, "What girl?" And I said, "At the window." And he said, "Haven't seen a soul there"—why I began to be suspicious.

So, when I'd said, "Ah!"—just "ah!"—I said no more, but I watched; and the more I watched the more unpleasant matters grew. You would not have liked it either, to see a bold-faced thing like that staring at your husband, I can tell you; not so much as pretending to read or sew, or anything.

I am a little near-sighted, and I couldn't tell what her expression was; but the very way she carried her head was enough for me.

I'll tell you just where the window was; not opposite, but at the side, as it were. Our house was the first house in the street, and the house with the window was the first in the street that crossed it.

At first I contented myself with pulling down the blinds, but she never minded that. Then I stared at her—after Charles Augustus had gone out, you know—for she kept there still. But a man came to the window, and of course I had to go away.

I suppose he pulled their blinds down, for down they were at all events, pretty soon, and I congratulated myself; but next morning they were up again, and there she was, with her hair in puffs and curls, as though she were going to a ball. No woman ever dressed her hair in that way before breakfast without having some reason for it.

Now, Charles Augustus and I had only been married a year, and I had no fault to find with him; but still, men are so much alike all the world over, and it was odd he never spoke of her. If he had said, "What a very forward young person," or, "It must annoy you, my dear, to have anyone staring like that, into your room," or something of that sort, it would have seemed so much better.

I felt sure he noticed her, and at last I knew it. He had bidden me good-bye just as fondly as possible, and pretending that he had something to do which obliged him to go out earlier than usual; and, ten minutes after, happening to go to my window, I saw him in that room. Yes, at the very window, with that impudent creature. I felt my head swim, and I couldn't see or hear anything for a moment. Then I summoned all my courage.

"Edith Robins," I said to myself, "you must do something. You must not sit down tamely and let this go on. Put on your hat, go round the corner, enter the door, and face that creature; put an end to this abominable flirtation at once, before worse comes of it."

At once I grew strong. I rose and put on my hat and jacket. I took my parasol in my hand, and, choking down my tears, walked slowly out of the door I had entered a happy bride twelve months before. Should I ever be happy again? I did not know; perhaps this was but the dawn of some great misery.

I turned the corner and entered the hallway of the first house. It was dingy and dark. It did not suggest the neighbourhood of refined people. The doors were all closely shut, but I made my way along the hall and knocked at the first one. Someone called "Come in."

I opened the door and entered. The first thing that caught my eyes was a tall figure, sitting in an armchair, wrapped in a sheet. A man was bending over him. Something glittered in the air.

I recognised the face of Charles Augustus in the sheeted form, and the ruffian who had stared at me in the dreadful creature who brandished the weapon over his head. It was all plain to me. He had by some means been beguiled into this awful place that he might be robbed and murdered. I gave a shriek and fainted away.

When I came to myself Charles Augustus was clasping me in his arms, and a strange man held a Cologne bottle to my nose, while the bold creature I had noticed stared down at me. I gasped:

"Where am I?"

And Charles Augustus answered very kindly, but not very cheerfully,

"In the hairdresser's, my dear, and as it is just the hour when it is busiest, the sooner we get home the better, I think."

And then I began to understand. They wrap gentlemen up in sheets before they cut their hair and shave them, you know, and the deadly weapon was a razor. And the bold creature—well, there she stood, and she certainly had her hair curled and puffed—but as below her shoulders she was only a wooden block, it did not matter. I had been jealous of a hairdresser's sign!

A. B. Charter.

"You are a queer girl. I never know how to take you." "Pshaw! Why, the trams go right by the door." "What door?" "The Metropole Theatre."

"SHE is so aristocratic; says she never will marry a man who is in business for himself." "How particular! I dare says she prefers someone more like herself—in everybody else's business."

HE (tremblingly): "I have one last wi-wish to ask you be-before we part in an-anger for ever." She (sobbingly): "Wha-what is it, Geo-George?" He: "Wi-will you me-meet me next Th-Thursday, as us-usual?" She: "I wi-will, George"

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Six more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

SIXTH LIST.

61. AEGNRT	**67. CHHIINT** .....
62. CENOPRSTW	**68. ENNORTV** .....
63. AEHLLOOPRT	**69. ABEEENORSTU** .....
64. BENORRTU	**70. ABEELNSWYY** .....
65. ADFLORS	**71. ADLLOR** .....
66. ABELNORTY	**72. ADEEGRRT** .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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The Course of True Love.

The Story of a Proposal that was Badly Worded.

It was a warm, cloudless Saturday afternoon in July. The sun beat down with such fierceness on the river that the boats had nearly all sought shelter. Many of them were moored at Eccleston Ferry whilst the owners consumed strawberries and cream in the pleasant tea-rooms there.

At various places along the stream where the trees grew over the river banks, solitary boats were lying hidden beneath the overhanging foliage.

Occasionally a light skiff shot swiftly past, leaving a silver trail along the stream. The occupant heard the clatter of tea cups, the tinkling of spoons, a sudden peal of laughter, and, if he were a stranger, he glanced in amazement along the apparently deserted river, drowsing faintly in the heat. Then he bent to the oars and sent the skiff forward with a leap. It was not his turn to-day.

One poor solitary being, however, had better luck than the others. Just before he reached the outskirts of the city he was recognised by a girl who leant over a garden wall.

He pulled in towards the bank, whilst she ran to a gate and re-appeared in a twinkling at the top of the private landing stairs. And in another minute she was seated at the bow with the rudder lines in her hands, and the boat swept into the stream again.

"We could not have had more beautiful weather," she said presently. "It's almost perfect, especially for the one who steers."

"I'm quite satisfied with my share of the work," he answered.

"But you must be very fond of rowing."

"No, it isn't that, I'm afraid you don't understand," he said slowly.

"No?"

"I wouldn't change places with anyone else because——"

"Did you hear that teaspoon?" she interrupted, tragically. "I wonder what they're having. Do you know, Jack, it's abominally greedy of me, but I'd change places with anyone who would offer me a cup of tea and a slice of cake."

"I have the materials here in the boat, and as soon as we find a quiet corner, we'll make tea if you wish."

"And the Genoa cake?"

"Yes, that was the sort you told me to get."

"I thought perhaps you might have forgotten it," she said, and smiled in relief.

"I never forget," he answered.

It was one of Jack Shrewsbury's limitations that he could not make love gracefully. The art of paying compliments was one he rather despised, and perhaps the girls thought no less of him on that account.

As a matter of fact, there are two classes that find favour, the men who pay compliments and the men who don't. But apart from this, there was something about the dogged strength of Jack's character that most people liked.

This was to be their last afternoon together on the river, for he had been transferred to a branch office of his firm at Leicester and was due there on Monday morning.

Most of his belongings had already gone, and this being a Saturday afternoon, he had arranged to meet Grace Churchill that they might have a final picnic on the river together. For they were already good friends these two, and drifting into a still closer friendship.

They soon found a quiet corner where the overhanging trees afforded shelter, and here he ran the skiff in close to the bank and tied the rope to some branches. And then he opened a mysterious black bag and produced a bewildering array of good things.

Tea, sugar, tinned milk, bread, butter, Genoa cake, a little camp stove, a bottle of methylated spirit, a tin kettle, and everything else necessary for a successful picnic. But he produced them all in such a serious kind of way, as though the whole affair were a matter of business, that poor Grace had to look at the Genoa cake several times to keep up her cheerfulness. And as for any thoughts she may have had on a subject even more important than Genoa cake it was not her fault if these thoughts grew less friendly as the afternoon wore on.

"I've something very special to say," he remarked after tea. "It's the last chance I shall have for some time, Grace, so I thought I'd better ask you now."

"Yes?"

"It will be very lonely in lodgings away in Leicester," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes, I suppose so."

She was pulling idly, and yet with a certain impatience at an overhanging branch, as she spoke. It slipped from her fingers suddenly and the sudden recoil caused the boat to rock a little.

"All due to nervousness," he said calmly, and smiled. "It's evidently time that somebody began to look after you, Grace. That's the matter about which I want to speak to you. And first about my position at the office, it has a rather important bearing on the subject."

"Are you certain of that?" she said, colouring a little, "because if your position has very little to do with—with what you were going to speak about, would it not be better not to mention it?"

"It is the most important part of the subject," he interrupted, and she shrugged her shoulders a little scornfully and said no more. But her eyes were troubled as she sat and watched the water lapping quietly against the side of the boat.

Girls are apt to think so much of the details of a proposal,

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and yet, had she but known, it was only the rugged honesty of his nature which caused him to place the money aspect first.

"I have £175 a year now, and they have promised me an advance at Christmas," he said presently; "and it would take us until next Spring to find a suitable house and to arrange about this and that and the other. But I thought I'd better mention it to you this afternoon as we may not meet again for some time."

She made no comment, so he continued:

"Of course it is not so much my present salary as the prospect this Leicester appointment offers. It will very likely lead to a district managership at £300 to £500 a year. What do you think, Grace?"

"About what?"

"About what I asked you."

"You haven't asked me anything," she answered, and gave him a glance that should have fired any heart less than fifty years of age. It was only her womanly pride which refused to yield to him, all else was won. But although he really did love her with all his heart, he took no account of womanly pride.

"I have asked you to marry me," he answered with just the faintest excitement in his voice.

"And I—oh, let us drop the subject," she said miserably.

"I should like to have an answer."

"Then it must be 'No.'"

"No!"

"It is such a beautiful afternoon," she said hastily, trying to hide her distress. "See how the sunlight comes glinting through these leaves and branches. And I think the air is cooler now, the boats are creeping out into the river again. Won't you take me home?"

"As you wish," he said slowly, and with something suspiciously like a groan. "I should not have spoken as I did, I am sorry to have troubled you, but I have lived in a fool's paradise all the summer. Well, it can't be helped.

"Is there no chance that you will change your mind, Grace?" he said wistfully. "I don't mind waiting. I don't mind what hard conditions you make if only I may hope to win you at the end. Don't you think you might become fonder of me in time? You do like me a little, don't you, Grace?"

"I don't know," she murmured, and felt her resistance weakening. If only he had spoken like this at first!

"But you must tell me. Do you like me at all, just as a friend?"

"Yes."

"Do you care for me a little more than for your other friends?"

"I don't know. How can I tell?"

"But you must tell," he said, and leaning forward he clasped her hands. "Don't you care for me a little more than for the others?"

He removed his hat and stood before her bareheaded, but she took no notice.

The sunbeams peeped curiously between the leaves and danced upon the water as it washed idly against the sides of the boat. Everything seemed to be waiting for her reply to this question. And she raised her eyes suddenly and looked at him as surely no one had looked before.

"Yes, I do," she said, and then, afraid lest she had said too much. "I don't know anyone else," she added naively.

"Then will you promise me," he cried triumphantly. "that you will marry me when I have £300 a year?"

"That has nothing to do with it," she said, and drew her hands away.

"I don't understand."

"Let us go home," she said hurriedly. "I am tired of the subject, you must not mention it again."

"But I thought——"

"I don't want to hear another word."

He protested and begged and demanded in turn, but all in vain, for her womanly pride was thoroughly roused by this time. They backed the boat into the open stream and he bent to his work with a will.

The heat of the early afternoon had gone, but the river lay like a sheet of silver, rippling softly beneath the breeze. The boat swept forward at a great rate, for Jack was pulling a long, concentrated stroke that held more than an echo of his disappointed hopes.

When they reached the private landing stairs, he held the boat steady whilst she alighted. They looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Is there no hope?" he said presently.

"No hope."

"Don't you care sufficiently to wait for me? But there," he added bitterly, "a poor beggar like me has no chance. I can see your face harden each time I mention my position at the office."

"You are unkind now."

"Perhaps I am, though Heaven knows I don't wish to be so. Good bye, Grace."

They shook hands in silence and then she turned suddenly and fled through the doorway.

"If only he had said he loved me, I would have married him to-morrow," she thought, and then, sinking on to a garden seat, she covered her face with her hands and cried as though her heart were breaking.

And Jack turned away, and pulled moodily down the stream, lost in amazement that Grace, of all girls, should be so mercenary.

The consolation that Jack applied to his wounded heart was not creditable either to himself or to Grace. As a matter-of-fact, although he tried to make up his mind that Grace had refused him because she did not expect he would ever attain to a managership, he was not such a curmudgeon as to believe it.

But he tried hard to believe that this was the reason, and

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when he went off to Leicester on Monday morning it was with a firm determination to prove his boast, or perish in the attempt.

The dogged, unyielding nature of the man came to his aid. He flung himself into the struggle with irresistible energy, working early and late.

As time went on the spirit of the fight gripped him body and soul, it fascinated him. Here was life worth living, the life of the commercial arena, where pluck and firmness were bound to win.

He became a manager, and that in less than four years. And having thus attained one object of his ambition he resolved to journey to Chester to try if he could not compass the other.

But apparently the Fates willed otherwise, for just at this high tide of his fortunes, some American financiers, who had presumably outworn their commercial reputations at home, came to England and cast covetous eyes upon the trade wherein Jack was engaged. The British manufacturers, scenting danger, joined their forces to meet the invader and the result was a huge combine of some twenty businesses.

The next step was the reduction of the staff, particularly those in the higher ranks, by something like fifty per cent. Here Jack's cleverness and previous success did him the unkindest turn of all.

His rapid progress had aroused the envy of those below him, as much as the jealous alarm of his immediate superiors and when the time came for the final selection, he found himself ignominiously in the cold.

He soon obtained another situation, but the salary was only £130 a year as against his former £300. Well, it was not his fault, he had done his best, and besides the fight was not over yet. He was still in the same business, and might yet work his way higher than he had gone before.

And then in the midst of his meditations, he suddenly thrust away all thought of the struggle, and there came into his mind a vision of a broad, smooth, flowing river, with banks all overhung with trees, and light skiffs that darted here and there amid the sunshine.

He was not due at his new situation for three days. He had not been to Chester since—then he shrugged his shoulders despairingly at the thought that that dream was all over now. But all the time he was throwing his things into his bag with a reckless haste that grew upon him with every minute.

He knew, or thought he knew, that his affair with Grace was quite impossible now, but still that wild longing tore at his heart and drove him half-unwillingly to the other side of England.

The bitterness of temporary failure, so galling to a determined nature, was upon him, and he longed to escape if only for a few days, from the scene of his disaster. And so he took his ticket and set out for Chester—perhaps the quaintest, most mediæval city in England. Here, he thought would be peace, with a rest from all ambitious dreams. But here, had he only known it, he was to experience the bitterest shock of all.

By a curious coincidence one of the first people he saw on leaving the station at Chester was Grace's brother. He was running to catch a train, so there was only time to shake hands hurriedly and make an appointment for that evening.

Jack felt quite pleased by this little meeting, for no doubt Grace would hear of it, and—and would laugh, he told himself bitterly, to think how his boast had come true one minute, to be falsified the next.

Nevertheless he hired a skiff that afternoon and rowed quietly down the stream. As he drew nearer to the well-remembered garden his heart began to beat faster.

He had no desire to force his company, but if he could see her only for a minute as he rowed past—and at that very moment he did see her coming quietly down the garden path. He stopped rowing and the boat began to drift quietly with the stream.

Presently she came to the end of the garden, and stood with her elbows leaning upon the low wall, looking thoughtfully down the river.

Jack's pride, his resolution, were all swept away in an instant, before an irresistible surge of passion. He rose to his feet, although the narrow skiff rocked dangerously as he did so.

He took off his hat and stood before her bare-headed, with his eyes shining, seeing only her. And she turned scornfully away, with an unmistakable curl of the lips, and deliberately walked back into the house.

Two hours later Jack sat in his lodgings almost broken-hearted, with his tea standing untasted before him. There was no possibility of mistake for she had deliberately cut him dead, and no doubt had done so to let him know her opinion of his failure at Leicester.

Well, each to his taste, but it was not what he expected from Grace, of all people. But even yet he refused to admit that she had been to blame. There was some misunderstanding somewhere, she must have heard some distorted tales of his misfortunes.

"A letter for you, sir," said the landlady, "just come by the afternoon post."

He took it from her mechanically, and she left the room again. Then he glanced at the writing and his indifference vanished in an instant. He ripped the envelope from end to end, and drew out a correspondence card, from which he read as follows:

"Dear Jack,—*George tells us you are back in Chester for a few days' holiday, and that he arranged to meet you to-night. Unfortunately he has had to go to Manchester on business so cannot keep his appointment, but if you will call round here this evening, mother and I will be pleased to see you.*

"*We were very sorry indeed to hear of your ill-luck just when you were on the high road to success, but hope the reverse will be only temporary.*

"*Yours sincerely,*

"Grace Churchill."

Jack leant back in his chair and stared amazedly at the letter. How could he reconcile these words with the events of the afternoon? Twist and turn his theories as he would he arrived continually at the same result.

The argument that explained the scornful turning aside in the afternoon could not interpret the friendly tone of the letter he had just received, although it was evident that the same argument would have to suit both.

Anyhow the letter was there, and it cheered him wonderfully, so much so that he promptly attacked his tea and punished the marmalade and the lettuces tremendously. And then, like a sensible fellow, he decided to go round and answer the letter in person.

As he walked through the quiet, old-fashioned streets, the twilight was already beginning to fall upon the city, although it was only about seven o'clock.

Somehow the letter was gaining the ascendency in his mind. Not that he doubted the events of the afternoon, they were too recent and too undeniable for that, but he became more convinced every moment that there was some mistake, which a few words with Grace would soon put right.

He did not feel quite so hopeless about other matters now. Of course he told himself once for all about every alternate minute that his chance with Grace was *nil*, and that, in fact, he could not even ask her again as matters were at present, but in spite of all this there was a distinct feeling of hope in his heart as he opened the garden gate and strode briskly along the path.

It was almost dark now, and as he neared the house he distinguished two figures standing in the porch and whispering earnestly together. Evidently it was a farewell of some kind, for they presently shook hands, and the tall figure stooped and kissed his companion several times.

Jack drew back, not wishing to spy upon them, and the

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next moment the man had torn himself away and run lightly past him down the path.

The girl remained at the door until Jack came forward into the open space in front of the steps. Then she looked at him hurriedly, as though startled, and suddenly ran into the house without a word. But before this, even though she stood in the shadow, he had recognised Grace.

He turned away with a heavy sigh. After this, it was out of the question for him to pay his visit as he had intended.

If she had become engaged to somebody else, it would have been kinder to have told him, he thought. And so he neared the gate, and seeing a garden seat, he flung himself upon it with a groan and stared moodily at the ground.

Someone opened the gate lightly and entering the garden, stared curiously at him for a moment, then, apparently satisfied as to his identity. "George," she said anxiously. "Whatever are you doing there?"

Jack sprang to his feet and strode towards her. "You are mistaken," he said bitterly. "My name is Shrewsbury."

"Jack! Is that you?" Her voice had lost its anxious tone and was full of delighted surprise. "What are you doing by yourself there?" she added, "come into the house at once."

"Had we not better say good-bye, here and now? I didn't know you were engaged, Grace, until——"

"Until when?"

"I saw you just now at your front door bidding good night to—to George, I suppose."

"You recognised me?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure? Come closer, Jack, and say if it was I you saw."

He came closer and stared eagerly at her with a new hope springing in his heart.

"Are you still certain?" she asked presently.

"I am certain of your voice, Grace, but you seem older than before. And your dress is different."

Then she broke into a sudden peal of laughter. "The one you saw at the front door was Doris, my younger sister. They say she is exactly like I was four years ago. She was away at a boarding school and spent the first half of the holidays with friends, that summer when——" She stopped, colouring slightly.

"When you gave such a shock to my self-esteem."

"Only to your self-esteem?"

"To far more than that," he answered, "and experiences in business have made me think your opinion of me was right, Grace."

"I did not express any opinion."

"You said you did not care for me."

"No, no," she murmured. "I didn't say that."

"Then what did your refusal mean?"

"It meant that I wouldn't marry you for your money, or position, or prospects," she said, "that was all."

"Well?"

"You didn't ask me if I would marry you for any other reason," she continued quietly.

"I have no right to ask you now," he said sadly.

Then she stepped forward and looked him bravely in the face.

"That is not for you to say," she said, with that affectionate wilfulness which had always charmed him. "You must ask me at once, and leave it to me to decide."

Wal Frank.

Mrs. Sniffles: "Henry, I think I hear mice gnawing at the dining-room door." Sniffles: "Don't be alarmed, dear; it's only the cook writing a letter to her lover."

"Bunkins, I believe, is about the smartest man of his years in this city of ours," said the man who observes. "Knows a great deal does he?" "Knows a great deal? I should say so. Why, sir, that man knows almost as much as his nineteen-year-old daughter, who is at college."

Your Editor Chats.

The Juggled Letters Competition will be completed in twelve lists; the sixth list appears on page 47. I would again draw my readers' special attention to the Billiard Tables which are being offered among the other prizes. They will form a most desirable addition to any house. The size has been chosen with a special view to their being easily removable, and to allow of their being put up in any ordinary sized room. Cues, balls, and other necessary accessories are given away with each of the tables.

Several competitors have asked whether they may put down more than one name if they are able to make more out of any separate set of letters. It is distinctly stated in the conditions of the competition that the name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct, but only one must be put down.

It is not to be expected that everyone's idea of what is a good story will coincide, and so that I may thoroughly understand what kind of stories my readers prefer, I have decided to offer a pencil-case each week to the reader who gets the stories in each week's number in the order nearest to that approved of by the majority. Write on the back of a postcard the names of the stories in this issue in the order in which you prefer them, and then send the postcard to Preference No. 1, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than by first post on Tuesday, July 14th. The decision of the Editor as to the awarding of the prize in case of a tie must be regarded as final.

At the time of writing, the sunshine, after the recent terrific rainstorms, is making the country look more beautiful than ever; the trees and hedges and crops are that lovely green which is one of the beauties of Britain. Visitors to our country always admire the verdure of the British Isles, which, they say, cannot be excelled anywhere. It is often those who live farthest away who see the most of other countries. The inhabitants themselves are unable, either because they have no spare time, or because they cannot afford to leave their own homes.

Where there are children in these poor homes, more particularly homes in the large towns, it is necessary that strangers should make the effort to raise money in order to give them a breath of fresh country air on one day of the year at least. Several Funds have been started for that purpose, but none is so far-reaching in its effects as the Fresh Air Fund, which, during the eleven years it has been in existence, has sent nearly a million children into the country for a day.

Ninepence is all it costs to give one child a whole day's happiness, and I am sure it is not because you grudge giving that sum, but only because you cannot be bothered to get the necessary stamps and send them along that your contribution has not come to hand yet. Go *now* to the nearest post-office and buy as many stamps, or as large a postal order as you can afford, and send them to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. All amounts will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Collecting forms can be had on application.

Your Editor.

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Which Shall It Be?

The Romance of a Singer and a Song.

"THIS is what I call a pretty state of things!" cried the little manager, dancing excitedly about the floor in order to give vent to his feeling of vexation. "Here have I been preparing Margaret for the grand occasion that will lift her from the ranks of the amateurs to the position of a coming prima donna, I have billed the town for the performance on Thursday—the day after to-morrow!—and now all my plans are to be upset, the public to be fooled, and Margaret's future to be spoilt, simply because some countryman comes along and asks her to marry him! Why on earth didn't he stop on his farm and grow cabbages?"

He stopped in the midst of a whirl near the piano and glared fiercely at the elderly man seated on the music-stool.

"And I suppose you encourage it, eh? You want him to marry her, rob her of her career, and take her away to hoe potatoes on an isolated farm many miles from everywhere?" he asked furiously. "You would like this fellow to take her away at once, and disappoint the public and injure my reputation? I can see you would like it! Oh, it's enough to make a man tear his hair!"

He passed his hands through his bushy hair as if he intended to illustrate his words in a very realistic manner. The elderly man's face was grave; he hesitated before answering, but finally said:

"I do not desire to disappoint the public or to damage your reputation, old friend, but I do hope that Margaret will accept him and that he will decline to allow her to appear on Thursday! I——"

"Listen to that!" cried the manager dramatically, apostrophising nothing in particular. "Did you ever hear anything so insane, so selfish? You old growler," he continued, turning to the other, "you are doing it for your own sake, without thinking of her!"

The elderly man's countenance became a trifle more earnest in expression.

"You are mistaken, Bain," he responded calmly, "mistaken and unjust to me! I am doing this for my granddaughter's sake and without any thought except for her happiness. You know my opinion of a professional career!"

"You failed yourself, Herbert," declared Mr. Bain, a little more kindly, "but that should not blind you to the chances of your granddaughter!"

"The career is full of bitterness and disappointment except for the favoured few who chance to tickle the public fancy or have been gifted with exceptional talent!" said John Herbert bitterly.

"I have experienced all that, and I would spare Margaret! I had her trained for the operatic stage because, after the death of her parents, it was the only thing which circumstances permitted me to do for her!

"I harboured the thought that she would become one of the favoured few—I hugged that notion in order to justify my action in bringing her up to that life which I detested, I suppose! Well, disillusionment has come.

"I recognise that she is little likely to please by her looks and manners only, and I also have sense enough to see that she does not possess great talent! Therefore I would sooner see her married to Mr. Sandeman, and living quietly and happily in a rural district, than undergoing the painful experience which is sure to be hers if she adopts the operatic stage as a method of gaining a livelihood!"

"It's sheer folly!" groaned Mr. Bain, sinking into a chair for a moment and then springing to his feet again. "Sheer folly! Who says she has no talent? Why, she sings divinely."

"She sings the notes very accurately," assented John Herbert, in his usual grave tones, "and she has a good voice, but——" He stopped, as though unwilling to give utterance to the opinion; with an effort he continued: "She sings mechanically. There is no *soul* in it! And that spells failure, Bain!

"In the true singer the words of the song are sung with a something that is not in the written score—a something that can never be put down in black and white and which can never be learnt! It comes of itself. I call it *soul!*"

"Don't agree with a word of what you're saying!" said the excitable Mr. Bain irritably. "I won't believe it! It will come all right. Let her go through Thursday's performance and then see!"

"That is what I am now anxious to avoid!" observed Herbert quietly. "She has a chance of marriage with a man of fair means; he can keep her in comfort, free from the worries of life! If she tastes the strange enchantment of the stage, she may not accept! That is why I hope that she will accept him and that he will persuade her to give up the idea of appearing on Thursday!"

"Listen to me!" cried Bain, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder. "You are a disappointed man; you failed in your musical compositions, failed to attract the public, so you think that everyone else will fail! I say it in all kindness, Herbert, you failed because you did not persevere! You should have stuck doggedly to ballad composition! You would have succeeded in that, but you were not persistent and you aimed at high-class composition for which you were unfitted! I implore you not to spoil Margaret's chance!"

"I have encouraged the visits of this young fellow, whose acquaintance we made accidentally some months ago. Yesterday I received a manly letter from him, saying that he wished to propose marriage to Margaret, and would come to-day for that purpose if I had no objection. I replied that I would welcome him, that I naturally could not answer for Margaret, but that he had my best wishes!"

"H'm!" grunted Bain. "I suppose that means that he knows that Margaret is likely to say 'Yes' to his proposal! I feel as mad as——"

He stopped abruptly as the door opened and the two young people came into the room. They looked radiant, but they showed nothing of the bashfulness which usually distinguishes the newly-engaged couple. Bain formed his own conclusions from this; Sandeman had not been refused, at least, but he had not received a decided affirmative.

There was yet hope that Thursday's performance would not be a fiasco. "I don't believe that Margaret would consent to

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play me such a shabby trick!" he decided as he gazed at the girl.

The young couple formed a striking contrast. Sandeman was tall, strong-looking, sunburnt and healthy; his appearance, although not imposing, made an agreeable impression on strangers. Margaret Bayliss was of medium height, fair of complexion, and with a wealth of golden-tinted hair, a pretty and attractive face and graceful carriage.

Bain's remarks concerning the kind of duty which would fall to her lot if she married Sandeman were, of course, exaggerated as the result of his annoyance, and it was not at all difficult to imagine Margaret as the centre of a happy home circle, with this strong man for a husband.

Both Margaret and Sandeman were somewhat taken aback to find Bain in the room, but they quickly recovered their self-possession. After two or three minutes' conversation, Sandeman took his leave and was accompanied to the door by Herbert.

"You will excuse an old man for being anxious concerning a step which so vitally affects the only relative left to him," said the old man earnestly, as they reached the front door. "I hope that your mission has proved successful!"

"Well Mr. Herbert," replied the other, rather diffidently, "it has not been unsuccessful! Margaret has not given me a decided answer yet; she wishes to think it over, so I have arranged to come again on Friday. I shall come in the evening, so as to give her time to recover from the fatigue of Thursday's ordeal! I am confident of success, though! So, good-bye for the present!"

They parted, and Herbert went slowly back to the room in which he had left his friend and his granddaughter. He was sad at heart; he dreaded the effect of the glamour of the stage on Margaret. If Sandeman had only made up his mind a little sooner!

"Sandeman himself wishes her to go through the performance!" mused Herbert with a touch of bitterness. "It tickles his vanity, the idea that she will be a success, and that he will feel that they are applauding his future wife! Ah, me!"

"I thought you wouldn't fail me!" Bain was saying, as Herbert reappeared. There was a ring of triumph in his voice. "After all my tuition, all my attention and work. Bah! I was foolish to take any notice of your nervous old grandfather!" he added, still speaking to Margaret but turning to John Herbert.

"He isn't old, Mr. Bain!" said the girl, sidling up to Herbert. "His hair is grey, but he is strong and upright, and he can't be so old in years!"

Herbert smiled as he kissed her.

"Oh, well, we won't quarrel over that!" cried the little man, preparing to go. "I can't stop any longer this morning. Don't forget! Dress rehearsal to-morrow! Good-bye! No, I can find my way out alone!"

In less than a minute he was tearing along the street, humming a quick march, oblivious of all about him and walking as if his life depended upon the rapidity with which he could cover the ground.

"So you have not given him a decided answer, Margaret? And you will perform on Thursday evening?" asked Herbert as he seated himself on the music-stool and took up a score. "Oh, there is no need for those pretty blushes! It does not take a man of my years long to learn how the wind blows. And do you think that you will be able to give him an affirmative reply, Margaret?"

He had great difficulty in controlling his eagerness to learn the exact state of her feelings. A troubled look crept into her eyes, but they were lowered, so he did not see it. She went to him and knelt by him, placing her head against his left side so that it was near his heart.

"Would it please you, grandfather?"

"Yes, my child! It would place you beyond all the worries and sorrows of the career which, otherwise, you will follow!"

"But I should not escape trouble by marriage, grandfather. Everyone has to worry and sorrow over something, whatever their walk of life! That is true, is it not? If I escape it in one direction, shall I not meet it in the other?"

Herbert was nonplussed; he could but acknowledge the truth of the simple statement, although he tried to make her understand, in a few words, that she would have less to vex her as the wife of Sandeman than as the struggling artiste. Then he turned the conversation.

"I fear that I shall not be at the dress rehearsal to-morrow, Margaret, so I should like to try that song which you will sing at the beginning of the second act. Ah, here it is! Not much in it, but the composer is a favourite, so it will go well enough on Thursday! Bain was right to make this selection; it gives you a better chance. Let us try it!"

He began and she took it up. At the end of the second verse he discontinued playing.

"You are all right at that; no fear of a breakdown!" he said confidently. Under his breath he concluded: "No soul required for *that*, which is fortunate!"

The dress rehearsal was a success, and Bain looked forward with well-nigh uncontrollable eagerness to Thursday evening. The hours seemed to be weeks, but they dragged their weary length along, and at last the time arrived.

The house, a small one, was packed. It was a novelty; the people knew that Margaret Bayliss had sung at unimportant concerts and had taken part in amateur theatricals, and the fact that the well-known Mr. Bain was to try the experiment of bringing her out in the chief part of an opera excited their curiosity. They assembled in force and waited in expectation; it would be interesting to see how Miss Bayliss would go through it. No one anticipated anything out-of-the-way.

John Herbert and Sandeman occupied a box. Herbert had wished to have a seat in front rather than be at the wings; his crossed hands were twitching nervously as they lay on his knee.

The first act was short, and gave but a poor opportunity for the display of talent; nevertheless, the audience gave Margaret a sympathetic reception and encouraged her by occasional good-natured applause.

Then came the second act. Margaret was discovered alone on the stage when the curtain rose, and, after a short soliloquy, she came to the front for her song. She shot a quick, significant glance at the conductor, who played the opening bars, and——

Herbert looked wonderingly at the figure of his granddaughter. That was not the song which she had practised with him! The music was familiar to him; he slipped into a day-dream, and, leaning forward, remained with closed eyes as Margaret sang.

The song was one that told of the chilliness of autumn and the dreariness of winter, of decay and death; then there followed the awakening of new life in the springtime, and the joy and glory of summer.

The theme was an old one, but the musical setting was such that it afforded splendid scope for what Herbert called "soul." The mournful note of the first two verses, and the glad, triumphant ring of the last two—ah, how magically Margaret rendered them! No expression? Why, her very being seemed to be poured into the song!

It thrilled the audience, imparting to every individual man and woman present a

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reciprocal feeling. It was like a flood of magnetism; it came from the singer and filled their own being! Spell-bound, the audience waited till the last triumphant note had died away; then the pent-up feelings were expressed in a deafening round of applause.

"She has scored this time!" cried Sandeman exultantly, looking at the audience as though he would say: "That prize belongs to me!"

He received no reply from Herbert; he saw that his companion was still leaning forward with closed eyes.

"Thank you, I am quite well!" responded Herbert, rousing himself to reply to Sandeman's anxious inquiry. "I was thinking. Encore? No, Margaret cannot give an encore! She would not reach that high level again within two or three minutes, so to give an encore would be to spoil the effect of that song. She is right in not responding!"

The remainder of the opera was an absolute success for Margaret, and when the curtain descended on the last act, Bain was beside himself. He danced about, began to speak but without being able to complete the sentences, and generally behaved more like a candidate for a lunatic asylum than as a sober-minded theatrical manager.

Sandeman was also full of extravagant delight at the success of the girl whom he now confidently expected to possess; it did not occur to him that his chances of winning her might be decreased by her triumph; on the contrary, the desire to have her for his wife, increasing with her success, made him more and more confident of winning her.

John Herbert had remained very silent and meditative during the rest of the performance; he scarcely appeared to follow the course of the opera, but kept his eyes half-closed, and his face preserved its impassive expression all through the final scenes. It was only when the opera was actually over that he aroused himself and prepared to leave the box. On reaching the door he suddenly remembered Sandeman.

"I must go round to Margaret," said Herbert simply, "She will be too excited to see you to-night, and you have promised not to touch upon the other matter till to-morrow. So I will take leave of you here. We shall have the pleasure of a visit from you to-morrow, as arranged?"

"Certainly!" replied Sandeman, looking rather disappointed. "Do not fail to convey to her my sincere congratulations!"

It is doubtful whether John Herbert heard the last words. He hurried from the box to the back of the stage, where he found his granddaughter and Bain awaiting him. He folded Margaret tightly in his arms and kissed her.

"It was a grand triumph!" he said earnestly. "But why did you risk all by singing *that* song? Why did you not tell me? Where did you practise it? Why——"

"Oh, one question at a time, you misanthrope!" laughed Bain, doing a kind of war dance in the centre of the limited space. "What have you to say about soul now?"

"If I had told you, grandfather, you would never have permitted me to sing it," said Margaret, looking at him with eyes half-filled with tears of happiness.

"When I first found it among your papers, I wanted to try it, but you would not let me, although you declared it to be the best thing you had done. Still, I did try it, and I was so pleased with it that I asked Mr. Bain to put it into the opera. We had to keep it a secret, or you would have prevented it. I think it is splendid, and I cannot understand why you hide it!"

"When I composed that music," said Herbert gravely, "I knew that it was the best thing I had done, and I expected the public to go wild about it. But it was received in absolute silence; it was a failure! I put it aside and determined that it should never be sung again. It was that failure which proved the last straw to me. My ambition was crushed.

"I tried in other ways, but only in a half-hearted style. I have had many disappointments since, but the memory of that has remained while the recollection of others has become dim. Bain, why did you let her risk her success by singing a failure?"

"Nonsense! That song would have been a great one years ago if you had had more go in you and had got it sung once or twice more! You are one of those men who make a hash of their lives by being too thin-skinned, too sensitive. A rebuff practically kills you!

"Look here! I have already had a score of inquiries for the name of the composer and the address of the publisher! You will be famous in your old days! Have I told them your name? Of course! And I'll have it put on the bills for Saturday's performance! You'll be called before the curtain with Margaret, hand-in-hand, you know, and bow——" Here he went through the action of bowing to his own reflection in the mirror, while Margaret laughed joyously.

"Another performance on Saturday?" queried Herbert, drawing a deep breath. "But—but what about marrying Sandeman and giving up the professional career?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" interposed Bain. He was about to continue, but he observed the look on Margaret's countenance and held his peace.

"Oh, grandfather, I can't marry him!" exclaimed Margaret appealingly. "I respect him, but I do not love him! I felt that I did not, could not, love him, and that was why I asked for time to consider. I wanted to make sure that I should not do him and myself a great injustice by marrying him. Now, after this, I know that it would be a cruel wrong!

"Do not urge me to do it, grandfather! I love you, and I owe so much to you that I would do almost anything to please you. I know that you have thought that it would be for the best! But I cannot do it! My whole being throbs with the love of music, and I should be no fitting wife for him!

"I feel now that we are not matched—that we should not make each other happy, and I am sure that you would not wish me to contract a marriage of that kind. And, grandfather, do you really think, after this evening's experience, that I shall be entering upon a life of disappointment if I choose music as a profession?"

There was a moment's pause.

"No, my child!" cried John Herbert at length. "You have conquered and have falsified all my predictions! Go on as you have begun, and I will write to Sandeman. You must marry only when love dictates!"

"What about me?" asked the manager, with a look of injured innocence. "Oh, I don't mean about marrying! I want to know if I am not entitled to some little gratitude for showing you that you still have an opportunity of becoming famous, Herbert? Why, your songs will go like wildfire, and you can go on writing as fast as you like!"

Herbert clasped his old friend's hand in silence; his heart was too full for words.

Sandeman was the only one of the four principal persons in this story who had cause to be sad, but he was of a robust constitution, and he soon recognised the position:

"I wish her all good things!" he muttered. "Perhaps I shall have better luck next time!"

F. Brewster.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
MARY MASON, Lady Maitland's maid.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Gilbert Chase Receives a Shock.

BREAKFAST at the Manor was a "come as you please" function at any time, and the morning following the *bal masqué* it was even more casually attended than usual. The servants moved about softly, and with awed faces that took their reflection from those of the few people seated at the table, for "Mr. Jack," the future lord of the Manor, lay near unto death; and the doctor's verdict, as he drove away from his morning visit, had been sufficiently grave and evasive to create alarm in the hearts of master and servants alike.

Sir Trevor Maitland drank a cup of coffee, and toyed with some fish on his plate. His genial blue eyes looked worn and hollow, while his face had aged suddenly since the night before.

"Dear Trevor!" said Lady Maitland gently, "try to eat something for my sake. You must not break down, too, dear, because I need you as well, you know!"

"You sat up with Jack all night, did you not, Mother-o'-Pearl?" Muriel interrupted swiftly. "You look ill, too. Let me help you in some way."

Lady Maitland smiled sadly. "It is nothing to me, Muriel, to sit up all night. Besides, I would not care to let anyone else take my place by the dear boy's side. The nurse we have wired for from London will relieve me occasionally."

"But won't you let Ivy help you also?" said the girl quickly; and immediately the words had passed her lips she knew her stepmother was annoyed.

"I do not think it advisable, dear," her ladyship said, quietly. "I think that the boy and girl flirtation that existed between them is at an end," she went on calmly. "Ivy told me as much yesterday; and announced her engagement to Mr. Scarlett."

"Digby Scarlett!" exclaimed Sir Trevor, roused from his apathy. "Well, I cannot say I am sorry; he is a sterling good chap; and I hope little Ivy will find happiness; and—and—my boy"—his voice broke—"will—please God—pull through, and marry happily!"

"Yes," said his wife gently; "I hope so too, Trevor!"

"I have telegraphed for Agnes to return to-night, my dear," continued her husband; "she would not like to be away from us in our trouble."

Lady Maitland was silent. She had been congratulating herself upon her freedom from the vigilant eyes of her husband's elder daughter, who had gone away to spend a few weeks with friends, and now her presence would be doubly distasteful! But aloud she said quietly:

"Naturally, Trevor, she will want to be near her brother. Now I will go back to my post," she went on. "Mason took it for me while I came down."

"Do not wear yourself out, my darling," said Sir Trevor hastily, as his daughter slipped out of the room. "Muriel and Mason had better stay in turns with the lad, till the nurse arrives. You are looking pale and unlike your bonny self!"

He turned to open the door, but his wife came up to him suddenly.

"Trevor," she said earnestly, "you have always found me a good and true wife since we were married, fifteen years ago, haven't you?"

He touched her hair with tender fingers: "Yes, my wife. Since the day I met you in Nice, a sad-eyed girl of twenty, in your widow's weeds, you have been to me the dearest and truest of helpmeets in the world. Dear mother of our child, Woolf! I have been twice blessed in my old age, by such a wife and child; and in my troubles you have drawn nearer to me in spite of the great disparity between our ages, and the girlishness of your beauty."

Lady Maitland sighed softly. "I am glad you have told me that, dear. I have wondered lately whether I might not have failed in some of my duties towards you! Now I must go to Jack," she said; "I do not like to keep away along."

"I will stay here, then," said her husband. "I am expecting a visitor."

Her eyes contracted suddenly, and her lips twitched as she repeated:

"A visitor—who is it?"

Before he could reply, a servant flung open the door, and said:

"If you please, sir, Mr. Chase would like to speak to you urgently!"

"Ah!" breathed his wife, "that is the—the man who found Jack in the spinny last night. I will stay and hear what he has to say," then, turning to the servant, she said: "Show Mr. Chase into the library, Lawson, and also ask Miss Muriel to stay with Mr. Jack until I come."

"But, my dear Pearl," Sir Trevor protested, "this person very probably has something to tell me that you should not hear. It will be painful if he has to inform us that he has caught this woman who shot our poor boy!"

His wife smiled, and placed her hand on his arm. "Very probably he has done so, dear! I should like to learn how he has accomplished it! I will follow you in a few minutes."

When her husband had left the room, she went to the sideboard and poured something into a glass, then drained it quickly.

"Now I shall feel braced up!" she murmured; "my nerves are just a little unstrung. That man can have found nothing—new. Heriot North by this time has burnt what I gave him last night; and the—thing is back in Trevor's drawer in the same condition as I took it. No; there is

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nothing I need fear; and yet——" She bit her lip, and touched a piece of black velvet on her wrist with a thoughtful frown; then, with one brief glance at her reflection in the glass, she turned and left the room.

Outside the library door she paused a moment. The sound of voices reached her—that of her husband, and, in a louder, coarser key, that of the detective.

"Yes, Sir Trevor," he was saying, "I thought it my duty to come to you at once, being the Chief Constable of Melton, and it being found on your grounds; though your family trouble about Mr. Maitland made me hesitate at first to intrude. But I think that the same person who shot your son is concerned in the other."

Lady Maitland turned the handle and walked into the room. Her face was very white, and under her large, languid eyes were faint purple rings. Gilbert Chase looked at her with admiration, as she stood behind Sir Trevor's chair, and bowed to him graciously.

"What is this I hear?" she said in her low voice. "No fresh trouble I sincerely hope, Mr. Chase? Or is it that you have discovered something that will throw light upon the cowardly attack on my step-son?"

"No, your ladyship," he replied gravely; "although I have made a discovery that appears to have some link with the attempt upon Mr. Maitland's life."

She opened her eyes widely: "A link! A discovery! What do you mean, Mr. Chase?"

Sir Trevor raised his hand: "No, my dear. I think it will be better for you to be kept in ignorance of this fresh sensation. You should not be frightened unnecessarily."

Lady Maitland smiled, and placed her white hand on his shoulder caressingly. "I have strong nerves, Trevor, and you must not wrap me in cotton wool always. Besides, I think Mr. Chase had better tell me now; I shall imagine all sorts of things unless I know."

The detective stole a look at Sir Trevor, but he made no sign in response, so he said slowly: "Early this morning, my lady, while searching the spinny round the spot where Mr. Maitland was shot, I stumbled across something that gave me a sudden shock, lying not two hundred yards from where I found Mr. Maitland!"

Sir Trevor's wife pulled a chair forward, the back to the light, and slowly sank into it.

"Yes, Mr. Chase, what was it you found?"

"A man I know well—from a criminal point of view," the detective answered. "I have noticed him hanging round the village inn lately, and intended keeping my eye on him. But now"—and the man shrugged his shoulder—"he is beyond my supervision!"

Lady Maitland leant forward eagerly with parted lips. "Not hurt also, Mr. Chase?" she breathed.

"Hurt? Not quite, your ladyship!" he answered laconically, "but dead as a rat in a trap, that's all! Mike Holland, the old 'lag' is *murdered!*"

"Murdered!" exclaimed Sir Trevor and his wife in one gasp; and from the half-open door there came a stifled cry that chimed with their own, and turned three pairs of startled eyes upon the figure that swayed towards them.

"Murdered! Did you say that—that Mike Holland was murdered last night?" and the girl, standing straight and willowy, with her face drained of all colour, and in her eyes the light of fever raging, sent a strange thrill through Gilbert Chase, the phlegmatic man of law, as he returned her glance with one of interest and curiosity.

"Yes, miss," he said gravely, "I did say that. The man, Mike Holland, has rendered his account in a Higher Court this time."

In the girl's eyes a peculiar gleam shone, and the ashen hue of her face grew even more grey and drawn as she slowly turned her gaze upon the beautiful woman in the chair.

"Do you hear what that man says?" she whispered hoarsely. "He is murdered! murdered! No secret is better kept than that the dead possess! He can't speak now! He—he——" Then her voice suddenly changed to a note of terror, as she continued: "Jack and the other—one—they met, and——" Her speech faltered, and with a low, muffled sound she fell, a huddled-up heap, at the feet of Lady Maitland.

The detective rose as Sir Trevor and his wife bent over the prostrate girl. He was thinking, deeply and swiftly.

"Mr. Chase, may I trouble you to ring the bell? This poor child will be very ill, I fear, under the shock of last night and to-day! Trevor," she turned to her husband who stood by her side, a helpless expression on his pale, worried face, "go, dear, and find Woolf; keep him with you. I dread the boy being similarly frightened in this house of sorrow!"

He obeyed her silently; and, after loosening the unconscious girl's neck-gear and holding some brandy to her lips, Lady Maitland addressed the detective:

"I am sorry this interruption has occurred, Mr. Chase. You must tell Sir Trevor and myself the other particulars of this unfortunate affair later."

The detective bowed.

"If I may say so, your ladyship, I should like a few words with this young lady when she recovers."

"Ah!" And her lips parted in a scarlet line, revealing the tiny white teeth under them. "I am afraid you will be disappointed if you expect any valuable information from this hysterical child. But, of course, that is as you think best; when she is better, which I fear will not be for a day or two, I will send for you." Then she said, a sweet smile curving her mouth, "I do not think you could have rung the right bell, Mr. Chase. One of them is out of order; but if you will be good enough to go to the morning-room and ask my step-daughter, Miss Muriel, to come to me, it may be better than an inquisitive servant in the room!"

When the man had closed the door behind him, Lady Maitland, quickly seizing the right wrist of the unconscious girl on the couch, gave one or two hard pinches on the soft flesh, that, after several repetitions, made an ugly mark, dark and red, then taking from her pocket a blue indelible pencil, she deftly touched the bruise with it.

"That man already has his suspicions roused by this little fool," she thought, "and she must bear the brunt of her own folly! If he wishes to fasten his chain of evidence round any neck, it will be hers!"

In the meantime Gilbert Chase knocked at the door of the morning-room, pointed out by an opportune servant, and, receiving no answer, walked in.

A girl turned quickly and faced him. It was the same brown-eyed and tawny-haired beauty whose description he carried in his pocket. A wave of curiosity swept over the detective. This was, he thought, the sweetheart of Jack Maitland.

"Excuse me, Miss——" he began, "but I am looking for a young lady."

"Yes?" she queried. "Who is it?"

"Lady Maitland asked me to send Miss Muriel to her in the library, as there is a young lady there in a bad faint."

The girl started. "You are quite right," she said quickly. "I am Muriel Maitland!"

"You!" exclaimed the detective, in genuine surprise; "but I thought you were——" He stopped, and covered his confusion by adding, "a visitor at the Manor!"

To himself he was saying, "How did I come to make such a mistake, now? It's thrown me right off my perch! I am certain she was in the window, yet she says quite plainly that she is Miss Maitland. Then who is Ivy Strange?" He caught his breath with a gasp of excitement, as the memory of a willowy figure, with heavy-lidded violet eyes, a mass of sun-kissed hair, and a sweet, tremulous mouth, rose before him.

"By Jupiter!" he murmured, with a thrill, "that is the girl! I see now—clearly, too clearly for my sense of justice. I've made a fool of myself—once, but now will make up for it by being doubly wide-awake!"

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Yet while these thoughts were passing through his mind there was another person more than ever determined to be wide-awake also, and whose cunning and quick wit made her more than a match for the worthy but stolid Gilbert Chase!

When Muriel and her escort entered the library, Lady Maitland gave a sigh of relief. "Ah! I am glad you are here, dear. She is on the point of coming round at last. I will leave you with her now, while I go back to my sick-room. The nurse will not have arrived yet." Then, turning to the detective, she said, in a low aside:

"Wait until she is better before questioning her, although I am convinced the poor child speaks in delirium. I will send for you when I consider her well enough."

He bowed his head gravely. As he left the Manor, and strolled through the grounds to the spinny, he was thinking not about the beauty and youth of Jack Maitland's sweetheart, but of an ugly bruise, faint and blue, on the white flesh of the unconscious girl's right wrist, that had caught his gaze when Lady Maitland had moved from the couch.

He put his hand to his brow, and wiped it; it was damp with a sudden moisture caused by some emotion other than surprise. "If I hadn't the evidence of my own eyes," he muttered, "I should think I was going stark, staring mad!"

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Gilbert Chase Reads a Telegram.

DIGBY SCARLETT glanced round his bachelor room with a quiet smile. His critical sense of the fitness of things was more than satisfied by the tone of deep red of paper and curtains that contrasted vividly against the dark background of the oak sideboard and chairs.

His solitary breakfast-table was dainty with silver and flowers, and as he stirred his coffee, a deep sigh of content rose to his lips, and his eyes lingered thoughtfully on the bright log-fire in the old-fashioned grate.

Presently he rose, and going to an inlaid cabinet in the window, took something out of a drawer, and examined it curiously with a furtive haste, as though he dreaded being seen with it in his hand.

It was an oval-shaped locket of hammered gold, and on one side there was a dirty mark, as though a dark liquid had slowly oozed into the tracery of the gold, leaving an indelible stain.

But it was not the exterior of the locket to which Digby Scarlett's eyes were glued in puzzled thought. It was open, and in one of the two spaces for photographs, was the picture of a young girl; the other space was empty, and the glass was broken, as though the fellow likeness had been roughly taken out.

"It's funny!" he muttered, "that I should have noticed this in time to take it! But what I can't make out is *her* photo in it. I wonder whose was on the other side!" He smiled, and as he replaced it in its hiding-place, murmured: "The boy won't be out of the sick-room—if he ever leaves it—for at least six weeks, and by that time this girl will be mine!"

As he turned away from the cabinet and was slowly choosing a cigar, the door opened, and a trim-looking maid said:

"If you please, sir, a gentleman would like to see you on important business."

Digby Scarlett started slightly, and his upper lip quivered under the long moustache, but he said promptly:

"Show him in here, Wallis; and lower the blind a little; the sun is just a trifle too strong this morning for my eyes."

The maid obeyed, wondering slightly at the weakness of her master's sight that could not stand the strength of a winter sun.

As the visitor entered the room, Digby Scarlett flashed a quick glance at him, and a faint sigh of relief escaped his lips as he noted the quiet-looking man with rather vacant blue eyes, who saluted him respectfully.

"Well," he said shortly, "to whom am I indebted for the honour of this visit? You must be brief, for I am a busy man."

The man flushed slightly, but said civilly: "I am Detective-Sergeant Chase, of Scotland Yard, sir, and my visit to you is to ask you if you can oblige me by telling me the exact time it was that you parted with Mr. Maitland of the Manor, who was shot last night?"

A cynical smile parted the lips of the master of the "Rest."

"That sounds almost as though you were charging me with murder, Mr. Chase," he laughed; "but I can tell you that I did not meet the gentleman after all; we must have missed in the dark. I am not quite accustomed to these woods at night, only having taken up my residence here a short time ago."

"Ah!" said the detective slowly. "Thank you, sir, for explaining the matter. I understood from Mr. Maitland that you and he had an appointment last night, and I thought you might be able to throw some light on the matter."

Digby Scarlett raised his eyes with a sudden surprise. "So this fellow knew of the existence of an appointment," he thought. He must be wary in his replies. Aloud, he said pleasantly:

"After rambling about for a time I turned back, hoping to see Mr. Maitland at the Manor, and was shocked when I heard of his accident. Have you any clue as to the would-be murderer?"

Gilbert Chase twirled his hat with thoughtful fingers. before he replied. He was not wholly satisfied that the master of the "Rest" was dealing straightforwardly with him, but until he had some chance of speaking to the boy whose commission he had taken up, there was nothing else to do but take notes of the stray evidence he could collect. And there was one person from whom he trusted to learn much!

He looked up, to meet the inquiring gaze of the master of the "Rest."

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "but this is not the time to talk of suspicions. Perhaps you have heard that another discovery was made this morning, not far from the place where Mr. Maitland lay; and I have a fancy that the one is connected with the other in some way."

Digby Scarlett looked interested. "I fancy I did hear something about a body being found," he said carelessly, "but thought my servant was referring to Mr. Maitland. Is there another, then? There seems to be an epidemic!"

"A tramp was murdered last night!" said the detective shortly. "I came across his body in the early hours, while I was searching the spinny for traces of the—the person who shot Mr. Maitland."

"Ah! And you imagine that both the successful and the unsuccessful attempts were made by one and the same person?" queried Digby Scarlett, pushing a box of cigars towards the man and turning to throw some more coal on the fire.

"Well, sir," replied Gilbert Chase, slowly, fingering a choice havana, "I can't say yet. My suspicions were inclined that way half an hour ago, but now I must wait for the inquest that will definitely prove whether the three shots I heard were fired from the same weapon or not!"

"You said 'half an hour ago,'" repeated Digby Scarlett curiously. "Am I to understand that something has occurred to alter your opinion since then?"

Gilbert Chase hesitated. "That is so," he said, after a while. "It is quite within the bounds of possibility for anyone—a woman, for instance—to wish an awkward enemy out of her way; but there is no reason I can conceive that she should want to kill the man whom she knew loved, and was loved by, her."

He bent his eyes upon the cigar he was lighting, but was quick to note the irrepressible start of the man who had resumed his seat in the chair with its back to the light.

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"Good Heavens, man!" Digby Scarlett exclaimed, "you must be mad! Why should she wish that tramp out of the way? She is the——" he stopped suddenly, aware of the mild, blue eyes of the detective searching his face with an innocent expression in their depths.

He fell back with a forced laugh, feeling that he had made an exhibition of himself.

"I don't fancy that I mentioned any particular lady, sir," remarked the man drily.

"You did not," Digby Scarlett admitted, now laughing boisterously; "but with one woman constantly in my mind, I imagine that other people only think of her also."

"Hardly flattering to the lady, in the present case, if I may say so, sir," Gilbert Chase murmured, rising to his feet and taking up his hat. Then he paused and looked again at the man in the chair, and noticed that the slim, well-bred hand holding a cigar, trembled ever so slightly.

"I suppose you hardly remember after all these years, sir," he began tentatively, "the forgery case in which you were the prosecutor?"

For a moment Digby Scarlett's head swam with a sudden, awful thought, that struck a cold chill to the very root of his being. Had his enemy sent this man to track him to his lair? Then the recollection of the broken down derelict of an ex-convict as he had seen him in London, rose before his eyes, and he smiled grimly.

"I remember perfectly," he said quietly. "What of it?"

"Only that I was one of the detectives that arrested the prisoner," said Gilbert Chase. "I knew your name, sir, immediately, because of that old case. Well, I won't detain you any longer, sir," he went on. "Thank you for telling me about your failure to meet Mr. Maitland. It simplifies matters, and brings my inquiry into a closer circle. Good day, sir."

As he left the room Digby Scarlett gazed after him with an ugly scowl. "So you came here to spy round, did you, Mr. Chase? And you imagine it would be a feather in your cap to have the master of the 'Rest' drawn into your net of inquiry. But in spite of my momentary incaution you will fail in bringing anything home to me. And before the boy is able to help you, I will be on my honeymoon with beautiful 'Ivy Strange.' 'Ivy Strange!'" he laughed softly. "Strange—yet *not* Strange!" Then going to the sideboard he poured himself out a glass of neat brandy, which he drank eagerly.

"I have something in that cabinet," he muttered after a while, "that my friend Chase would pay dearly to possess!"

* * * * * *

As he walked in the direction of the "New Age," Gilbert Chase chuckled audibly once or twice. "I fancy you just overdid a little of your unconcern, Mr. Scarlett!" he thought. "You nearly let the cat out of the bag when I laid that little trap for you. I don't think I am far wrong in assuming that you know a great deal more than you pretend, about Mr. Maitland's accident; but I have you under my eye, and there's time enough to let matters develop gradually.

"At present it is Miss Strange to whom I intend to devote my energies. She——" he stopped, and put his hand to his pocket for a match. As he did so, he touched something that arrested the words on his lips and sent a sparkle to his eyes. He drew it out slowly. It was the half-used stump of a cigar that he had picked up when searching round the spot where the fallen man, Mike Holland, had lain.

He examined it afresh, his interest excited by a fresh idea

"Mr. Maitland smoked nothing else but cigarettes," he muttered, "and that poor chap could not run to more than an ounce of 'snout' at the most. No. It's the smoke of a gentleman who can afford to pay a good price for his fancy."

Then, acting upon an incontrollable impulse, Gilbert Chase did a strange thing. He took the cigar from his mouth, and placed instead the half-used stump between his lips, which he lit and puffed silently for a few seconds. Then he took it out, carefully extinguished the light, and returned it to his pocket with a thoughtful smile, as he put the cigar Digby Scarlett had given him back into his mouth.

"As I guessed," he mused, "that stump was the remains of a havana!"

When he reached the "New Age" he went to his room, and opening a small letter-case, took out some pieces of paper that appeared to be the fragments of a letter. He bent over them carefully. The texture of the paper was common, and the few words he could decipher were obviously disguised.

"These don't help much!" he muttered. "Since I picked them up in the spinny that night I have puzzled over them. 'Money,' 'father,' and 'silence,' that's all! But if the girl took the money, what need was there for her to go down as well? There is a lot behind all this, but my only chance is in the girl. Poor Mr Maitland! if he only knew that while he is lying unconscious his sweetheart is being drawn into a net of circumstance, which will take a lot of cleverness to get out of!"

He put the scraps of paper back into his letter-case and locked it up, together with the cigar end. Then closing the door, he turned the key and softly slipped down the narrow stairs into the street, where he nearly collided with a tall, dark man, hurrying in the direction of the village. Gilbert Chase looked after him with a puzzled frown.

"Why, that is the owner of the 'Hollies'!" he muttered; "he looks as though he had seen a ghost! I thought he was such a strong-looking man, too! Probably he is also upset by the sudden collapse of the son and heir of Sir Trevor. He was at the ball, too. In fact, that black-eyed 'Mason' told me he was the most constant visitor at the Manor!"

Spurred by a sudden thought, he followed behind the man who, with downcast face and gaunt eyes, entered the post office, and, going up to the telegraph ledge, wrote and crushed several of the forms before satisfied with his message.

When he had gone, Gilbert Chase went swiftly to the place where the haggard master of the "Hollies" had been standing, and while affecting to write a telegram, he quickly detached the clean half of the sheet of blotting-paper with which the stranger had dried his message.

People who sent telegraphic communications in Melton were few and far between, and the blotting-paper was clear. Gilbert Chase walked some little distance away from the post office; then holding up the page to the light on the reverse side, he read:

"Anxious to leave England. Is post at Bombay still vacant? Will accept if so!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Do you Remember?"

The windows were darkened, and the shadows fell slantingly on the still face of the boy in the bed. The gentle, low-voiced woman who moved with silent steps towards the fireplace, sent a glance of approval round the room where she was to combat the waters of Death, the waves of which were ebbing near the boy who lay on the edge of the shores of Life.

She had done all there was to be done until the next visit of the doctor, and had seated herself in an armchair by the bed. She was a dark woman, with brown hair streaked plentifully with grey; and harassed lines round eyes and mouth told a story of want and past privations.

A gentle tap at the door disturbed her, and rising quickly, she opened it the breadth of an inch.

"Well," she said, in a whisper, "what's wanted?"

"Lady Maitland told me to tell you that you had better

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have your lunch," said the voice at the door. "I am to sit with my brother till you return."

The woman looked at her visitor with a quick scrutiny that gradually changed to a slight smile as the earnest brown eyes of the girl met her own.

"Very well, miss," she murmured; "if you will sit quiet by the bed and call me if he makes any movement, I will leave you for a moment. My journey yesterday has made me just a little tired by now."

The girl entered the room softly, while the nurse went downstairs into the breakfast-room, where a dainty lunch had been laid for her.

Suddenly, when she was preparing to enjoy her well-earned meal, a voice outside the door made her drop the knife and fork in her hand with a noisy clatter, and clutch the table-cloth with a gesture of fear.

"Nurse Beaumont is having her lunch in here," said the voice; "I will go in and speak to her. Muriel is sitting with Jack now."

"Did you see her arrive yesterday?" asked another voice; this time the gruff one of a man.

"No," continued the first. "I was with Ivy in the library; then I had other things to do, so thought it better to let her get accustomed to her surroundings as there was much to be done. But, come, we will see her together."

The door opened, and the fascinated eyes of the nurse in the chair looked almost fearfully into the face of the tall, beautiful woman who came into the room with slow, graceful steps, followed by an elderly, stout-looking man with white hair.

"Ah! nurse," said her ladyship condescendingly, "how is the patient to-day?"

The dark, nervous eyes of the nurse at the table rested anywhere but on the face of the woman in the doorway. Instead, she glanced over her head at the silent, subdued man standing behind her.

"I—I am not sure until the doctor comes," she said, in a voice scarcely audible; "he had a bad night last night."

With a faint sigh Sir Trevor turned and left the room, and his wife would have followed him, had not the nurse suddenly stretched out her hand, and whispered hoarsely:

"Madam, I must speak to you alone!"

Lady Maitland paused, and threw a glance of haughty surprise at the trembling woman.

"Well," she said, in a low tone, "what is it, nurse?"

For answer, the woman raised her head and gazed eagerly into the calm, disdainful face of the mistress of Maitland Manor.

"Madam," she said, in a strangled tone, "don't you know me? It's seventeen years since we parted, when I took—the baby with me—and—you went on your journey as—Mrs. Vernon."

The woman at the door grasped the back of a chair, and leant forward with an intent expression on her face that gradually changed to one of unwilling conviction.

"You are Alice Mayne, then," she said coldly. "What are you doing under your present name?"

"I married," the woman replied; "then my husband died the following year; and I had a little money, so trained for a nurse. I had no idea when I was coming here that I should meet you—again!"

Lady Maitland's face hardened: "Then forget me, Nurse Beaumont," she said icily. "Mrs. Vernon is dead—only Lady Maitland lives!"

Still the woman prevented her leaving the room by saying, with a furtive glance at the door: "Your ladyship, your ladyship! one word more. I have a confession to make to you about—the baby!"

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

A frown puckered the even brows of Sir Trevor's wife, and she caught her breath with a sudden catch.

"Well," she said shortly. "What can you tell me that I do not know? It died a year after you took it!"

Nurse Beaumont shook her head. "Ah! your ladyship, you were told that; but it was not my fault you were deceived. My husband would not let me keep it, but sent it out to nurse with his sister. She took it to a baby farm, and a year later called for it, and gave it in charge of another woman—cheaper than the farm people. When I wrote and asked her for news of it, she told me it was dead!"

A sigh fluttered to the lips of the beautiful woman who listened to her story with compressed lips. "As it is dead, why worry me with the story now?"

"But I don't know that it is dead!" the nurse whispered; "although I told you what my sister-in-law wrote, believing her; and I sent you, if you remember, the jacket and socks she sent me!"

"What happened to it?" asked Lady Maitland, with quivering lips and steely eyes; "tell me at once!"

"Until just a year or two ago," the woman said, "I believed what my sister-in-law had told me. But when I went to see her on her death-bed, she confessed that she had something on her mind—about—that baby!"

The eyes of the woman compelled her to finish what she had to tell.

"It did not die when she said!" she whispered; "it was stolen, and she was afraid to let me know!"

"That was nearly fifteen years ago," Lady Maitland murmured, with a slight smile. "Probably by this time it really is dead!" Then, turning sharply to the woman, she went on in a low, soft tone: "From henceforth, while you are in this house, you are a stranger to me, and I to you. Never dare to refer to the past again! That is dead to me; quite dead!"

With a cold, stately grace she left the room and made her way slowly to her boudoir.

Some time later, when the nurse was having her tea, Lady Maitland took her place by the sick bed of her step-son. The doctor had been, and said that on no account were the windows to be opened, for the temperature of the room was to be maintained at the same degree until the crisis had been reached. Until then the life of the boy on the bed hung in the balance.

Sir Trevor Maitland's wife stood alone in the room. She had sent Muriel downstairs, and only the unconscious boy and herself were in possession.

As she looked thoughtfully down upon the still figure of her husband's son and heir, a sudden thought flashed into her mind, and she bit her lip in a spasm of fear.

The memory of a soft, sneering voice of two nights before, and two cruel, glittering eyes mocking her with the half-breathed suggestion that the boy—dead, would clear their paths, occurred to her in all its ugly significance, and she shuddered.

She glanced at the window; then back at the bed.

Only the opening of a window! nothing rough or revolting, would be sufficient to make her son Woolf the heir, and pave the way for the enemy to marry that white-faced fool of a girl.

With a swift gesture, and a tightening of the muscles round her mouth, she went to the window and flung it wide open; ignorant of the fact that from behind the heavy curtain of the bed, a young, careworn face, with an irrepressible look of horror in the depths of the wide, burning eyes, was watching her action.

"There!" she murmured, as the cold, damp air of the January afternoon filtered into the room and touched with chilly fingers the loose hair on the fevered brow of the unconscious boy. "No one will know that it was I who opened it!"

When her soft footsteps had died away, a slim figure shot from behind the curtains, and closed the window; then turned to the bed, and bent down over the boy lying there.

"Darling!" she murmured, "I have saved you this time! God grant no fresh attempt may be made! I am going away, my dearest! I cannot stay here; I am afraid! afraid! afraid!"

Her head sank down into the softness of the eiderdown, and the heavy lids closed over the weary eyes that sleep had not visited for many nights.

Time slipped by, and Nurse Beaumont, coming back to her charge, started when she saw a figure, shadowy in the twilight, kneeling by the side of the bed. She bent over it and touched the tangle of bright hair with gentle fingers.

She had already learnt that the girl at the lodge was a foundling.

"Miss!" she said. "Miss!"

Receiving no reply, she lifted the girl, and half-carried her to a couch. With a sympathetic gesture she brushed the curls back from the low brow of the sleeping girl; then a stifled cry rose to her lips, as she bent forward eagerly—yet fearfully—to gaze still closer at a small red mark on the white forehead.

"What is the matter, nurse?" said a soft voice behind her; and turning, she saw Lady Maitland, in a loose, clinging tea-gown, standing at the door.

The woman beckoned to her, silently.

"Your ladyship! Come! Look!" she whispered, pointing to the girl's brow.

"Do you remember *that*!—that mark?"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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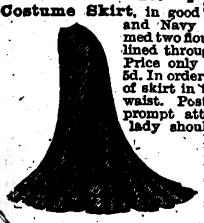

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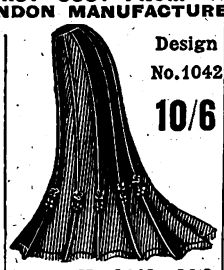

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How the Chain was Forged.

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He's Left in Peace Now.

"My wife never gets me up to cut the grass before breakfast." "Is that so?" "Yes; she tried it once, and I was so sleepy I ran the lawnmower all over her flower-beds."

Nothing New.

He kissed her! She neither drew back nor turned red, And she did not deliver a slap on his ear; he kissed her! No word by the lady was said—She had ceased to be thrilled—they'd been married a year.

It Couldn't Have Been.

"Wretch! There's a letter in your coat pocket I gave you to post three months ago." "It can't be possible, my dear." "Why do you say that?" "Because I'm pretty sure I haven't had that coat more than ten weeks."

The Money was Spent.

Smith (who had forgetfully left his purse on the piano last night): "Have you found anything this morning, Angelina?" Angelina: "Oh, yes, dear! Thanks! I have ordered a new piano stool, some lace curtains, and such a love of a hat!"

Auntie Might Have Guessed.

"But why on earth did you introduce me to your aunt as Mr. Darling? Did you forget that my name was Scroggs?" "Certainly not, you old goose. But I know she overheard me call you 'darling,' and I wouldn't have her think I was spooning for all the world."

Clever Child!

"My youngest child is only eighteen months old," remarked Mr. Snaggs, "yet he can play on the piano." "Oh, what are you giving us?" replied two or three in the crowd. "It's a fact. Just put him on top of the piano, with a few playthings, and he'll play as contentedly as you please for an hour at a time."

His Consolation.

"Why did you invite Bragdon to spend Sunday with you? It nearly broke his heart when Jennie Harkins married you." "I know it. I thought if Bragdon came up and saw how Jennie and her mother rule things in the house over which I am supposed to preside, he'd be rather glad for himself after all."

Such a Thoughtful Wife!

"Mrs. Beasley is always thinking of her husband. She never does anything without considering him." "Well, that's nice of her." "Yes, but it seems to me she overdoes it sometimes. When the men came to paint their house yesterday, she wouldn't let them start until she had selected colours that would harmonise with her husband's new striped shirts."

Married v. Single.

"How many persons can you crowd into a tram?" I asked the conductor. "That depends on whether they are married folk or couples thinking about it," he replied.

Waste Not, Want Not.

"Where's your bottle of cough medicine, Josiah?" "What do you want with it?" "Well, you won't take it, and as it cost ninepence it shan't be wasted. I'm going to polish the piano with it."

No More Ambition.

Opulent Father-in-Law: "What ails you, George? Since you have married you seem to have lost all your ambition." George: "Well, you see, sir, I reached the height of my ambition when I became your son-in-law."

Insomnia an Advantage.

"My husband has a great advantage over most men." "Indeed?" "Yes. He walks in his sleep." "I don't see what advantage that can be to a person." "Why, he can carry the baby all night long and still get his natural rest."

They'd Got Dusty.

"I saw you talking with my cousin just now," she said. "Don't you think he has a wonderful fund of dry humour?" "Yes," he replied, with some misgivings as to whether the fellow really was her cousin, "he has indeed a fund of dry humour; in fact, it's so dry that it's dusty."

A Clever Woman.

"I tell you my wife knows a thing or two. The people who inhabit the neighbourhood into which we have just moved look at us with awe." "How did she manage it?" "Engaged two of the biggest vans in town to move us, when all our goods might have been transported in a greengrocer's cart without overloading it."

Experience is a Hard Mistress.

He quoted the old chestnut. "In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," he said. She sighed and shook her head. "That's the trouble," she replied; "they turn lightly instead of seriously." For she was a girl who had been through several Spring engagements.

A Lesson She Hadn't Learnt.

Dire poverty confronted them. "And there is nothing in the house for dinner?" he whimpered. The young wife burst into tears. "No, and I don't know how to get breakfast and lunch except with what is left over from dinner!" she sobbed. In this terrible moment her cooking class certificate, looking down at them from its gilded frame, seemed almost to mock them.

She Won the Bet.

Fred Flasher and Miss Florentia Flounce were discussing the mental power of controlling thought. Said Flasher: "I will give you a pair of gloves if you can think of positively nothing for five minutes, and still be awake." "Done," she responded. Five minutes passed. "I've won the gloves," she exclaimed. "How did you manage to think of nothing for the whole five minutes?" he asked eagerly. "I fastened my mind on your moustache, and kept it there," she replied triumphantly. The referee awarded her the gloves.

Almost Unnerved Her.

Marie: "Maud and I were in town yesterday, and as we were walking along one of the streets we looked up and saw some men on a ladder, painting a building. They must have been at least fifty feet above the ground, and all of a sudden one of them slipped and almost fell. I was terribly shocked." Harry: "I'm not surprised at that. I suppose in your mind's eye you could see the poor fellow shooting down through the air, even though he succeeded in saving himself?" Marie: "Oh, it wasn't that. In his awkward clutch at something he upset his paint, and a big splotch of it came right down on my new Spring hat. Did you ever hear of anyone who had such luck as I have?"

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Early Morning Catarrh.

In an editorial on Catarrh in the last number of the *Review of Nose and Throat Diseases*, there is mentioned the tendency of catarrhal diseases to become especially troublesome in the morning. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact that during the night when the body is recumbent, the catarrhal accumulations pass backward from the nasal cavities into the throat. In the morning, on waking, these accumulations cause hacking, coughing, or scraping to free the throat from the phlegm. Nearly all those who suffer from nasal complaints have this symptom, and in some cases it becomes so prominent as to be called "Early morning catarrh." This number of the *Review* also contains a "Supplement" giving the details of a large number of cases of catarrh cured by a new method, which has been successful where operative procedures and cauterisations have failed. There is, likewise, a Report Form, by means of which patients suffering with deafness, or ear, nose, or throat ailments can obtain free advice by post. Those who are interested can secure a copy of the *Review* (with supplement and report form), free by post, by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10, Marble Arch, London, W. When possible, however, the editor advises patients to have a consultation with the medical staff at the Drouet Institute. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Husbands and Holidays.

THE holiday season always brings with it a group of problems for lovers. "J. H. J." writes as follows:—"A young couple have not long been married. The husband proposes he shall spend his holiday by himself. Should this be so?"

* * * * *

This question was discussed in *Pearson's Weekly* last year, and good reasons were given on both sides as to whether or not a husband should spend his holiday alone. It is, of course, a matter of opinion. For my part, I think certainly a man and his wife should go away together, especially if newly married. It would be a sorry state of affairs if a man only expects his wife to be his helpmeet in working days, and in the drudgery of a household, and not to share with him the pleasures of the seaside or country.

* * * * *

On the other hand, I believe many married men do gain advantage from a trip with a few other men friends. It must depend on circumstances. If the wife has somewhere to go where she herself will have a good time—say to her own home—it might be a good plan for her husband to go somewhere on his own. But on no account should a wife be left at home to mind a house if her husband is able to give her the change which she needs as much as he does.

Marriage on a Small Income.

"DIFFICULTY" (aged twenty) is attached to a lady five years older than himself. He earns 25s. a week, with the prospect of double in three or four years' time. She earns £2 a week, but supports her widowed mother and family from it. Should he start courting her now, and if so, how?

* * * * *

You will not be in a position to marry for three or four years. That would not be so unfortunate under other circumstances, but seeing that your friend is in business, and that several lives are dependent on her efforts, I fear you would be doing ill in entertaining any ideas of marriage. In the first instance, your wife would have to throw up her business engagement, or neglect your household. If she did the former, the responsibility of her helpless relations must fall on you, which you could ill afford.

* * * * *

There is no harm, however, in telling the girl the facts of the case; if she is willing to have a long courtship, well and good, though, at the same time, I should not advise it. And if she continued in business, you would have rather a rough time of it at home. A woman cannot work all day, and then turn to household duties without serious danger to her health, to say nothing of her happiness. Unless your business prospects look up very considerably within the next few years, I fear you would be encountering great trouble for both yourself and the girl by marriage under present circumstances.

A Change of Lovers.

"MAY" used to "keep company" with a young man, who, after ten months' friendship, went to live in another county. During his absence "MAY" got to know another man, whom she saw every day, and grew fond of. She is now engaged to him, but her parents much prefer the original man. What is she to do to make peace at home?

* * * * *

If you sincerely love the second man, you must not think of any but him. Your parents may be right in liking the first one best, but after all, it is not for them to say which of them you should love. No doubt when your parents know your present sweetheart better, they will like him as well.

Putting on "Sea-Side."

WHILE at the seaside "G. H." met a young lady. In conversation he gave her to understand that he was in a very much better position than he really is. He grew fond of her, and now loves her. How can he break the truth to her as to his position?

* * * * *

A very pertinent question. Young men are rather too fond of "putting on sea-side," not realising that it will sooner or later find them out. You must, of course, either tell the girl straight out what is your position before carrying matters further, or set to work to place yourself in a better one, hoping that time will convert your untruth into a truth.

Too Forward at Seventeen.

"AMETHYST."—I am glad you like *Short Stories*, and have got your friends to take it in. As to the young lady typing next door to whom you would like an introduction, it would certainly be better to try to get to know her privately than in her business capacity. No doubt both her employers and yours would not much care for any intimacy between you during business hours, especially as you are only seventeen.

* * * * *

You say you have only left school two months. Well, is it not rather early for you to start courtship with a girl unknown to your friends? I have every sympathy with genuine love affairs between boys and girls, but I cannot encourage you in what seems nothing more than curiosity. I should recommend you to spend your time trying to improve your business position, and by taking exercise in your spare hours. You have plenty of time in the future for love-making, which is, after all, not the only thing in life—certainly not at seventeen.

In Love with Another's Girl.

"LANCELOT" is sorely troubled. He has never been in love until now, and this time it is with a girl who can never be his wife, for she is engaged to another. Some weeks ago, his cousin came up and announced that he was engaged. The cousin, by the way, was to "LANCELOT'S" mind quite an unattractive man.

* * * * *

The other day "LANCELOT" met him and his sweetheart, and in one glance fell desperately in love, and if there is a language of eyes, he read the same message in the girl's eyes towards himself. He has since met the couple frequently, and his feeling for the girl has deepened. He believes she does not care for the man she is engaged to, but does care for himself. What should be done?

* * * * *

Avoid seeing the girl by every means in your power. She belongs to another, and it is not for you to disturb your cousin's happiness by imaginary ideas of your own. The commandment against stealing applies to hearts as well as inanimate things, and to draw a girl away from the man she is engaged to is a form of theft.

Cynthia.

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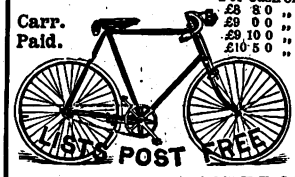

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THE SISTERS.

BEING THE STORY OF TWO MAIDS AND A MAN, AND THE LATTER'S ROMANTIC CHOICE.

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A Journey With a Strange Ending.

"What a glorious old place! I wonder now if, by some extraordinary chance, I am heir to all these broad acres. But no, that would be too much like a bit out of the fairy-tales I used to read when I was a kiddie, where the Poor Young Man always turned out to be a King's Son."

A few faint, far-off notes, the chime of a distant church clock, floated across the great private park that surrounded the author of these observations, and he consulted his watch.

"Half an hour before my time," he remarked; "I suppose it won't do to get there too soon—it might look as if I had rushed off expecting to hear some marvellous piece of good news. Instead of which, I was only—ahem!—curious. All the same I came by an earlier train than the one suggested. But there's no occasion for me to admit that."

Bernard Osborne stepped back out of the sweeping avenue from which he had been viewing—extended under a cloudless summer sky—the lawns and woodlands of a splendid country-seat.

Depositing himself on a pleasantly-rounded hillock that was screened by a coppice of rhododendrons, he lit a cigarette and took a letter from his pocket. It was written on thick, crisp paper and headed "Cunningham and Cunningham, Solicitors," with an address in a historic county-town in the South of England. Its terms were formal, its contents clear and to the point. Bernard Osborne re-read the epistle deliberately.

"I regret to inform you that Sir James Lascelles, known to you as Mr. Lassal, died suddenly some three weeks ago. I was absent on a tour in Spain and did not hear of the sad event in time to return for the last ceremonies. Being the only member of my firm in the confidence of the deceased gentleman, you could not therefore, be informed of his death, or afforded an opportunity of attending the funeral. I hasten, however, at the earliest possible moment, to make this intimation, and to execute certain instructions with which he had favoured me in view of the circumstances which now arise."

"What circumstances?" queried the reader aloud, then continued his thoughtful perusal.

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"If you would be good enough to come down into Hertfordshire, it would much facilitate matters. Your friend and protector, as there is now no reason to withhold from you, was Sir James Lascelles, of Nether Hall, Herts, and Cadogan Square, London. It is at Nether Hall that I should be glad to see you. An excellent train from King's Cross will set you down at Nether Hall station, at 2 p.m., a convenient time for me to await your arrival, and, I trust, a suitable one to yourself. Sir James was a widower, but there is a most capable housekeeper, and you can easily be put up for the night."

The letter was signed, "Yours faithfully, David Cunningham."

Bernard Osborne studied it reflectively. A lithe, well-built, well-groomed, rather quizzical young Englishman, his handsome, good-tempered features wore an expression graver than was their habit. He folded the letter, put it away, and lay gazing across the lush green levels to where the stately front of the Hall itself showed between the huge trees that here and there shadowed the lawns. The smoke from his cigarette floated dreamily in the still summer air.

Mysterious, reticent, unlovable, the person whom he had known as "Mr. Lassal" had been, from early boyhood, Bernard Osborne's guardian and supporter.

Orphaned at an early age, scarcely remembering his parents, and left entirely without resources to the mercy of harsh and miserly relatives, he had no sooner passed under "Mr. Lassal's" control than he began to receive a liberal education.

Without luxury, yet without poverty, he had been guided, almost sternly, from youth to manhood, according to the instructions of his sphinx-like and seldom-seen patron. And now, while he hesitated upon the threshold of the world where—as "Mr. Lassal" had curtly informed him on more than one occasion—he had to earn his own living, he had learnt of that patron's death.

Unable to mourn him with the sincere grief of the heart, Bernard Osborne was yet conscious of a vague anxiety, of a disconcerting loneliness. What new leaf of his life was he about to turn? His mind was busy with a thousand theories as he lay and puffed at his cigarette.

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Suddenly a report, loud yet sharp, disturbed the silence. It was as if a pistol had been discharged at his elbow. He started up and fell back again, caught in the chest by the end of a low-growing bough that, an instant before, had been rustling its leaves within a foot of him. A cry had followed the report—a cry of feminine alarm. Disengaging himself from the fallen bough, he rose, to confront an embarrassed girlish figure.

He lifted his hat, bowing—the face into which he looked was undoubtedly a pretty one.

"I—I hope you are not hurt," he said, "though to be frank, I don't exactly know what happened to either of us."

The intruder's cheeks flushed crimson; she was a girl of about nineteen or twenty, dark-haired and dark-eyed, and simply, almost carelessly dressed in black. Even her limp sun-hat and the ribbon at her throat were black.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry," she stammered, "but I was in the tree—er—reading—and the branch broke. Have I hurt you?"

Bernard Osborne contemplated her with an emotion new to him; she was so rosily appealing in her innocent confusion.

"Not in the least," he said, "but you have not got off scot-free." And he pointed to one of the small sun-burnt hands that hung at her side. The soft flesh had sustained a nasty tear and blood was welling in a tiny stream from the wound. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, it's nothing," she retorted, groping with her uninjured hand to take a pocket handkerchief from the feminine receptacle in the folds of her skirt. She could not find one. Bernard Osborne drew out an immaculate square of cambric, embroidered with his initials (for, to tell the truth, he was more than a trifle natty in his personal habits), and tore it in half.

"Permit me," he said, "you have cut a small artery and it must be attended to. I did once, I believe, attend a First Aid course." He possessed himself calmly of the injured member and bound it up. Then he stepped back, as if to leave her free to go.

"Thank you so much," she exclaimed; "good—good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," he answered; reluctantly, it must be confessed, "but your book; you were reading." She coloured again.

"Oh, never mind," she said, "it can wait till another time; I have stayed out too long already. Good afternoon, and thank you."

She went off with the graceful haste of a young fawn, but halted and rejoined him.

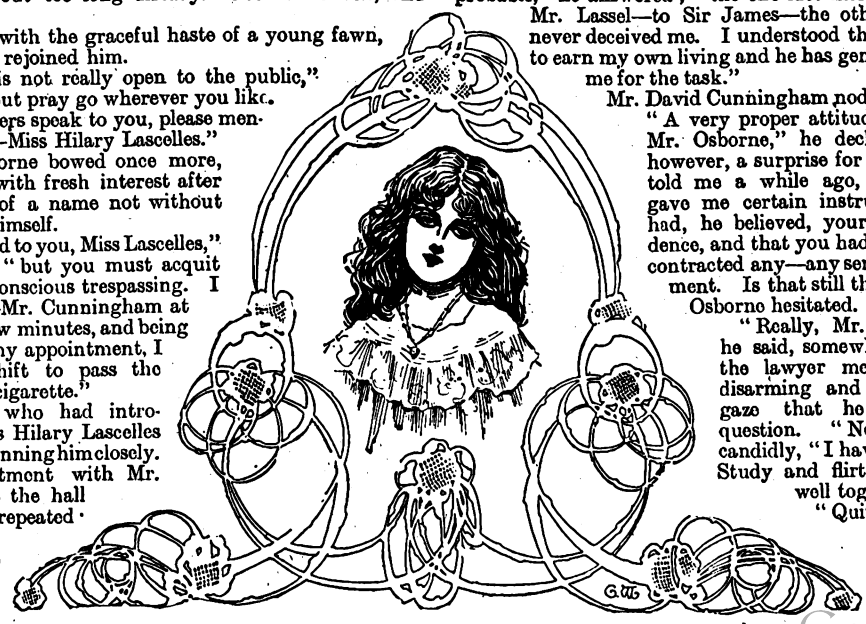
"The park is not really open to the public," she added; "but pray go wherever you like. And if the keepers speak to you, please mention my name—Miss Hilary Lascelles."

Bernard Osborne bowed once more, regarding her with fresh interest after her utterance of a name not without importance to himself.

"I am obliged to you, Miss Lascelles," he responded, "but you must acquit me even of unconscious trespassing. I am to see Mr.—Mr. Cunningham at the Hall in a few minutes, and being in advance of my appointment, I was making shift to pass the interval with a cigarette."

The person who had introduced herself as Hilary Lascelles started back, scanning him closely.

"An appointment with Mr. Cunningham at the hall to-day?" she repeated. "but were you not to have come in the dog-cart—it went for you."



The other coloured in his turn. "I—I came down by an earlier train," he said, "and finding no one waiting for me, I left my bag in the booking-office and strolled over."

Hilary Lascelles hesitated, still studying him. Unexpectedly the chime of the distant church sounded again. It roused her and she made an impulsive motion to take her departure, but spun round on her heel.

"You had better go up alone to the Hall," she told him, with an odd coldness. Her manner changed and she pursued, frankly, "We shall meet there. Don't say you saw me out here, will you?"

"Since you do not wish it," he answered gravely, "no."

She thanked him, and moved off a step but retraced it.

"What is your name?" she asked. Osborne was vaguely surprised by the query but replied without comment.

"Bernard Osborne," he said.

Hilary Lascelles knitted her brows critically, she might have been considering whether or not she liked the combination.

"Thank you," she responded; "and now, for the present, good-bye."

Osborne would have detained her, but she forbade him with a gesture and flitted away, and he stayed, to beguile a moment or two by a search for the book she had chosen to peruse in so singular a spot. Failing to find it, he glanced at his watch, and returning to the avenue, gained in due course the entrance of the old and ivied Hall.

A footman received his card and his inquiry for Mr. David Cunningham, and he was ushered without delay into a large apartment, half ante-room, half library. Arms and armour decorated it, and a substantial pedestal desk occupied a corner. From this latter there rose as he stepped into the apartment an undersized, precisely-dressed man, with a lined, clean-shaven face and twinkling blue eyes. They settled shrewdly upon Bernard.

"Mr. Osborne," said their owner, "I am glad to see you. My poor client, Sir James, told me I should like you; I do. Sit down." He motioned to a chair near the desk and resumed his own.

"You have come here, Mr. Osborne," he proceeded, putting the tips of his fingers together, "with, no doubt, a brain very full of natural conjectures. Let me set one portion of them at rest forthwith. You are no blood relation of Sir James and you are not his heir."

Bernard Osborne bent his head assentingly. "Neither was probable," he answered; "the one fact increases my debt to Mr. Lassel—to Sir James—the other, well, he has never deceived me. I understood that I should have to earn my own living and he has generously equipped me for the task."

Mr. David Cunningham nodded approvingly.

"A very proper attitude on your part, Mr. Osborne," he declared; "I have, however, a surprise for you. Sir James told me a while ago, when—when he gave me certain instructions, that he had, he believed, your complete confidence, and that you had not, up to then, contracted any—any sentimental attachment. Is that still the case?"

Osborne hesitated.

"Really, Mr. Cunningham," he said, somewhat proudly, but the lawyer met him with so disarming and good-natured a gaze that he answered the question. "No," he replied, candidly, "I have been too busy. Study and flirtation do not go well together."

"Quite so," remarked the solicitor; "well, in that case, Mr. Osborne, I can

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proceed at once to the business on which I have brought you here. And you will please understand that in all I do, I am only following out my late client's explicit instructions. Excuse me for a minute."

He got up solemnly and withdrew. Not one minute but ten passed, and still Bernard Osborne was left alone. Finally the door opened and Mr. David Cunningham reappeared, not unaccompanied. With him were two unmistakably beautiful women—both tall, both young, both elegantly, even exquisitely, dressed.

Osborne looked at them—lost in an instinct of admiration that eclipsed all other emotions. He started. One was fair—dazzlingly, imperially fair, the other dark, dark with the rich soft, sparkling tint of hair and eyes and skin that is between blonde and brunette. And in the dark beauty he had recognised the girl whom he had met and talked with in the park. Nor did he wonder that he had momentarily failed to identify in the splendid creature before him, the hoydenish maiden from whom he had parted so unaccountably.

Hilary Lascelles made no sign of recognition, except that her eyes encountered his own with a certain intelligence. Both women, however, were regarding him steadily, acutely. An air of vague disdain on the features of the fair beauty passed slowly, as a shadow passes, and she smiled—a cold little smile.

The lawyer came forward.

"Mr. Osborne," he said, "allow me to introduce you. Ladies, this is the gentleman of whom I have spoken to you. It only remains for you to learn his name; it is Mr. Bernard Osborne. These ladies, Mr. Osborne, are Sir James' daughters. One is his own by birth, one adopted; as to which is his adopted and which his own child I may not enlighten you; it is a secret Sir James kept even from them. Miss Hilda Lascelles, Mr. Bernard Osborne; Miss Hilary Lascelles, Mr. Bernard Osborne."

As the solicitor completed his lengthy introduction the two sisters paused, side by side, a vision of perfectly contrasted beauty in the afternoon sunlight. But neither spoke. The lawyer coughed.

"One of these young ladies, Mr. Osborne," he proceeded, "is rich, one a beggar. Which is which they do not know; Sir James will tell us that. If you would carry out your more-than-father's wishes, you must, before the will is read, choose one of them for your wife."

Bernard Osborne gasped; the thing seemed incredible. Mr. Cunningham fathomed his thoughts.

"If you refuse to make such a choice," he added, "you are penniless, and it is possible that neither of the ladies may prove to be Sir James' heir. In the event of their agreeing to abide by, and to act on, your decision between them, and of your agreeing to make the necessary choice, I am in a position to guarantee that at least one of them shall be handsomely provided for. The position may be a strange one, but it is my duty to carry out my late client's wishes—all of which are laid down in the will itself."

A spasm of bewilderment flitted over Bernard Osborne. Then his eyes settled on the two lovely women before him. Either of them would make a fitting mate for a better man than he could think himself.

Mr. Cunningham saw that he was yielding, and drew out his watch.

"The ladies have given me the requisite assurance," he said, "and, as the will requests, they have laid aside for the moment their mourning, and exercised their own unfettered taste in the matter of attire. You have five minutes to choose your future wife."

Bernard Osborne struggled with a sense of incredulity. Was ever a sane, twentieth-century man confronted with such a problem? But even while he hesitated, his glance was travelling from Hilda the fair to Hilary the dark.

The latter still had a strip of soft cambric about the hand that he had bandaged. She noticed that he was looking at it, and a gleam of gaiety lit up her delicate features and lent them a sweeter, more womanly light than showed in Hilda Lascelles' clearly-chiselled, faultlessly lovely countenance.

He stepped, almost unconsciously, forward, and she, answering the language of his eyes, made half a step in advance.

"Very well," he exclaimed, "I will choose. My sincerest apologies to Miss Hilda, but I have always been so unfortunate as to prefer dark people to fair."

A curious crimson flush stole to the very brows of Hilda Lascelles, but she said nothing. The lawyer drew an envelope from his pocket, and extracted a rustling, legal document. He ran his eye over it, put a finger on a clause, and held it out.

Bernard Osborne saw the indicated phrases. "To my adopted child, Hilary Lascelles, only daughter of my brother Henry Lascelles, one time H.B.M. Consul at Madeira, my love and best wishes for her future happiness in some suitable sphere of usefulness; to my own beloved daughter, Hilda Lascelles, the whole of the properties hereinbefore enumerated."

He had chosen the beggar!

The Way of a Woman.

"It is all very strange! I still feel as if I were dreaming and couldn't wake up."

Hilary Lascelles was sitting in the half light of the great conservatory that opened from the drawing-room of Nether Hall. The gleam of a shaded lamp fell caressingly on her soft brown hair and on the lustrous black silk and chiffon of her dinner gown. She had already returned to her mourning.

Beside her, in the dusk, sat Bernard Osborne, and before her, his hands behind his back and his head on one side, stood Mr. David Cunningham. Through the glass dome of the roof the moon showed a pale blue disc high in the heavens—the evening was far advanced. In the drawing-room without a drowsy footman was securing for the night the fastenings of the French windows.

"You will get used to it very soon," said the lawyer, drily, "almost as soon as Miss Hilda got used to the idea that it was she who was wealthy and not you. And yet when Sir James adopted you on the death of his brother and your mother from fever—it was in Madeira that both Miss Hilda and you were born, and your own mother died within a week of your birth—he conceived the idea of mixing up your identities in order that Miss Hilda should not be spoilt by growing up to know herself an heiress."

Hilary sighed; there was even more in her sigh than in the solicitor's tone of suppressed sarcasm. Mr. David Cunningham surveyed critically the two upon whose quiet *tête-à-tête* he had intruded with professional coolness.

"Then I am to conclude," he observed, calmly, "that you two young people intend to carry out your rash undertaking?"

"That is as Miss Lascelles chooses," Bernard Osborne told

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him; "I have offered her my heart and hand; they are hers till she declines to consider them so."

Mr. Cunningham chuckled. "I like your pluck, my boy," he exclaimed; "Sir James always said you were plucky. Well, we'll see what you think of it in the morning. I shall not blame you if more prudent counsels prevail. Miss Hilary might really do better for herself financially, and you are a clever fellow—you might marry a rich wife in the end if you waited and played your cards carefully. Think it over, both of you. Good night, I'm going to bed."

Bernard Osborne dropped his cigarette and stamped it out as the lawyer lounged off.

"Don't mind him, please," he said to his companion; "I assure you I would not have things a jot different. I—I have never seen anyone I—I like so well as you. Do let me try to teach you to like me a little before you decide that—that it must all be off."

Hilary smiled—a shy, womanly smile.

"You are very generous," she answered, "not to mind a scrap about the money. But I will not let you bind yourself—yet."

She rose, but he detained her—holding the hand he had bandaged only a few hours before.

"Then I am not to be as lucky as I thought I was?" he said; "I am not to have the treasure that Fate promised to drop into my lap? You are trying to break it gently to me—you care for someone else? I should have guessed that—someone you fell in love with at first sight, as I fell in love with you in the park just now."

Hilary's fingers were not quite unresponsive to the ardent clasp that had fastened upon them.

"How foolish," she said, softly, "I have never seen anyone to love. We have lived here very quietly with our governesses and the servants, almost as though we were prisoners of State. How can I help being—being interested in—in someone who is very generous, very warm-hearted, and not—not very bad looking?"

The last half dozen words were delivered from the threshold of the conservatory; she had slipped away from him with graceful ease. A moment more and she was gone.

Her cheeks glowed and her eyes shone as she glided through the big house to gain her own room and shut herself in. He had even dared to pursue her, she guessed, for a slow, masculine footstep passed an instant later down the corridor. Then, not far off, she heard a door shut, and knew that he, too, had retired.

Her pulses quickened and her breath came faster to think that he—handsome, generous, gallant as he was—had openly confessed himself her lover.

The strange events of the last few hours, her discovery as to her own birth, her loss of the right to grieve, as a daughter, for the stern and not-too-well loved man whom she had believed her father, her sudden change of prospects and position—all were blotted out by the thought that she was beloved.

There are among women rich natures to whom love comes as a sweet and passionate ecstas , lifting them into a new and transfigured world. Such a nature was that of Hilary Lascelles.

She sent away her maid—for was she not now to be poor—and taking the pins out of her hair, began to comb it leisurely, still thinking. For a long time she sat in a delicious reverie, and then a sound in the room attracted her attention. She looked up—splendid in her sweeping evening gown, white armed, white bosomed, her head crowned with the golden masses of her hair, Hilda Lascelles had come into the apartment.

Hilary rose and the glances of the two women met—although they had dined together, in company with Bernard Osborne and the lawyer, they had not hitherto exchanged, in public or private, a word upon the subject of the will or of the younger man's choice.

There was a certain disdain in Hilda's eyes as she studied her adopted sister—the sloping mirror enabled her to contrast her own imperial beauty, perfectly displayed in the elaborate toilette that was still undisturbed, with the latter's more girlish and appealing prettiness. Yet, in her loose dressing-jacket, with her brown tresses streaming over her shoulders, Hilary was a ripely dainty little figure.

"Well," said Hilda abruptly, "and how do you like your prospects? I suppose this Osborne will become a schoolmaster or a tutor or something—he will have to if he is to be able to marry and keep a wife at such short notice. But you can't really mean to—to encourage him to carry out his idiotic agreement and marry you."

Hilary went on combing her hair. "I think I shall," she responded, with provoking gravity; "he seems quite smitten with me, which is very generous, considering that I am practically a beggar. And then he is clever, handsome, and good-tempered. Husbands like that don't grow on gooseberry bushes."

"Nonsense," said Hilda Lascelles, harshly; "he is too young to marry unless he marries money. You know what Cunningham told us, that the pater thought he ought to go into politics and make a name for himself. To be reduced to the necessity of earning a living for a wife and perhaps a family, by teaching or clerking—it would be ruin to his chance of a career."

She came a step closer and laid a hand on Hilary's arm.

"Hillie," she said, calling her by a rarely-used childish name, "you don't think I would let you starve, do you? Put an end to this foolishness between you and Mr. Osborne and I will settle five hundred a year on you for life. It will be best for you, best for him."

The other ceased from combing her brown locks and lifted her head proudly.

"I don't want the money," she said, "it is yours—you are your father's daughter and it was his money. Luck gave Mr. Osborne to me instead, we met in the park this afternoon, I had gone out to get a glimpse of him, if I could, and climbed into the old lime-tree to see the dog-cart go by. The bough broke and I fell, cutting my hand. He bound it up and we talked a little; he had walked over from an early train and was passing through the park."

A sombre anger was gathering upon Hilda Lascelles' features; Hilary did not heed it.

"Of course, I didn't know who he was, at first," she continued, "but I soon gathered it. I took a fancy to him, and I suppose he did to me. I think I would rather have him than the money. If he really cares for me, in three months I shall let him marry me."

A fierce exclamation broke from Hilda's lips and she thrust her adopted sister from her. Hilary knitted her brows and studied the fair, angry face.

"Hilda," she murmured slowly, "you—you don't mean to say that—that you want him yourself!"

Hilda Lascelles set her white teeth. "How dare you—!" she began, and stopped, someone was knocking loudly on the door.

She drew back and Hilary hastened to open it. Bernard Osborne, partially dressed, his throat bare, his head ruffled, sprang in. With him entered a blast of suffocating purple smoke.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried; "I thought this was the room I saw you go into. Come, there is not a moment to be lost—the place is on fire and blazing like tinder."

A scream answered this intimation and Hilda Lascelles—

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wild with an instantaneous frenzy of alarm—darted out into the corridor. A wall of flame barred one end of it. At sight of the roaring blaze she shrieked again and sank down, stupefied by terror.

Bernard Osborne shrugged his shoulders and looked at Hilary. Pale and resolute in her picturesque disarray, she met his glance with quiet self-possession.

"There is a way out through the picture-galleries and the servants' staircase," she said, "and the fire doesn't seem to be in that direction. Shall we try?"

For answer Bernard caught up the collapsed and sobbing Hilda and strode off, Hilary piloting him through the smoke, from one great room to another. He halted abruptly.

"Mr. Cunningham," he said, "his room was near mine, where the fire is the worst—I should have thought of him."

"I will go back," answered Hilary. And she turned quickly. Bernard stayed her.

"You brave little woman!" he said, "but you couldn't fight the smoke. I must go."

He put his lips to Hilda's ear. "Miss Lascelles," he told her, "if you cannot control yourself you will be left to your fate. The way out lies straight ahead."

Setting her down remorselessly, he allowed Hilary to support her, and then darted into the smoke. Hilda gave a scream and fled—through the long gallery towards the stair beyond. But Hilary lingered, retreating little by little from the advancing billows of smoke.

At length a figure emerged staggeringly from them, a figure bearing a burden. It was Bernard Osborne and in his arms he carried the unconscious form of Mr. David Cunningham. Blinded, half-suffocated, the younger man reeled this way and that.

Hilary sprang to him with a cry and, seizing his arm, guided him down the gallery. He clung dauntlessly to his burden and Hilda saw that the lawyer was clad in dressing-gown and slippers and that one of his hands clutched mechanically a small brown bag.

Half an hour later, the little lawyer, assiduously tended on the lawn outside the half-consumed house, none of whose inhabitants had had a narrower escape than himself, was able to sit up and inquire the whereabouts of his bag. When it was put into his hand he wrinkled his singed eyebrows and chuckled. Still more did he chuckle when he learnt of his rescue by Bernard Osborne from the corridor into which, wrapped in his dressing-gown and carrying his bag, he had managed to struggle.

Then, in the lurid light of the blazing house, he opened the bag, to draw out a long blue envelope and wave it.

"If—*if* this had been burnt along with me!" he exclaimed; "Osborne, my boy, you have done better than you know—much, much better."

And Bernard Osborne had, though it was not until some little while after that he became acquainted with the real purport of the solicitor's enthusiastic observation.

The blue envelope, however, contained a sealed document, marked "To be opened Three Months After My Death." It was the latest and genuine will of Sir James Lascelles, a will by which his fortune was equitably divided. The principal portion of his great wealth went in equal shares to his daughter Hilda and his adopted child Hilary, the remainder sufficed to provide for a handsome bequest to Bernard Osborne and for legacies to old friends and servants.

"The other will," said David Cunningham, in the course of his final explanation, "was practically a dummy. Whichever girl you had chosen, I was in a position to prove her a beggar."

"But—but why?" demanded Osborne, bewildered.

The lawyer smiled.

"You were the son of an old college friend of Sir James," Bernard was told. "He was a strange man, Sir James, and at first he rather resented becoming responsible for your education and upbringing. But he grew greatly to like you, and what is more, to trust and admire you. So much so, that he coveted you as a husband for one of his girls."

"But—but why not have introduced us to one another in a

—a less unconventional way and during his life?" queried Bernard.

"He planned to do so," replied David Cunningham, "but the girls were in the schoolroom and you very properly occupied with your education. If he died prematurely this fantastic comedy was to take the place of the introduction he meditated. He wished to make sure of your disinterestedness, you see.

"There is a codicil even to this will, providing that the bequest to you may be cancelled at my option and devoted to charitable purposes. The discretion was to be exercised if you should act disingenuously towards the lady of your choice on being made to believe that she was penniless."

It only remains to add that between Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Osborne and the latter's adopted sister, there is a gulf which the years tend rather to widen than to bridge.

R. Norman Silver.

"YOUR cook is a very handsome girl." "She is. She mashes the potatoes by smiling at them."

SHE: "Are you sure that it was a year ago to-day that we became engaged, dear?" He: "Yes; I looked it up in my cheque-book this morning."

SHE (an ardent admirer): "I quite agree with you, Mr. Maunder, Drivelle's poems are great rubbish. Why, I'm sure you could turn out that sort of thing by the yard!"

"DODGER is going to have a law passed compelling women to wear their old hats at the theatre." "What good will that do?" "Why, then they will always be willing to take them off."

DOBSON: "Do you believe in second sight?" Hobson: "No, but my wife does. When I go shopping with her she always says to the salesman: 'I'll come in and look at these again.'"

NURSE: "Sure, ma'am, the twins have been making a fuss all day, ma'am." Mrs. Olive Branch: "What about?" Nurse: "It's because they can't have a birthday a-piece, like the Smith children next door. They think they have been cheated."

"JOHN, Charles, William," cried the boys' mother, "where are those apples I left here?" "In our midst," returned the boys, and when the doctor called that night the mother knew that her little darlings had spoken truthfully as well as with a grammatical accuracy that is not universal.

"THOSE flannel shirts I bought here last month——" he began. "I remember it," said the clerk. "It was a great bargain. Do you find them warm enough?" "They were warm enough when I first put them on, but I didn't think to inquire about them this morning." "Inquire about them?" "Yes. Ever since they were washed the baby has been wearing them. Now, if you have anything that isn't quite so much of a bargain, and is a little more likely to remain my size, I'd like to see it."

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A MATTER OF SPELLING.

The Romance of a Name and an Accident.

It was a summer afternoon in the orchard. The conversation had died down, but I brought it to momentary life with a somewhat belated remark on the subject which had just been under discussion.

"For my own part," I said lazily, lounging on the grass, "I think most names are good enough, but at least preserve me from Obadiah! I knew a man once who was actually christened Obadiah Octavius! And Jemima!—I think Jemima is an atrocity, if ever there was one. Now Dorothy, Dorothea, Theodora, the gift of God, that's the best woman's name I know of."

I spoke with meaning for I had a special reason for thinking so, and I glanced stealthily at pretty Dolly Tracy who was sitting in a low deck chair not far from me, but still a good deal farther off than I could have found it in my heart to wish. But presently when the others scattered themselves a bit I meant to change all that.

As I looked at her now I gathered courage from her bearing; her cheeks seemed to have taken on a pink tinge and she lifted her eyes momentarily to mine, removing them hastily with a reproachful, almost frightened glance which I was at a loss to understand.

The pink colour deepened to red, but as she did not look up again I continued in my selfishness to gaze at her.

Whether she felt my scrutiny and the love that provoked it or not I do not know, but all at once the blush seemed to have become scarlet, distressful, and even to my bewildered fancy a tear trembled on her eyelids, a dewdrop that glistened for a second in the sun and was gone the next as she sprang from her seat and cried:

"Come, the court is in shadow now, who'll have a set of tennis?"

My airy, fairy castles all came tumbling to the ground for the moment, but I was quite willing.

"I'll help you play against Miss Neville and Ted!" I said eagerly.

"No, thank you," she replied coolly, "I don't think we should be at all evenly matched that way."

I felt hurt. Miss Neville and Dolly played about an equally good game. I wondered if she meant to insinuate that I—that Ted——

"All right," I said huffily, "you girls can play us. Come on, Ted."

Ted is my younger brother and I have always considered him extremely lacking in respect for me, but on occasion he can surpass even himself. This was one.

"Rot!" he said loudly, "and have you poaching all my balls! Not if I know it!"

And to cap this rude speech he appropriated Miss Tracy to himself as his partner by ostentatiously turning to her and asking: "Shall *we* toss for courts or let them toss?"

I accepted the situation with sufficient though not too much dignity, and tried to recover my temper somewhat by slashing all my balls hard and fast at my young brother.

Naturally, I took care they should all go wide of Dolly, and my partner and I were getting an easy victory and I was beginning to feel somewhat better, when Dolly, who had come up to the net for balls, cried out peevishly:

"I haven't got a single stroke in up till now and it's all your fault, Mr. Blake. I consider it most ungentlemanly to slash balls at a lady!"

I apologised profusely and tried to explain that it was just what I had been carefully avoiding doing. It was her serve now, and anxious to please her I was at great pains to lob her a ball that the veriest tyro could scarcely have failed to return. I suppose she had done me the injustice to prepare for a slasher and could not change her mode of defence in time for she only just let her racquet touch it and the ball fell into the net.

I was hopelessly in her black books after that, and the game drew to a victorious close for us but a melancholy one to me.

I wandered away feeling terribly out of sorts. I had meant to put my fate to the test that afternoon, but now I felt suddenly robbed alike of courage and confidence. Dolly could not care for me else she would never have acted like that just when my heart had begun to beat high with hope.

I came moodily back and recrossed the tennis-ground. Oh! this was too bad! I might get over her flirting with young Ted—he was only a boy, but when it came to coquetting with that ass Saunderson it was more than flesh and blood and love and jealousy could stand.

At the side of the tennis-court, under a luxuriantly flowering laburnum tree, had been placed two garden-chairs, and ensconced thereon, their two heads close together under the shade of a huge white sun umbrella, I descried Dolly and Arthur Saunderson.

My blood boiled.

How dared he? that was what I wanted to know! And how could she, my pretty, dainty Dolly, endure to have a clown of a fellow like that dancing attendance on her! Why, he couldn't even shield her from the sun without putting her to twice that amount of inconvenience by crowding her and mangling her delicate muslin dress. And as for elbow-room, he evidently was under the impression she didn't need any.

"I'll teach him manners!" I thought grimly.

Dolly looked over at me just as the thought crossed my mind, but I wasn't going to let her see that I cared, so I shouted to Ted, who was sitting on the drawing-room steps whistling.

"Come on, Ted, I'll play you singles."

Ted accepted the challenge with alacrity and came and picked up his racquet, and we started our game in earnest. Ted is a close match for me at the best of times, still, it's not often that I can't beat him, but to-day he seemed in unusually good form, and my own play was scarcely as steady as usual.

I was annoyed when the games stood at three all, especially with Dolly looking on. I have a bad temper, and everyone knows I am a bad loser, so that it was not surprising if I should determine to carry all before me. I did so.

Ted's balls were here, there, and everywhere about the court, and after frantically returning a difficult stroke the impetus of my desperate effort was such that it carried me on and before I could stop myself I had collided with Saunderson's garden-chair, and its occupant, the white umbrella and I were among the *débris*.

It was not my business to know exactly what happened after that, but when I came to I was lying on the sofa in the library; the blinds had been drawn down and someone said,

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"He'll do now." There seemed to be a great crowd of people, and I said I felt all right, and presently they went away and left me with a splitting headache which kept me company for my sins.

When I put my hand to my head I found it was all bound up and there was a great bump on one side, which I said to myself must be the bump of jealousy, and I only hoped it wasn't as large as it felt.

"But, by George!" I muttered out loud, "I was jealous!"

"Please do you want anything?" asked a small voice which seemed to come out of the corner of the room.

I tried to peep out from under my bandages but I could distinguish nothing. However, I recognised the voice and put a plain question:

"Is that you?" I asked.

"Yes, it is," answered the voice quite naturally, but with a little tremble.

"Then I want you," I said promptly.

A small, timid figure crept up to me and said:

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," I said, "but you won't do it, I know," I added, in a tone of fixed conviction.

"How do you know?" said the voice indignantly. "Of course I will! Try me!"

I couldn't see her for the bandages and the bump of jealousy; still, but for them I'm sure I should never have had the courage; as it was I said in audible tones:

"You might kiss me."

Silence.

"You might kiss me," I ventured, in a weak murmur this time.

Dead silence.

"I shouldn't have thought," I said, more weakly still, "that you would refuse a dying man's request."

I own that was my last card, but still I never thought it was going to be quite such a trump as it proved.

Dolly flung herself on her knees beside me and clasped me round the neck in a manner one might have thought certainly calculated to hasten the demise of a man with but a few more breaths left to draw, but which on the contrary had a singularly pleasing and revivifying effect on a man of my naturally robust constitution; so much so, indeed, that in a few seconds I was able to sit up and return with considerable vigour the caresses she had hitherto lavished on me.

"You're not going to die!" sobbed Dolly, "don't, don't say such dreadful things!"

"Do you love me?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, yes—you know I do. And if you had died I should have felt a murderess and Mr. Saunderson would have been one because he put the chairs there; he insisted on putting them there, and now he is covered with bruises and can scarcely walk, and his hands are scratched all over."

"I feel better," I said, ignoring the latter part of her speech. "I think I shall recover—with care. I shall require *all* your care," I said, sinking back as the memory of the lump on my head and her concluding words occurred to me together.

"Oh, I shall be your most devoted nurse," she said tenderly, as tenderly as even I could wish.

"My sweet Dorothy!" I said.

"But that is not my name," she said, pouting, "and you don't like my name. You said hateful things about it."

"The sweetest name in the world!" I cried enthusiastically.

"But my real name is Jemima," she said, with crimson cheeks, "and Dolly is only a pet name. I quite thought you knew."

And then I suddenly understood everything, but even if my head ached with my folly, what did it matter, my heart was light now.

"It's only a matter of spelling," I declared fondly. "Whatever your name, it would always read Dorothea to me."

Ellice Beere.

Your Editor Chats.

THE Buried Stations Competition is in process of checking and the result will be published in this paper at the earliest possible moment.

I CAN thoroughly recommend the Juggled Letters Competition as being one of the most fascinating that has ever been given to readers of any paper. If you once start trying to put the letters in their proper order you will not want to give up until you have arrived at the best solution obtainable. The competition will be complete in twelve lists, the seventh of which will be found on page 79.

The conditions are perfectly clear, and everyone should be able to understand them. No replies to queries will be given either personally or through the post, but if a point of sufficient general interest is raised it will be dealt with in this column.

AGAIN this week I am offering a gold-plated pencil-case to the reader who sends in the list of stories in this number written in the order of merit in which they are regarded by the majority of readers. I am anxious to find out the kind of stories you prefer, so that I may be able to give you what you like best. Write your list on the back of a post-card, together with your name and address, then send it to PREFERENCE No. 2, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, July 21st.

I HAVE just been in the country for a few days, away from the heat and bustle of London, and now that I have returned can realise to the full what life must be to those who are never able to get away at all, either from want of time, or, what is worse, from poverty.

Unfortunately, the number of those included in the latter category is very large, and a great proportion of them are children. From want of fresh air many lives have been lost, and growth has been stunted. How can a child be expected to attain its normal physical development when it is always cooped up in a town? Let those who are placed in easy—or comparatively easy—circumstances do what they can to lighten the burden of their less happily and fortunately situated fellow creatures.

To provide a day's pleasure in the country for one child costs only ninepence—that is the sum for which the FRESH AIR FUND can do it—and this includes a good supply of wholesome food. Such a cheap charity deserves support, doesn't it? So won't you help it along?

Send your ninepence—or more if you can afford it—to the Hon. Secretary, FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Whatever your contribution is it will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Collecting forms can be had on application.

Your Editor.

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A Weir Mitchell Victim.

Telling of the Trick to Bring Together Two Young Hearts.

"Dickie," said Maisie, with a twinkle in her merry blue eyes, "I've got a new idea!"

Handsome Dick Fenning looked at her appreciatively.

"Something novel or you, Maisie," he answered good-humouredly. "I thought your feminine propensities did not go much beyond new hats."

"You needn't be sarcastic," she replied scornfully. "You're not overburdened with ideas yourself, you know, or you would have found ways and means for our marriage. You needn't be jealous because I've gone one better than you!"

"About our marriage, is it?" asked Dick, roused to interest and ignoring Maisie's last home thrust. "So you think you have a plan for our mutual welfare. Go ahead, little girl, and if it's feasible, I'm with you."

"Papa, as you know, Dick, won't consent to our marriage until your prospects are brighter. He refuses to go away unless I accompany him, in case we—we——"

"Bolt?" suggested Dick, by way of helping her on.

"Er—er—yes," agreed Maisie; "thank you, Dick, that's just it. And—and," she continued, with the suspicion of tears in the blue eyes, "he said to me this morning that he thought it time the engagement of his daughter to—to a man not rich enough to marry should be—be—er——"

"Broken off?" hinted Dick kindly.

"Yes, dear, that was it; until he—the man you know—you, Dick—until your position was better financially."

"Oh!" gasped Fenning, "he said that, did he?" and he gave vent to a long whistle; "which means that as my prospects are at present *nil*, he would insist on our engagement being postponed for an indefinite period!" said Dick woefully.

"My poor boy!" sighed Maisie, "that's just what he does mean. He also said that when he goes away for the summer, he will exercise care that you don't know our whereabouts."

Dick replied by a woefully woebegone expression.

"What we have to do, Dickie, is to get him to some resort where you can stay without his knowledge."

Fenning nodded. "Secret meetings, hair-breadth escapes from the ogre's discovery, bribing the servants, and all that sort of thing!" he murmured.

"Nothing of the sort!" replied Maisie, with a scornful toss of her pretty head. "I've got an idea by which you and I can be in the same house, Dickie—*house!*" she repeated with emphasis, "and he shall never know."

"Shall never know?" repeated Fenning incredulously. "Impossible! It can't be done, Maisie!"

"You dear, silly old thing!" cried Maisie, kissing him (which necessitated a longer pause than she had intended), "it can be done, shall be done, and we are going to do it! Now for the plan!" said Maisie, looking sweetly fascinating in her excitement. "Ever since papa had a spill in his motor-car he has not felt quite the thing."

Dick looked mischievously at Maisie, and tapped his head solemnly three times. "Is that it?"

"Yes," cried Maisie, laughing. "It buzzes. His dear old head swims and buzzes sometimes."

"Always, I think!" chimed in Dick under his breath.

"Wicked boy!" laughed Maisie.

"Go on!" said Dick.

"Doctor Porter — papa's doctor, you know, and a great friend of ours—he'd do anything for me, Dickie—says he wants two months' perfect rest and quiet, and the only way to obtain the real thing is by the Weir Mitchell process, which means complete rest and isolation for six weeks at least."

"I don't see how that's going to help us. We can't go in for it, and, if we did, couldn't see each other!"

"Have patience, sir, and you will see," put in Maisie, with the calm of exasperation. "Dr. Porter knows of a large hydro in the north where the Weir Mitchell process is carried on to perfection."

"Ah!" exclaimed Fenning, with a nod of approval, beginning to realise the scheme.

"What I have to do," went on Maisie, "is to get Dr. Porter to send papa to this hydro with me. When papa is safely isolated I shall wire for you to come down. Now, you silly old darling, do you see?" cried Maisie in ecstacies.

For expressive reply Dick placed Maisie's head in the neighbourhood of his shoulder.

"But are you sure of the rules of this rest cure?" he asked, after a few minutes.

"Yes, dear, quite. The patient remains in bed for at least six weeks, living the life of a slightly animated snail, merely eating, sleeping, and being massaged three or four times a day; allowed to see no one except by the doctor's permission, and may not even read. The patient is entirely cut off from the world, as it were. Dickie, you can be down the whole time nearly and papa will never know!"

"It's splendid!" agreed Dick enthusiastically. "And, by Jove!" he cried, "I'll work at my books like blazes and see if I can't persuade Aunt Jemima to come down. She wants a change, and the water cure would do her worlds of good. I'll show her no end of attention and try to get into her favour again. She's a good old sort, but has never forgiven me shooting her favourite cat and having to pay for all those windows I broke at college. She told me she altered her will as I was a scapegrace, and all sorts of things. And, Maisie, she—she can chaperon you and need know nothing of your father's orders about me—eh?"

"Indeed," said the girl, "it's a capital plan; and, Dick?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Mum's the word!"

"Rather!"

"In a week I shall have papa at the hydro, and I think it would be better if—if——"

"I avoided you for the present?" asked Dick.

"Yes, dear, if you don't mind?"

"Of course I mind, but I'll do it."

"Go into the country so that I can tell papa you've gone away!"

"Maisie, you're a born schemer!" replied Dick, sweeping her into his arms.

* * * * *

Mr. Benjamin Banks, Maisie's father, offered many excuses why he should not try the Weir Mitchell cure, but all objections were gradually overruled by the persuasions of his daughter, for whom he had a very soft spot in his tender old heart.

As he proceeded to put as many obstacles in the way as he could, Maisie very promptly and carefully pulled them down, pointing out why there was every reason that he should at least give the process a trial. She was backed by their friend

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Dr. Porter, who, whether suspecting trickery or not, heartily supported Maisie, and emphatically agreed that it would effect a speedy and certain cure.

Such visions of health and strength did their joint persuasions conjure up that in the end the old gentleman stoutly denied ever having resented the idea, and finally declared that nothing on earth would prevent his going at the earliest possible moment.

"At any rate," he said to Maisie, "that good-for-nothing boy, Dick, won't dare follow us. It wouldn't do at all for you to be at the hydro with him there, no chaperon, and I shut up in my bedroom for six weeks. You needn't tell him where we're going. Where is he—he's not been here this last few days?"

"Gone into the country, papa dear."

"Ah! has he? He'll prove himself a sensible young man if he stays there. Why, my dear child, it's a folly for you to be engaged to a penniless pauper with no prospects, and not, I think," he added severely, "strong tendencies for work."

"Oh, papa, he's not penniless!" broke out Maisie; "he's got £200 a year, and writes awfully clever books!"

"Two hundred fiddlesticks! Heaps of people write books, but they can't sell 'em, child!" contemptuously replied the retired merchant.

Mr. Banks had been a steady business man all his life, and scorned the idea of money-making by anything but legitimate business. With him, artists and authors were beyond the pale.

"Who ever knew one who made any money?" he asked.

He fondly anticipated a good marriage for his pretty daughter—good, that is, from his and the world's point of view.

"You can't marry on two hundred a year, Maisie," he said, patting her cheek. "No, you must give up all thoughts of Mr. Fenning.

"Perhaps," he added to himself, "this absurd infatuation will dwindle if they don't see each other for a couple of months."

At this thought he was more than ever determined to get away, and a few days later saw them comfortably installed at a handsome and well-appointed hydro fitted with every appliance and bath known and unknown to the scientific world.

For three days Mr. Banks looked about him and was initiated into the mysteries of hydropathy, and found it healthful and diverting. Then, having consulted the doctor, commenced the rest cure. His daughter was permitted to visit him three times a week, each visit to last only a quarter of an hour.

The time was passed in sleeping, eating (every two hours), and being massaged. Reading was forbidden. His life therefore, did not promise to be very active for the next six weeks. But he resigned himself to his fate, bid a tender farewell to Maisie, and temporarily retired from the world.

Directly her father was confined to his room, from which there did not appear to be any possible chance of escape, owing to the tender solicitude of a most assiduous attendant, Maisie dispatched the following wire to Dick:

"Come at once. Father commenced.—MAISIE."

The following reply came a few hours later:

"Aunt and I with you 8.30 to-day.—DICK."

Maisie discreetly kept out of the way when they came, and Dick was careful to see that his aunt notified their arrival in the visitors' book by writing "Miss Mitchin and nephew."

While his aunt went up to her room, Dick went in search of Maisie, and, after wandering in and out of the numerous public rooms and up and down the corridors, eventually arrived at the Winter Gardens. Seated in a chair under a palm he saw a vision of white feminine daintiness, apparently deeply absorbed in reading. He stepped quietly up to her.

"I've come, Maisie," he whispered.

"Dick!" she cried, "oh, Dick—isn't it splendid?"

There were people about, which Dick resented.

"My name is not in the visitors' book, Maisie, simply 'Miss Mitchin and Nephew.'"

"Dick, you're smarter than I gave you credit for. And how is your aunt?"

"Awfully decent and quite glad to come."

"Papa is perfectly secure. Not allowed out of bed. And cannot possibly know of anything that goes on. Must live the life of a dormouse for the next six weeks."

Half an hour later Maisie and Dick were chatting to Miss Mitchin. She was a dear old soul, with happiness beaming through her spectacles, but terribly conventional, and lived in constant terror of Dick disgracing himself. She was not aware that Mr. Banks would have been furious had he known of Dick's arrival, for she had not been told of the threatened breaking off of the engagement. She was fond of Maisie and liked to see the young people happy and enjoying themselves.

"And so your father has gone in for Weir Mitchell?" she asked Maisie.

"Yes, the doctor said it would be the best thing."

"Perhaps," said the old lady innocently, "this incorrigible Dick"—and she tried to look severe—"will go and see him sometimes."

"He is not permitted to receive visitors," put in Maisie.

"What a pity! Give him my kind regards, my dear, and wish him a complete recovery from me. I'll perhaps write him an occasional note."

"I wouldn't do that," urged Maisie, looking fixed bayonets at Dick.

"It will upset him," chimed in blundering Dick.

"And pray, Richard, why should a note from me upset him?" asked his aunt.

"Well, you see," said Maisie, "he's not allowed to have any letters or notes. He is not supposed even to read."

As the conversation was drifting into dangerous channels, Maisie diplomatically turned it into smoother waters, and the trio retired to rest in a very merry mood.

Dick set himself to study his aunt, and by his devoted attention gradually gained favour.

The days passed pleasantly enough with tennis, drives, picnics, and walking, so Dick and Maisie spent a great deal of time together. Their plan had succeeded beyond expectations. Maisie paid her father periodical visits, but never delivered Miss Mitchin's message.

After three weeks' isolation Mr. Banks was heartily tired of it. He noticed that his daughter looked particularly happy. He said nothing, but thought all the more. He swore at his attendant, hydropathy, and everything connected with it.

"Another three weeks," he gasped one day to Maisie; "but I'll see it out if it kills me," he heroically declared.

"On the contrary," said Maisie, "three weeks more will give you a new lease of life."

Meantime Miss Mitchin had quite made up her mind to alter her will again in favour of Dick, and make him an allowance. She was even so indiscreet as to mention this to Maisie, who was not slow in imparting it to Dick.

A few days after Mr. Banks had stoutly declared his intentions of seeing it out, Miss Mitchin, Maisie, and Dick were sitting in the summer-house on the bowling-green. Suddenly a well-known voice broke

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upon their ears—a voice that made Dick jump, and Maisie pale.

"It was no use," said the voice; "I could stand it no longer. I'm sick of it. Eat, sleep, eat, sleep, day after day, with my limbs sore with the constant thumping of my masseur. No books, no society, no nothing."

"But, my dear sir, pray consider the doctor," came another voice. "Do get back to your room, pray, Mr. Banks."

"The doctor can go to—to where he likes, and I don't want ever to see my bedroom again."

The speakers were getting nearer. Maisie and Dick knew they were caught like rats in a trap. In another moment Mr. Banks and his attendant had turned the corner and were on them.

For a moment Mr. Banks paused and stood stock still, glaring at them. His face went alternately red and purple. At length he stumped up to them in a towering rage.

"And pray," he said, going up to Dick, "what in thunder is the meaning of this, sir?"

"Meaning of it, sir?" repeated Dick foolishly.

"Yes, sir, meaning of it? I will repeat it fifty times if you like."

Miss Mitchin dropped her work and was simply speechless.

"How long have you been in the Hydro, Mr. Fenning?"

"Nearly three weeks, sir," answered Dick.

"How—how dare you, sir," roared Mr. Banks, glancing at Dick and Maisie. "How dare you come down here and take advantage of my isolation?"

"I believe, sir," answered Dick, with a twinkle in his eye which he could not suppress, "there is nothing to prevent my visiting a health resort with my aunt?"

"Miss Mitchin," went on Mr. Banks, fuming. "Madam, allow me to inform you that your nephew is a daring young scapegrace—and—and an impostor. Miss Mitchin, is it possible that you were also in the conspiracy—*conspiracy*, madam?"

Miss Mitchin's face was a study in consternation and mystification.

"Ah, what an old fool I have been. Of course, I see it all now. Your scapegrace of a nephew planned that I should come down here for the rest cure, and put Maisie up to the trick so that he could be here without my knowledge."

Again Mr. Banks looked very black at them.

Suddenly it flashed across the dear, prim old woman what it all meant. She glanced at Dick and Maisie and smiled—actually smiled.

"Come here, sir," she said to her nephew as severely as she could.

Dick came up to her.

"Is this true, you—you bad fellow?" she asked. "Was it a scheme of yours?"

"It was my idea," answered Dick, hoping he would be forgiven the lie, and he heard Maisie give a little gasp.

"Mr. Banks, I assure you that I am innocent of any conspiracy, conspiracy," she reiterated, "as a babe unborn. What you imply has fallen upon me like a thunderclap. As yet I am rather in the dark, but have an inkling of how matters stand. Perhaps one day I shall be enlightened."

Mr. Banks glared harder than ever.

"Well—well," put in the old lady after a pause; "young people will be young people. Love knows no prison bars and—and—— Mr. Banks, you and I were young once and not impeccable."

Mr. Banks grunted.

"Dick is a young scamp, but I believe"—and she glanced tenderly at him—"he is very fond of Maisie."

Dick's look at Maisie conveyed volumes.

"And pray, what is he going to marry on?" asked Mr. Banks.

"Perhaps something can be done," answered Miss Mitchin; "we'll see."

"Madam," said the old man, "I've been tricked and humbugged, but I had my suspicions, so I resolved to get up and see what was going on. We—we'll discuss the matter in full later in the day—er, that is, if I don't return to my Weir Mitchell, and thumping and sleeping, and eating and——"

Try as she would Maisie could not keep back a laugh which was so infectious that the summer-house was soon ringing with merry peals. The humour of the situation was irresistible.

"Well," said Mr. Banks presently, as sternly as he could, addressing Miss Mitchin, "and pray how are we going to deal with these young people?"

"Deal with them?" she asked with a smile. "I should suggest that the first thing we do is to go and buy them a wedding present."

And they went.

Dagney Major.

GEORGE CHESTER'S MISTAKE.

And How It Was Found Out.

"Charity, kind sir! My poor children are starving!" The speaker was a thinly-clad woman, who shivered in the wintry blast, for it was December, and the keen, frosty air penetrated even the warm garments of the rich. The gentleman addressed was a man of perhaps thirty-five, a rich and prosperous man, who hoped soon to become still more rich and prosperous through an alliance with the fair girl at his side.

"Poor woman!" said Edith Mortimer compassionately. "I have left my purse at home. George, I am sure you will help her."

"Of course I will, my darling. Here, poor woman, take that, and may it do you good!"

As he spoke he drew from his pocket half a sovereign, and put it into the extended hand of the applicant. The poor woman's heart bounded with joy, for she had hoped for but sixpence at the most, and half a sovereign seemed, to her, positive wealth.

"Heaven bless your generous heart!" she exclaimed, with heartfelt gratitude.

"Thank you," said George Chester graciously.

Edith Mortimer rewarded him with a beaming smile.

"I am glad you gave the poor creature so much," she said. "I like generosity. I don't think I could esteem or respect a mean man."

"We think alike on that point, my darling," said Chester. "I never can refuse to give, even if I suspect the object may be unworthy. It makes me happy to make others happy."

Another beaming glance from Edith.

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"I love you all the better for that, dear George," she said, in a low voice.

"On the whole," thought Chester, "my half sovereign is a good investment, though I can't help grudging it to the beggar. When Edith becomes Mrs. Chester, and I get hold of her twenty thousand pounds, she shan't give many half sovereigns to beggars. For the present, it's policy to be generous."

Of course Edith could not read the thoughts of the man at her side. She believed him to be a genuine philanthropist, while, in reality, he was a mean, selfish, hard-hearted man, yet with tact enough to overcome these traits for the sake of making a favourable impression upon the heart of the heiress.

Edith Mortimer was an orphan, and the absolute mistress of twenty thousand pounds; no small fortune for a girl of nineteen. But her fortune was by no means her chief attraction. She was beautiful, sweet-tempered, accomplished, and her heart was animated by the most generous charity. She had a regular list of pensioners, and would have found if impossible to refuse an applicant who was in need.

As Edith said, she would have found it impossible to respect or esteem a mean man. Thus far, George Chester had succeeded in concealing his real character from her, but the time was coming when it would be revealed. Whenever he was with her he gave liberally to any who asked for charity, but at his business he would have repulsed them with hard and bitter words. He kept a large clothing shop in one of the principal streets in Verchester, but Edith, who lived some little distance outside the city limits, had never been there and knew absolutely nothing of him in his business relations.

Of course there were many who courted the favour of the young and beautiful heiress, but there was only one who came near being the rival of the successful suitor. This was Doctor Goodwin, a young physician, who had recently established himself in the city, and was having a hard struggle to get into a lucrative practice, being poor and without influential friends. But he was essentially noble, of good figure, with a frank, open face, and unusually able and intelligent. Success with him was only a matter of time.

When he saw the rich trader preferred to him, he quietly withdrew, disappointed, but too honourable to attempt to reverse Edith's decision, now that it appeared to be made.

It was made, and the wedding-day was about to be fixed, when something occurred which quite changed the position of affairs.

Edith was walking in Verchester one day when her attention was attracted to a girl of about her own age who was sitting on one of the stone seats placed there for the use of tired pedestrians. The girl was plainly dressed, and in her face and attitude was such an air of despondency, that Edith, whose heart was full of compassion for the wretched, felt herself constrained to stop and speak to her.

"Are you not well?" she asked, in a low, sympathetic voice.

The girl, who was very thinly and poorly clad, looked up.

"Yes," she answered, "I am well."

"But you are sad. You have met with some misfortune, have you not?"

"Yes," answered the girl despondently.

"Will you tell me what it is? Perhaps it is something which I can remedy. Don't think me inquisitive, but I really want to help you, if you will let me."

The girl answered gratefully:

"Thank you for your kindness. It does me good, for I stand in need of kind words."

"Tell me, then, your trouble," and Edith, in her sealskin jacket, sat down beside the plainly dressed girl.

"My mother and I live together," explained the girl. "We are very poor, and mother is an invalid, unable to do much. We have nothing to live upon except what I can earn by the needle."

"That must be very little."

"Yes, it is very little; but I have been cheated out of that little. It is terrible."

"Tell me about it. Is it possible that anyone could be so mean as to cheat you out of the little you earn in that hard way?"

"I will tell you how it happened. A week since, I got a bundle of waistcoats to make for a large house. The pay was very small. By working early and late I could earn about a shilling a day."

"Is it possible? I never heard of such oppression," said Edith indignantly.

"Well, I finished the half-dozen, and this morning took them round to the shop. Instead of paying the money, the proprietor, a rich man, said roughly that they were not well done, and he could only pay ninepence apiece for them. If I would take that he would give me more work. I knew it was all a pretence to cheat me out of threepence on each waistcoat, for I am an experienced hand in that line, and these were made as well as usual."

"And did you take the money?" asked Edith.

"What could I do? There was no money to buy our dinner. I had to take it, but I know that it is impossible for us to get along on that paltry sum. I see nothing for us but starvation."

"Cheer up! I am rich! I will help you!" said the heiress. "But tell me the name of this mean wretch who cheated you."

"It is George Chester."

"Who?" exclaimed Edith, startled and surprised.

"George Chester. I hear he is engaged to a wealthy heiress. but I don't think such a man can prosper."

"I must look into this," said Edith quickly, her face flushed. "It is more important to me than you know. Come to my house."

The girl accompanied her home, and presently the heiress, who had changed garments with the poor girl for a brief space, emerged into the street and made her way to the shop of George Chester. She was so muffled up that her face could not be seen.

"What do you want?" asked a salesman roughly.

"To see Mr. Chester," answered Edith, in a low voice.

"He is busy. He can't see a girl like you."

"I have something important to say to him."

George Chester, on being told this, came forward.

"Well, girl, what do you want of me?" he asked rudely.

"You gave me only ninepence for some waistcoats I brought here this morning," said Edith, in an assumed voice.

"What of that? They were badly made."

"I need the money for my mother. I worked hard, and I am sure the waistcoats were well made."

"Look here! I can't be troubled with you," said Chester roughly. "I gave you all the work was worth."

"My mother will starve."

"Let her starve then. It's no business of mine."

This was too much for Edith, whose indignation was intense.

She uncloaked herself, revealing to George Chester a face that terrified him, so full was it of withering scorn.

"I am glad I have found you out, Mr. Chester," said Edith. "Fortunately, it is not too late," and she turned haughtily and swept out of the shop.

"Edith! Edith Mortimer!" called George Chester, in an agitated tone. "Come back. It's all a mistake. I will make it right."

Edith did not answer, nor turn back, but left the shop with her illusions broken.

The next day it was announced in society that the engagement was broken. Three months later there was a new engagement, but this time it was Doctor Goodwin who had gained the prize for which so many were striving.

The poor girl soon obtained remunerative employment through Edith's influence, and she and her mother never again knew want.

As for George Chester he rued bitterly his fatal mistake; but for Edith it was a most fortunate one, since it saved her from marrying a man whom she would have despised, and gave her a husband whom she could respect as well as love.

C. F. Preston.

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"HILDA'S HERO."

A Story of the Coming Together of Two Affinities.

His name was Hugh Pollard; his age six-and-twenty. Everybody in Screwford knew him and liked him; he was one of the foremen at the Wearford Valley Cloth Mills.

One wonders by what fatal instinct mill owners are led to choose such lovely spots for defilement. Wearford Valley was perhaps half a mile long, its steep sides covered with hanging woods of beech, with primroses and bluebells, watered by an ever-running melodious stream, roofed from bank to bank with sweet grasses and wild flowers.

A painter, a poet, any man with a soul to discover, stood a good chance of discovering it there. Even if there were no soul to discover, the chance was equally good that the fact of its absence would be discovered. And that was something.

One Saturday afternoon, in the middle of May, a carriage and pair stood before the principal shop in Screwford.

Presently a couple of ladies, one middle-aged, and the other young, came out of the shop, and stood chatting for some moments on the pavement, before entering their carriage.

While thus engaged, Hugh Pollard came along the street towards them. In dress he looked what he was—a workman of the better kind. He was a tall, well-set-up, good-looking fellow, with an unusually refined face; he carried himself erect, and had a manly bearing. He glanced an instant at the elder lady, then at the horses, which were handsome animals, and passed on. The ladies entered the landau, and the carriage rolled away, overtaking and passing the young workman.

"Aunt, do you know who that young man is we have just passed?" inquired the younger of the two.

The elder turned her head, and looked back at the person indicated. Settling herself again, she said:

"Yes. Why do you ask, Hilda?"

"He seemed to remind me of someone."

"That is Hugh Pollard. You remember the Pollards?"

"You don't mean the Pollards of Berle?"

"Certainly. Old Mr. Pollard, you know, owned the three largest mills in the place. He failed while you were abroad. It was an awful crash. Your father, I believe, lost about two thousand pounds in it."

"And was that Hugh? Hugh Pollard? I used to play with him," murmured Hilda. Her voice seemed sad, and all the light had vanished as by magic from her sweet face.

"Yes, we used to know them. It was very sad, dear. The old gentleman died soon after, and Mrs. Pollard and her son were left penniless."

"What is he doing about here, aunt?"

"Ah, now, I do think that is the funny part about it. Why they should stay about here, so near to where they once lived so differently, I cannot make out. It seems so strange."

"But what is he doing now? He looked like a workman."

"So he is, I believe. Let me see; what did I hear about him? Ah, I remember. He went—he was only a boy at the time, you know—he went and got a situation at some cloth mills, and worked side by side with many of his father's former workpeople. Odd, wasn't it?"

"And now?"

"I heard some time ago that he was a foreman, or something of that kind, at the Wearford Mills. But just think of it! He was bred as a gentleman. Why, three months before he was working as a common weaver, he was studying at Cambridge."

"But he had his poor, widowed mother to support."

"Oh, of course it was very noble of him, I suppose. Certainly it was brave. Dear me, Hilda, how time does fly! That was twelve years ago, and it seems only yesterday, so to speak. You were a girl of ten. And now you——"

"Why didn't you speak to him, aunt?"

"Why, Hilda, child, what do you mean? How very absurd! Besides, it is kinder not to notice him in his present condition. Of course, if he should ever lift himself up again, we should be only too glad to welcome him."

"I wonder what value he would place on the welcome?" remarked the girl Hilda, in a voice that was fed with the air of a mood too high and broad for scorn or sarcasm. Nevertheless, on the delicate ear of stately and conventional Mrs. Rickard it grated with the suggestion of a discord.

"If he were a wise man he would attach great value to the welcome," she answered coldly. "But there, enough of an unpleasant subject. Just look at the slope of that wood; did you ever see such a lovely carpet of bluebells?"

Hilda Carrington was an orphan, and lived with her uncle and aunt, Major and Mrs. Rickard. Ten years of her life, however, had been spent in a young ladies' seminary.

She was a tall, handsome girl, with a brilliant colour and a fine figure. She looked the lady down to the ground, and she was what she looked. Her face was in itself a fortune, not simply on account of its pure, high-bred loveliness, but more especially because of its exquisite womanliness, its strength, its intelligence, its humanity.

She suggested at first sight, and at last sight, nothing petty, nothing thin, nothing acrid. Face and form, manner and voice, spoke clearly of a nature rich in passion, in sentiment, in sympathy, in practical wisdom.

She did many foolish things, but they made a better impression than the wise things of many others. She had a large soul, which is better for a woman than a large intellect, and quite as effective. And she believed in soul—a woman's sweetest faith the world over.

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Frequently left alone with her thoughts the image of Hugh Pollard haunted her.

All the old child-life came back, and its memories, which she shared in common with Hugh, were still vivid and fragrant. She had been fond of boys; would have liked to be a boy herself; had affected their ways and manner. The boys had been fond of her evidently, for she had memories of half-a-dozen lads who had been her close friends.

Among them all, Hugh Pollard stood out as the handsomest, the sweetest tempered, the bravest, and most gallant. A stout-hearted little gentleman, a thorough-bred through and through. And now—— Oh! it was pitiful, she thought.

He was thirteen, and she was nine; it must have been summer time; he put his arm round her neck and kissed her, and added, in an explanatory tone:

"My stars, Hilda, you are a delightful girl, and I do love you!"

No other boy had ever done that or said that; it took place in a hayfield, and even now the scent of the new-mown hay was in her nostrils.

Again, they were together in a little valley, in the shadow of a hanging wood, for the day was hot. Below them was a babbling brook, crossed by a hand-rail bridge. On the other side was an old wall, very high, and clothed with ivy. They sat and gazed at the wall, and fell wondering what was on the other side of it.

Suddenly a head popped over the wall and a voice said:

"Well, my dears, suppose you come in and see for yourselves."

They went in, like true adventurers, and made a find. Such gooseberries, such strawberries, such currants! The apples were not ripe—more was the pity—nor the pears; but they strengthened the sense of abundance.

There was a cottage, too, as pretty as a shell; and an old man, with a laughing face and a white beard; and an old woman with white curls over her ears, and a sweet face, and the softest of voices.

They stayed there, it seemed, for hours, and ate fruit and cream and new bread and butter, and drank tea by the cupful, feeling that it added to their dignity. It was Paradise, which if not found in childhood, is for ever a land unknown.

It is not easy to forget those who stole with us into Paradise, and by the same token the girl grown woman did not forget the boy grown man.

For some days Miss Carrington was in doubt; then she did something that was distinctly characteristic. She left home alone with one small trunk and spent the night with a friend who lived five miles distant.

The next day, as Miss Morel—her middle name—she quietly returned to Screwford and took rooms in an unpretending, vine-covered cottage, the home of Hugh Pollard.

One would not like to say that Mrs. Pollard, Hugh's mother, had no soul; gallantry alone would forbid it. Still, the fact is undeniable that she had a strange sense of being without something that she ought to have had.

The glorious air did not exhilarate her. The superb outlook did not make her break forth into singing. The near beauty of her own garden did not touch her spirit and make it quiver with a nameless tender joy.

This was the way that things affected her son; but she, poor woman, could not forget the past any more than she could love the present.

Pollard, however, had this advantage over his mother—not only had he discovered his soul, but he had also made the profoundly fascinating discovery of his soul's affinity. His other self—his second soul—his feminine counterpart!

"Why don't you marry, Hugh?" his mother once ventured to ask one evening as they were walking in the garden.

"Because I have never fallen in love, and I never shall unless"—and he hesitated.

"Unless what, my son?"

"Oh, you needn't be frightened—not the least bit in the world. There is no fear of it happening."

"No, no; but tell me, what is it?"

"Not with that serious voice and face. Ah, there, now the sun is out and the land is beautiful, I will tell you. Years and years ago, in what seems now like another life, as a lad I had a playmate—a girl. I don't know what has become of her; her people were very rich; I suppose she is married. I loved her—we were only children, you know, but I loved her. She was such a plucky, royal-hearted girl! Now, if Hilda Carrington turned up, I wouldn't answer for the results."

"What do you mean, Hugh? Would you forsake me for her?"

"Now, now don't be so tragic. Hilda Carrington is about as likely to 'turn up,' in that sense, as I am to be made King. Why—why, I'm a mechanic, a poor workman. And she, by Jove!—like as not she's a millionaire's wife now. No, there's no danger. But she has stood since my boyhood for my ideal, mother.

"If she beckoned me, I should say to myself, 'There stands the kingdom of Heaven beckoning me, and blessed is the man who leaves everything for the kingdom of Heaven's sake.'"

There was a ring now, a passion, an enthusiasm in his voice that nothing could hide. His mother made no answer, but an anxious look came into her eyes. "Let us go towards the house," he said, after a pause. "I see our new lodger is picking roses."

Ah, that new lodger! He did not understand it a bit, but she was like an electric battery, he thought. If he looked at her, if he spoke to her, if he even thought about her, there was something about her that made him tingle. What it could be remained a mystery to him for some weeks.

One day, however, it came upon him like a flash—she reminded him of Hilda Carrington! Then he laughed, fell a-whistling, and felt comfortable—more comfortable than he had felt for some time.

"She is no more like what Hilda would have grown into than chalk is like cheese." He told himself this audibly, and felt convinced of its accuracy. He felt so brave, so sagacious. He had explored the mystery; he had broken the charm.

Mentally he laughed to scorn her power over his imagination. He felt quite eager to see her again, to speak to her, that he might realise how the virtue had gone out of her, how dead she had become.

He had not long to wait. It was a delicious evening in June, and the sun was drooping down behind the hills in dull red splendour. She was sitting in an arbour, in a low rocking chair, and the glory of the sun was upon her.

He came along the garden path and raising his hat to her would have passed on; but she spoke to him, and he stood still.

"Do you ever row on the lake, Mr. Pollard?"

"Sometimes, Miss Morel."

"Do you enjoy rowing?"

"Oh, yes. Do you row?"

"No; but I should like to—if I had someone to teach me."

"Oh, I will——" He stopped suddenly, like a hunter at a high fence; and, like a skilful rider, she put him at it again, and helped him over with a touch and a word.

"Will you?" she exclaimed, and her face lit up gloriously.

"Oh, yes; with all the pleasure in the world."

Is this your favourite story? See page 71.

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"If I am not detaining you." She glanced at the vacant chair, and he said:

"Not in the least. May I?"

She nodded slightly, smiled, and the faintest of flushes deepened her brilliant colour. They talked rowing, they talked landscape, they talked next week's athletic sports, they talked church, they talked politics, they talked—bless me, they talked everything except the main thing, to wit—themselves.

He talked with ease and intelligence, she thought, and, better still, with that subtle sympathy and cast of thought that bespoke the Varsity man, not the weaver of Wearford.

"He is still a gentleman to the core of his brain. He might never have left us. He is one of us yet, and I am so thankful!" was the way she put it to herself that night as she looked at herself in the glass.

And he? He did not come in till late; he had walked the garden for hours. A light was burning in her room; he watched it for some minutes, then went indoors and spent the night with his pipe and his thoughts.

"What a weak fool I am," he said to himself. "I am false to Hilda, my ideal. If she stood before me in flesh and blood, she could not move me more than this woman does. As much! I don't believe she would have a show at all. What does it all mean? She's like music to me—like magic, bewitching music! And all the time I'm fool enough, ass enough, pig-headed enough, to pretend that her charm is Hilda's charm. I looked at her profile, and thought it like Hilda's. I looked in her eyes and saw Hilda's eyes. Her voice was Hilda's voice.

"I'll speak to mother to-morrow. One of us must go, or I am lost."

Not until the evening of the next day did he find an opportunity to speak to his mother alone. He had just made her comprehend that he had something serious to say, when Miss Morel appeared in the doorway.

"Will you give me a lesson in rowing this evening, Mr. Pollard?" For a moment he looked at her coldly, and she added, in an apologetic tone, "Not if you are tired."

Their eyes met and Hugh Pollard was no longer master of his own actions. It was in the gloaming when they returned home, and Mrs. Pollard had gone down to Screwford. They sat together in the arbour talking. Bit by bit the conversation took a personal turn, and she told him how she was her own mistress, and alone in the world.

"The closest friend I ever had was a boy. We were boy and girl together," she said.

"Ha! is that so? That is much the case with me." He sighed, and added: "That was in the old days, when I thought I was going to be a gentleman all the days of my life."

"Did you care for her much?"

"I have lived on her memory. She has been my ideal until—now."

"Do you mind telling me her name?"

"Oh, you won't know her. Hilda Carrington was her name."

"Do you think you would know her again if you saw her?"

"Know her? Well, I think my soul would, if my senses didn't."

"Am I—at all—at all—like her?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

He laughed lightly; then he bent towards her, and, as he gazed into her burning face, suddenly there burst upon him like a flash of lightning, a thought that made him start from his seat and kneel beside her. "Oh, can it be? or am I dreaming? Am I dreaming? Tell me, who are you?" he cried.

"I am Hilda Carrington! Oh, Hugh! Hugh!"

In another moment he held her in his arms.

And the sequel you will read. They were married, of course. And Society had much to say about the match at first. But Hugh was not long in gaining his place even in its eyes. He was able, far seeing, and industrious, and he prospered.

He acquired a large moneyed interest in the mills and this same Society welcomed him with open arms.

A. N. Abell.

THE BOTTLE OF CEMENT.

Telling of a Lover's Strange Predicament.

Mr. Withers' recent experience of the incompatibility of the coat-tail pocket and glass bottles was very painful and embarrassing.

He had returned to his home after a brief visit to London, and had brought with him as a present for Miss Wilson—to whom he was betrothed—a bottle of that remarkable cement which is sold by pavement merchants, and which is by them represented as being much stronger than wrought iron.

It had occurred to him that this cement would be a very nice thing to have in his future house, since, with it, all sorts of broken china and glass could be mended.

On the evening of his arrival home, he put the cement-bottle in his coat-tail pocket, and called on Miss Wilson, intending to offer it to her as soon as he entered the house.

Mr. Withers was ardently attached to the young lady; and when he saw her before him, he not unnaturally forgot all about such merely earthly matters as cement.

The parents of the young lady welcomed him politely, and, after a few moments of conversation, withdrew with a discretion which it is to be wished that all old people would emulate. Being of a frugal mind, Mr. Withers promptly lowered the gas, and proceeded to make himself at home.

The bottle was a stout one, and would perhaps have withstood any ordinary pressure, but as Miss Wilson weighed fully ten stone, and as the back of the small rocking-chair was of hard wood, it is not strange that the bottle yielded.

Mr. Withers was so much interested in the weather and other subjects, such as usually absorb the attention of young men in his position, that he did not notice the breaking of the glass, and it was not until an hour later that a false alarm of father in the front hall induced Miss Wilson to hie quickly to the sofa, and suggested to Mr. Withers the advisability of turning up the gas.

The cement had done its work, and Mr. Withers did not get up to attend to the light, but requested the young lady to discharge this duty for him. She did so, and then noticed his pained and preoccupied expression. To her anxious inquiries he admitted that he felt a little faint and would like a glass of water.

Miss Wilson hurriedly went for the water, reproaching herself for being so heavy, and accusing herself of selfishness and want of consideration.

In her absence the young man made superhuman efforts to wrench himself loose, but the cement refused to yield. When Miss Wilson returned with the glass of water, he looked so much worse that she was really frightened, and he was compelled to tell her the real state of the case.

She was a practical person, and timidly suggested that if she were to call pa, "perhaps pa might be able to free you;" but Mr. Withers said no; he could not bear the mortification of being found in such a situation by any father.

It was finally agreed that he should wait until a late hour, and should take the chair home with him. This was accordingly done, and had not the unfortunate young man been arrested by a local constable, who only discharged him when a severe test proved that his possession of the chair was purely involuntary, his misfortune might never have become generally known.

When disasters such as this are liable to happen to the wearers of coat-tail pockets, it becomes doubtful whether they are not altogether too hazardous for general use. In fact, good authorities maintain that the coat-tail pocket is positively detrimental, and that it should be abolished. **E. P. Anson.**

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Five more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

SEVENTH LIST.

73. BEEKMOPR	79. ACDNOOPRSY .....
74. AADEFHMNR	80. AAENRRRST .....
75. ABDEEILLNNOP	81. ADEFHLMOOSW .....
76. AACEMNR	82. BCEGIKLLSYY .....
77. AAADHILLNRR	83. AABELLLSTW .....
78. AHLLOOWY	84. EEORTTTUX .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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A Woman Hater.

Which Tells of How a Closed Door Led to a Marriage.

EVELYN TREVOR and her young pupil bent their steps towards their favourite haunt, the picturesque little wood at the furthest extremity of the grounds of Mostyn Grange.

It was a lovely April morning, the birds warbled their love ditties in the trees overhead, among the delicate green Spring foliage, while the ground was carpeted with the pale yellow primrose and the dainty blue-bell.

The child clapped her hands gleefully :

"Oh ! do look, Miss Trevor, what lovely flowers we shall have to decorate Daddy's room ! We must fill our two baskets and then come back for more."

"Is your father very fond of flowers, Daisy ?" queried Evelyn, as they busily set to picking the sweet-smelling buds.

"Oh, I do not know," answered Daisy, a little sadly ; "you see, it is three years now since I have seen Daddy, and I was such a wee tot then," she added with a superior, very-much-grown-up sort of air, "that I hardly remember what his tastes are. But surely he must love flowers—flowers are so beautiful, and my Daddy, who is such a hero, must be fond of all beautiful things, don't you think so, Miss Trevor ?"

Evelyn smiled at the child's guileless enthusiasm.

"You are very fond of your father, Daisy ?" she said, half wistfully.

"Of course, Daddy comes first in my heart, then Grannie, and then you, dear Miss Trevor"—and impulsively the child flung her arms around her governess and hugged her.

The young girl warmly responded to the effusive caress.

"Darling little Daisy !"

"I shall tell Daddy how good you have been to me ever since he went away and Daddy shall love you too !"

"Hush, hush, child, you are talking nonsense ; little girls must never speak about things which they do not understand."

"But, dear Miss Trevor, Daddy *must* love you if I ask him to."

"Daisy, you must not say such foolish things, or I shall be quite angry with you."

"And that would be the very hardest punishment you could inflict on me"—and once more the warm-hearted child embraced her governess.

It was now three years since Evelyn Trevor had come to Mostyn Grange, engaged by Captain Mostyn's mother to look after his little motherless daughter, while he himself was fighting in South Africa.

Mrs. Mostyn had been most kind to her little granddaughter's governess, while as for Daisy, her warm little child's heart had gone out at once to Miss Trevor, so that Evelyn had been very happy during those past three years.

Now a change was to take place, the "Master," as he was styled by the servants and villagers, was returning home at last after his long absence. At Captain Mostyn's own wish he had remained out in Africa long after the conclusion of peace, instead of returning to England.

Evelyn dreaded, she knew not what, feeling somehow the greatest awe of the father of her little pupil, and at any rate she was sure his advent would interrupt the even course of their present life.

When they had picked as many flowers as their baskets could contain, they wended their way back through the long avenue of centenary elms which were one of the chief features of the beautiful old Grange, and immensely admired by tourists when the grounds were thrown open to visitors once a week.

They passed under the massive old stone archway, and through the heavy oak door into the large, mediæval flagged hall, with the monumental carved-stone chimney at the far end, and the walls hung with antlers and quaint, old-fashioned weapons.

Here, in olden times, the Lord of the Manor was wont to sit at his hospitable board ; he and his family and his companions in arms, gathered at the high end of the board, while the menials, foresters, and soldiers sat below the salt.

Evelyn had greatly admired the architectural beauty of this hall when first she had come to the Grange, but now she was so accustomed to it that she and Daisy passed quickly through and ascended the massive dark oak stairs, lit by the large stained glass windows, through which the rays of the sun flowed in with rich ruby and gold tints. They entered the "West Room," which from time immemorial had been the apartment occupied by the owners of Mostyn Grange.

The young girl and the child with deft fingers disposed all their floral treasures in old china bowls and rare and costly crystal vases ; these bright touches of colour seemed to enliven the gloomy, old-world room.

"We might have got the gardener to give us his choicest orchids from the hot houses, but I have always heard Granny say that Daddy hated everything artificial, so it was best only to use these wild flowers."

Daisy's little tongue ran glibly on as they put the finishing touches to the final adornment of the room.

Just then Mrs. Mostyn's maid came up to Evelyn.

"Please, miss, madam would like to see you when you are at liberty to come to her in her sitting-room."

"Very well, Ruth, please tell Mrs. Mostyn I shall go to her directly I have taken off my out-door things."

A quarter of an hour later Evelyn entered the old lady's private sanctum.

"You wished to speak to me, Mrs. Mostyn ?"

"Yes, dear, come and sit down close to me."

Mrs. Mostyn was one of those ideal old ladies so rarely to be found nowadays in our twentieth century, when women positively refuse to get old-looking, and cling to their perennial youth, and the white-haired grandmother seems to be a feature of the past.

Most ladies now, no matter what their age may be, have golden tresses or ebon locks, and smooth, unwrinkled faces. But Mrs. Mostyn did not approve of modern innovations, and she spurned the new and wondrous arts of the toilet-table. She always wore a plain, black silk dress, ruffles at her neck and wrists of the most exquisite old cream-tinted lace.

Her silver hair was braided back from her broad brow under a neat widow's cap which she had never left off since her husband's death, full five-and-twenty years ago ; she was brisk and active in spite of her age and always cheerful, though

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she had confided to Evelyn that her life had not been free from many deep and cruel sorrows.

Evelyn seated herself on the couch by the elder lady's side and Mrs. Mostyn took her hand.

"I have something very disagreeable to say to you, child," she said gently.

The girl started; during the three years that she had been an inmate of Mostyn Grange, she had never heard an unkind word from the old lady. What could she possibly mean?

"I have been unfortunate enough to displease you, Mrs. Mostyn?" Evelyn faltered.

"No, no, dear, certainly not; it is something in connection with my son's return."

"He wishes you to dismiss me?"

"No, indeed; in fact my son does not trouble his head about you in any way; he is quite satisfied with the fact that I tell him I have secured for Daisy a first-class governess with whom I am absolutely satisfied."

"You are very kind," murmured Evelyn, but sorely troubled at the mysterious tidings which Mrs. Mostyn seemed so unwilling to communicate to her.

"Well, my dear, it is no use beating about the bush, I have an unpleasant thing to do, and I must bravely muster up courage to tell you. I am sorry to say that we shall have to change our pleasant institution of your having all your meals in the dining-room with us; the advent of my son obliges me very much against my will to have your meals served to you in the school-room."

Evelyn flushed hotly.

"Oh, it is of no consequence; indeed, it is only natural that Captain Mostyn should object to sit down at the same table as his daughter's governess."

Mrs. Mostyn kindly patted the young girl's cheek.

"Now, now, child, your pride need not be up in arms; I was afraid you would feel this keenly——"

"I ought not to do so, for I know it is the custom in most houses for the governess to have her meals served in her own room; it is you, dear Mrs. Mostyn, who have spoilt me."

"I assure you, my son has expressed no opinion on this subject, it is not that he would object to taking his meals with you because you are a governess; no, indeed, my Lionel has too much sense for that, but he would veto the presence of any woman, were she a princess of the blood royal. He has a rooted aversion to our whole sex, and is what we commonly term a woman hater."

Evelyn looked up with a puzzled expression.

"But Captain Mostyn is a widower; how did he bring himself to marry one of our despised sex?"

Mrs. Mostyn sighed.

"Yes, indeed, he married and in that fact lies the secret of my poor boy's hatred and contempt for all women. His wife—but, nay, we may not speak ill of the dead, besides, she is Daisy's mother. Suffice it to say she made Lionel absolutely miserable, and when her untimely death brought their unhappy married life to an end, he vowed from henceforth he would never have anything more to do with women.

"With the exception of his own mother (thank God he makes an exception in my favour), he thinks that all women are false, and he despises and hates them. You see, dear, I tell you all this, so that you may not feel that the change in our arrangements is meant as a slight upon you."

Evelyn lifted the old lady's hand to her face and pressed her lips to it.

"Dear Mrs. Mostyn, you are always so good and thoughtful for me; how can I ever be grateful enough for all your kindness to me? Please forgive the outburst of ill-placed pride I displayed just now."

"Never mind that, child. Only I must beg of you, as a special favour, to avoid as much as possible coming in contact with my son. I do not suppose his stay here will be of very long duration, as, ever since his wife's death, he has always sought to be on active duty abroad, and he has always been to the front wherever there was fighting going on. Thank God, his life has been spared to me in spite of all the perils he has courted so recklessly. He is passionately fond of his little daughter, who mercifully is not one bit like her mother. She takes after her father."

"Daisy is very like you, Mrs. Mostyn."

"Yes, so people say; Lionel was always supposed to have inherited my features and his father's character."

That same evening Captain Mostyn arrived. Evelyn was sitting in the school-room, when she heard the bustle and noise of his arrival. Daisy had been fetched down by Ruth, in order to be by her grandmother's side to welcome back the returning wanderer, and Evelyn sat facing the supper-tray which the footman had just brought up to her.

It was a dainty little meal, but the young girl did not feel hungry; it was the first solitary meal she had taken in this house; and she felt sad and lonely. Two big tears were slowly coursing down her cheeks.

"How childish and silly I am," she exclaimed, and to change the current of her thoughts she began pacing up and down the school-room.

She stopped in front of a small bracket on which stood a large photograph of Captain Mostyn in khaki uniform, which he had sent to his little daughter from Cape Town. Evelyn took it up and gazed at it intently; a good-looking face cer-

She started back—a tall man in evening dress was standing in the doorway.

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tainly, but with a stern and determined look which proclaimed the man therein depicted to have an iron will.

Just then the door was flung open and Daisy rushed into the room. Evelyn dropped the photograph with a guilty look and burning cheeks, but Daisy was much too wildly excited to notice anything.

"Oh, Miss Trevor, Daddy says I may stop downstairs this evening for dinner in honour of his home-coming. I have just run up to tell you, and also to beg you to go to Daddy's room for me, please. I have not time, as he told me to come down at once.

"This morning, as we were arranging the flowers, my little brooch with the pearl daisies Daddy sent me came unfastened, and I left it on the table, forgetting to pick it up again. Will you please fetch it and keep it for me? Daddy would think it so careless of me to leave it on his table."

"Very well, dear, I shall go at once if you are quite sure your father is not in his room."

"Oh, no, he is with Granny in the drawing-room, and I cannot get hold of Ruth or any of the maids to fetch me my brooch."

Daisy danced gleefully out of the room, and Evelyn, taking a small hand lamp, proceeded down the dimly-lit corridor towards the "West Room." The door was open and she glided noiselessly in, making straight for the table, where the child declared she had left her brooch.

The room was in total darkness save for the uncertain light shed by the small lamp Evelyn carried; she lost some time seeking about among the books and nick-nacks on the table, ere she found the missing trinket, then, just as she laid her hand on it and grasped it, she heard the distant sound of the hall-door opening, a sudden gust of wind swept into the room, blew out the light in Evelyn's hand, while the door slammed to violently.

"How provoking," she thought, "but it does not much matter, I can easily find my way to the door, and feel for the handle till I find it."

Very carefully she groped her way to where she felt sure the door stood, but seek as she might, she failed to discover the handle, and she very soon realised that hers was no easy quest. She felt up and down, but everywhere her hand only came in contact with the smooth oak panelling.

She went round the whole room, feeling carefully against the wall, thinking she must be wrong about the place where she thought the door stood, but all in vain, there seemed to be absolutely no outlet to this room.

Suddenly, with a feeling of intense horror, something flashed across her mind which she had heard of vaguely from Ruth when first she came to Mostyn Grange, about the "West Room" having been used in the time of Cromwell to conceal cavaliers, and that it had been fitted up for that special purpose as a sort of secret chamber, the door was concealed in the panelling, and only opened at the touch of a secret spring.

"Good Heavens!" thought the unfortunate Evelyn, "was it possible that that arrangement still existed in this now modernised house?"

The mere thought of such a possibility was torturing to the now half frantic girl. If this were indeed so, her present predicament was awful, shut up alone in the darkened bedroom of the master of the house, the very man whom she had been told hated the sight of every woman, and of whom Mrs. Mostyn had begged her, as a special favour, to avoid meeting, so long as he remained at the Grange.

Evelyn shuddered at the mere thought of his finding her thus; how could she explain her presence? The quest of the brooch would seem such a futile and childish excuse. Oh, why had she foolishly consented to come to this room?

Every other room in the house was lit by electricity, had this one been left out when all the modern improvements had been carried out in the house? Once more she started round the room, hoping to lay her hand on the electric switch, but her search, alas, again proved to be fruitlesss!

She dared not alarm the house by calling out or knocking on the wall, no, she must trust to one of the maids coming in later to attend to the room before Captain Mostyn came upstairs. Oh, surely it was impossible that no one would come to release her before he came, some one *must* turn up to save her from that. The unfortunate girl sank down on a chair and indulged in that most feminine of luxuries, a good cry.

Time wore itself on, and to her it seemed that she must have been shut up for days in this dark room waiting for some impending and awful doom with no possible hope of escape.

Suddenly she heard a slight creaking noise, and at the same time the room was flooded in light; she looked up for one moment then shrank back, crouching in her corner when she saw a tall, dark gentleman in evening dress standing in the doorway with his hand still on the electric knob, which she had so vainly sought.

When he saw Evelyn he started back, and the deep frown and angry flush on his face made her feel like a miserable, guilty creature as she reluctantly came forward, stammering excuses.

"Dasiy had lost her brooch and she begged me to fetch it; the wind blew out my lamp and slammed to the door—and—and I could not find my way out." She gasped out the last words in a low, hoarse voice. Oh, could she ever forget the look of cold, withering scorn he cast on her, as he said in hard, deliberate tones:

"I presume you are Miss Trevor? To-morrow you will give what explanation you may think best to Mrs. Mostyn, on the subject of your extraordinary conduct this evening. She is at liberty to believe you or not."

Then he stood aside to let the unhappy girl pass out. Poor Evelyn, she felt as if a hard, cruel blow had been dealt her in the face.

After a sleepless night, white-faced and utterly miserable, she sought Mrs. Mostyn. Would her kind benefactress credit her unlikely tale, or would she, like Captain Mostyn, doubt her word? If so, Heaven help her, she would have to leave her place and seek another situation, with her name under a cloud.

Directly she entered the room the old lady held out her hand.

"My poor child, what a very unfortunate occurrence! Lionel has just been in to tell me."

"Oh, Mrs. Mostyn, he does not believe me!"

"No, but I believe you, Evelyn: that wretched, stupid, secret door is the cause of all the mischief."

Evelyn sank on her knees, and, hiding her face in her hands, burst into tears.

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Mostyn, for trusting me!"

"Yes, dear, I do trust you implicitly; you need have no fears on that subject, but as my son is so terribly prejudiced against the whole of woman-kind, and against you in particular after that wretched incident of last night, I feel it will be better, perhaps, for you to return to your mother for a short time while Lionel remains here. Daisy can be told that she is to have a holiday while her father is here. Mind, child, I am not sending you away, but I think it advisable for you to leave us for a short time. Still, if you prefer to stay, I leave you quite free."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Mostyn, but you are right. I shall go home to-day."

"As soon as Lionel leaves, I shall send you word, and you will return to us at once."

A few hours later Evelyn had packed her things, her box was sent to the station in one of the traps, she herself elected to walk by the pretty winding path, which skirted the river and led to the village.

As she was slowly walking on, with a heavy heart at leaving the dear old Grange, where she had been so happy, she suddenly heard a child's scream and a loud splash as of someone falling into the river. She rushed forward in time to see little Daisy struggling in the water.

The child had evidently slipped from the bank in trying to reach a flower or reed, and the current, being pretty strong there, was dragging her towards the mill dam a little lower down, where she would inevitably be dashed to pieces against the revolving wheel.

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Evelyn felt there was not a moment to lose, and without an instant's hesitation, she flung herself into the icy cold element.

She was a fairly good swimmer, but her progress was much impeded by her clothes, which clung around her and seemed to drag her down with their awful weight, and, as already mentioned, the current was very strong at this particular point of the river.

However, she reached Daisy just as the child was sinking after having managed to keep herself afloat for a time by striking out wildly with both hands and feet. Evelyn caught her round the waist, whispering :

"Don't struggle, darling, trust me, I shall save you."

But the frightened child clung desperately to Evelyn, and her efforts, added to the wet, clinging clothes, made it a deadly and terrible strain for the exhausted girl to reach the bank.

At last, however, she did succeed in landing herself and the rescued child, but she was so utterly worn out that she lost consciousness and fell on the grass, still clasping little Daisy in her arms, just as Captain Mostyn came rushing to the spot.

From a distance he had caught sight of the two struggling figures in the water, but, in spite of his speed, had come up too late to be of any help in the rescue.

Daisy now ran up to him in her dripping garments.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy, I should have been drowned if it had not been for Miss Trevor, she saved me, and now, oh, Daddy, I think she is dead!"

He stopped one moment to tear off his shooting jacket, and wrapping it round the child, said to her :

"Run, Daisy, as quickly as ever you can to the house; tell Ruth to put you to bed, with hot water-bottles, and to give you a hot drink, and tell them to send help for Miss Trevor."

Then he bent over Evelyn, and soon ascertained she had only fallen into a deep swoon. Very gently he raised her in his arms, carrying her along the path in the direction of the house. He soon encountered Mrs. Mostyn and some of the servants hurrying to seek Miss Trevor as Daisy had carried back her tale of the accident. The maids had blankets with them, and in them they wrapped the still unconscious girl, and carried her back to the house.

The ensuing days were terribly anxious ones for all the inmates of Mostyn Grange, for Evelyn, during her three years' stay, had endeared herself to the hearts of all who knew her.

Daisy was none the worse for her sudden immersion in ice cold water, but poor Evelyn lay between life and death, having developed an acute attack of pneumonia.

Captain Mostyn had not contented himself with the advice of the local practitioner, he had telegraphed to London for one of the most eminent physicians, and had also secured a first-rate trained nurse.

"Miss Trevor—Evelyn, will you consent to become Daisy's mother?"

"Miss Trevor saved Daisy's life," he told his mother, "she shall at least have everything of the best which money can procure. God grant she may pull through, otherwise the poor girl's death will lie at my door."

Poor Evelyn, hers was a desperate case, the doctors shook their heads and said that perhaps, owing to her youth and strong constitution, she might pull through, but it was very doubtful. Her mother was a confirmed invalid, and could not come to her, but Mrs. Mostyn was untiring in her care and devotion to the sick girl, and she gave the nurse all the help in her power.

Then came the day when the doctors declared that the crisis of the case had been reached, and said that night would decide whether their patient would recover or not.

Mrs. Mostyn and the nurse were watching by the bedside, when Ruth glided into the room and whispered that Captain Mostyn wished to speak a few words to his mother. Mrs. Mostyn rose and came out into the little sitting-room which adjoined the large bedroom, one of the best guest chambers, where Evelyn had been moved so as to have more air than in her own room.

"You wish to speak to me, Lionel?"

"Yes, mother, may I see Miss Trevor?"

"See her, why?"

"She is not expected to recover, and I wish to see her once more. As she is not conscious of what happens about her, it cannot harm her. Mother, *do* grant me this favour."

Mrs. Mostyn looked earnestly at her son, then said quietly :

"Very well, Lionel, you may see her as you wish it."

She entered the bedroom, whispered a few words to the nurse, who at once retired, and then signed to Lionel to come in. He drew near the bed, where Evelyn, white as marble, lay quite motionless. It seemed as if death had already claimed her for its own.

He bent down over her and pressed his lips reverently to her pale brow, then he drew back, buried his face in his hands, and a shuddering sob broke from him.

Mrs. Mostyn laid her hand gently on his arm.

"My poor boy!"

He started and seemed almost ashamed that anyone, even his mother, had been a witness of his weakness; he cast one last lingering look on Evelyn, and then silently left the room.

Slowly the terrible night of watching and suspense wore itself away; the clock had just struck two when the library door opened; Mrs. Mostyn knew her son was there keeping his sad, anxious vigil and waiting for news.

"The crisis is over; Evelyn has taken a turn for the better, Lionel; she is saved!"

"Thank God!" he responded fervently.

* * * * *

A fortnight had passed, and Evelyn was so far convalescent as to be able to get up and lie on the couch, which was drawn up by the window, where she could gaze out on the long and lovely vista of sloping lawns and stately avenues. Little

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Daisy had been in to see her repeatedly, and the first drive for the patient was now being discussed; as Daisy left the room, Mrs. Mosytn said:

"Evelyn, my son wishes to see you to thank you for saving his little daughter's life."

The girl started and her pale cheeks grew crimson.

"Oh, Mrs. Mostyn, I thought he had left long ago."

"No; he said he could not leave till he knew you to be on the high road to recovery. He has been most anxious on your account and got the best possible medical advice for you."

"Captain Mostyn is very kind; but I would rather not see him, please, if you do not mind."

"But I do mind; Evelyn dear, won't you see Lionel to please me?" pleaded Mrs. Mostyn.

"You have been so good to me, Mrs. Mostyn, that I can deny you nothing. I shall see your son, but it will be a most painful interview to me."

"Will you receive him now?"

"When you will," the girl said wearily with a sigh; "you will stay by me, Mrs. Mostyn?"

"No, dear, I think not," and Mrs. Mostyn smiled.

"Then please send me Daisy."

Mrs. Mostyn bent down to kiss Evelyn.

"Don't be too hard on Lionel, child, because he judged you unfairly once."

Then, before the girl could answer, the old lady left the room. A few moments elapsed, and then there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Evelyn; she half hoped it was Daisy, but the door opened and Captain Mostyn entered. He looked as much embarrassed as the girl herself did. She did not hold out her hand to him, but just bent her head to acknowledge his presence. He drew near the couch.

"I am so glad, Miss Trevor, that you are now rapidly recovering."

"You are very kind, Captain Mostyn."

"I have come to thank you for saving my little girl's life."

"Oh, please do not mention that; I only did what anyone would have done in my place; it was nothing."

"Nothing, Miss Trevor, when you nearly lost your life, through your heroic act!"

She smiled:

"Does Captain Mostyn, a woman-hater, think it of much account whether one woman more or less encumbers the earth?"

"Miss Trevor, this is unkind! I have come not only to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for saving my little Daisy's life, but also to beg your forgiveness for my abominable rudeness to you the first night I saw you. I——"

"Oh! Captain Mostyn please," she hastily interrupted, "do not allude to that evening; it makes me so miserable to think of it. You did not believe me," she added reproachfully.

"Miss Trevor, I behaved like a cad and a brute to you. Can you ever forgive me?"

She averted her head and did not answer. Then he knelt by the couch, and, taking her hand, he whispered:

"Miss Trevor—Evelyn, will you consent to become Daisy's mother; that is, if you can put up with Daisy's father?"

She turned quickly, and snatching her hand from his, exclaimed:

"I do not understand you, Captain Mostyn. You have no right to insult me!"

"Insult you, Evelyn! Does a man insult the woman he loves?"

"You cannot and do not love me, Captain Mostyn. Out of a mistaken sense of gratitude, or perhaps from a false sense of honour, because you misjudged me once, you now offer me a good position—that of your wife. I decline the honour," she said coldly and proudly.

"Evelyn, Evelyn, you are wrong; it is your turn now to misjudge me. I do love you—I swear it by all I hold most holy!"

"You, the woman-hater! how can you love one of my abhorred sex?"

"I am paying a heavy penalty for having so far hated and despised all women! Now the only woman I have ever cared for turns from me and scorns my love!"

"Nay, I do not scorn it, *if* it is genuine!"

"Evelyn, how can I convince you? If you had seen a fortnight ago the agony I went through when I stood by your bedside and felt that death would snatch you from my grasp, *then* you would not doubt my love for you."

"When you stood by my bedside—*you*, Captain Mostyn?"

"Yes; forgive me, but I implored my mother to let me come in and see you once more; I thought you were dying, and, Evelyn—yes, I must tell you, even if you are very angry with me—but I kissed you, as you lay there white and motionless. It is one thing more I have to crave your forgiveness for."

He expected an indignant protest from her, but none came.

"It was no hallucination then," she murmured softly; "it was true—you stood by my bedside?"

"Good Heavens, Evelyn, did you recognise me then?"

"I was in a sort of trance, and I thought I saw you come in and bend over me," (and she lowered her eyes and blushed,) "and kiss me, but I thought it was all a dream!"

"And now you know it is not a dream, you are not angry?" The slight tremor in her voice and a happy light which had passed transiently across her face gave him a little hope.

"No," she answered very softly.

"Would you rather it had been a dream?"

"No."

"Evelyn, do you believe in my love *now?*"

"Yes."

"And will you not try to love me back a little?"

"No."

This unexpected and decisive answer shattered all his newborn hopes, a deep groan escaped him; then she laid her hand very gently on his, which lay on the arm of the couch.

"Captain Mostyn, I cannot try to love you a *little*, because—well, because I already love you a great deal!"

"Evelyn, my darling!"

"Yes, I have always loved you, long before you cared for me, before I ever saw you!"

"But, my own dear Evelyn, how is that possible—how could you love me before you ever saw me?" And he now boldly clasped her to his heart and kissed the little quivering mouth, which had at last been led to confess her heart's secret.

"There, you are doubting my word again, Captain Mostyn!"

"Don't call me Captain Mostyn, please; my name is Lionel."

"Well, Lionel"—she uttered the name softly, as if almost afraid to use it—"you see, I was always hearing your praises sung by your mother and little Daisy; your portraits and photographs were scattered all over the house, and although I was only a governess, I was an idiotic, romantic girl, and was stupid enough to fall in love with a man I had never seen. Then came my first meeting with you, when your cruel, scornful words and looks stung me like the lash of a whip. Oh, why would you not believe me?"

"My poor little darling, what a brute I must have seemed to you."

"No, I loved you still in spite of it all, but it was terrible agony to me, and I made up my mind no one would ever know, and *you*, of course, least of all."

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Mostyn came in, holding Daisy's hand.

"I hope we are not intruding?"

"Mother, you will have your wish. Evelyn loves you so much that she has consented to put up with me so as to become your daughter. Come here, Daisy, and kiss Miss Trevor; she is going to be your mother and take care of you, and of me!"

"Oh, Daddy, I am so glad!" and Daisy jumped on the couch and flung her arms round Evelyn.

"I said Daddy would love you if I told him to!"

"So, Evelyn," said Mrs. Mostyn, smiling as she kissed the young girl, "you have cured Lionel of being a woman-hater!"

Lily Butler.

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PLAYING WITH FIRE.

The Story of How a Husband was Brought to his Senses.

HERBERT LATIMER loved his wife, but he liked to occasionally cut loose from her apron strings and enjoy himself. About midsummer, he told Lena that he had "business" in Scarborough, and had to go there—alone, of course. She pouted, and cried, there was an exchange of unpleasant remarks, and Herbert left the house, feeling very unhappy—one of the unhappiest men in London.

An hour later, at the Savoy, he met his old college chum, Reginald Mansfield, to whom he related his troubles, and asked his advice.

"Follow your own inclinations, old fellow," advised Reginald. "Don't permit yourself to be tyrannised by your wife. I am astonished at her efforts to rule you, and only four months after marriage. Go to Scarborough, and she will soon realise the fact that a husband was born to control.

This seemed sensible advice, and in less than a week Herbert Latimer had gone to Scarborough. He had gone without leaving his address with his friend, Reginald Mansfield, and the latter was on his way from the club to Latimer's house to obtain it.

It was his first visit. He had been abroad when Herbert had married, and he had returned but a few days prior to the conversation just reported. On the evening of his arrival he had gone to see a middle-aged lady, an old friend of Herbert Latimer, once the friend of Reginald's own mother. She was a woman of the world, who had kept the depth of her heart and feeling, and who had looked on many of the chances and phases of life with her clear, steady eyes. The talk had turned on Herbert Latimer's wife.

"She is a simple country girl, is she not?" asked Reginald.

"She has a rare and charming nature, strong and sweet—far too good for Herbert. But she adores him—as girls of that character adore men of his."

"Oh, Herbert is not bad."

"Not at all. But weak. A weak Adonis. Men of that kind always have the best love lavished upon them." Mrs. Percy paused a moment. Then she raised her eyes to Reginald's. "She looks like Eleanor," she added, in a gentle tone.

She saw that he changed colour. "How that memory lives with him!" she thought. She alone knew this man as he was. She alone had known closely the dead girl who had been the dream of his young manhood. When people spoke of Reginald as a Lothario, she would remark quietly: "Let us not judge too much from the surface."

"She looks like Eleanor."

Those few words of Mrs. Percy had been persistently in Reginald Mansfield's mind as Herbert Latimer had come to him a few days later with his grievance. They were in his mind as he rang the bell of the young man's house.

Like Eleanor! Was it true? For an instant, as he waited in the dim drawing-room, he wished that he had not come. Then a curtain was raised and dropped again. A slight, girlish figure in a straight, flowing dress advanced. Mrs. Latimer put out her hand.

"You are a good friend of my husband. I have heard of you often; I'm very glad to see you," she said.

But Reginald Mansfield stood for an instant as one bereft of sense. Mrs. Percy was right. Here was the same rare Madonna type of beauty, the same low, broad brow, the same pathetic mouth, the same expression of the violet eyes—his heart beat fast with the sudden ache that he had so often hoped was stilled.

"Are you ill?" asked Lena Latimer, startled. He had already recovered himself with an effort.

"You will think me absurd," he said lightly; "but you look strangely like—someone I used to know."

In his agitation he forgot the object of his visit.

* * * * *

It was a warm, cloudy morning in August. Herbert Latimer had returned from his outing, and, to his dismay learnt that his wife had gone on a yachting excursion to the Solent with the Wentworths, a family with whom he and his wife were very intimate. But this was not the most important part of the disclosure. Reginald Mansfield was with the party!

This was rather too friendly on the part of his old college chum!

Herbert hastened to the home of Mrs. Percy, and to her related his troubles.

That lady endeavoured to calm him by such words as these:

"Oh, that yachting excursion is all right. Mrs. Wentworth is the model of propriety. And young married women must amuse themselves—even when their husbands are away."

"Oh, this is outrageous!" exclaimed Herbert. "Probably you see nothing wrong in Lena leaving London yesterday to 'amuse' herself, as you say, on the very afternoon that she knew I would arrive?"

Mrs. Percy shrugged her shoulders. Her visitor had turned towards the door.

"Where is the yacht likely to be now? I take it that you are informed, Mrs. Percy."

"I believe it is to return to Southampton to-morrow, or the day after. You are not going?"

But he had vanished.

One moment Mrs. Percy stood musing; and her teeth,

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white and fine still, showed in the peculiar smile that parted her lips.

"What will the outcome be?" she murmured. "And then—— Alas! what fools, what astonishing fools men can be, at times, to be sure!"

* * * * *

A mist had come up and lay, an impenetrable veil, over the sea. In the prevailing neutrality of the atmosphere's tints, a woman's yachting dress of blue-and-red made a warm, picturesque spot, blurred and deep, in the foggy perspective. A man, stalking along with swift strides, caught a sudden vision of this dash of colour, and of the slender, well-known figure it clothed at an abrupt terminus of the walk.

It was Lena, and she was not alone. A man walked by her side, too, whom he—Herbert—could have no difficulty in recognising. The tall, loosely built, nonchalant figure, was that of Reginald Mansfield.

The two had stopped now. Their backs were turned. But, sharpened to abnormal acuteness, Herbert's senses could divine, as it were, their mental attitude at the moment, betrayed in the pose of their vague, dark silhouettes. Lena, her head bent away from her companion, seemed to be looking out to sea, and, as Herbert advanced rapidly nearer, something listless, dejected, became more clear in the droop of her shoulders.

But Reginald Mansfield looked not at the sea, but at her. He stood near her, so near that his hand could touch her elbow.

The blood surged up in Herbert's heart, and at that instant the two faced about to retrace their steps and saw him advancing.

Lena was the first to speak. She had turned from white to red and back to white. A suppressed trembling had seized her. But her voice was clear and steady.

"Herbert, dear! You here? How did you know where the yacht would be to-day? I thought you were to be in London! Who told you where we were?"

Herbert's white, dry lips, framed two words shortly.

"Mrs. Percy."

Reginald Mansfield raised his eyebrows.

"Ah, yes. To be sure, she would know. You had a jolly outing, I suppose, Latimer?"

Calmly he met the glare of Herbert Latimer's eyes.

But Mrs. Latimer, laughing nervously, had touched her husband's sleeve. She turned her glance to Reginald Mansfield, and there was something like a wild, repressed appeal in it. Did he read its meaning aright? He took off his hat.

"Will you permit me to withdraw, Mrs. Latimer? I am sure that after your separation your husband's companionship must be the only one acceptable."

He nodded to Herbert, but received no look from the latter in return.

The next instant husband and wife were alone, and then the flood-gates of Herbert Latimer's jealous rage and indignation were opened.

Lena stood silent, with downcast eyes, as the hot words poured over her. She was, then, he asked, like every other woman? The great trust he had had in her truth, believing it so perfect that not even the shadow of a frivolous flirtation could touch it, was, then, proved to be unfounded? He had, perhaps, not been a model husband himself. He acknowledged it.

He had been in the wrong. He had gone after his own pleasures. He had seemed to neglect her. He had, in fact, neglected her. He had the misfortune of having been bred among people who looked upon such things as only trivial faults. But, through all, he had always felt, that, faulty as he might be, she was unassailable. Mrs. Percy, however, had suggested to him, by exasperating innuendoes, all that had been going on for weeks. And a flirtation with Reginald Mansfield, of all men! A flirtation with his own friend!

In intolerable despair he talked on. And then he stopped. What more was there to say? Sharply he turned from her.

Was he going from her? She raised her head, she watched him as he walked away, blindly, as one who is stunned.

"Herbert!" she suddenly cried out, with a rapturous note of joy and love. She ran after him, she clung to him; all her sweet Madonna face was covered with tears and smiles. "Herbert! Beloved! Beloved! It was only to test you, only to teach you, by your own pain, what mine had been!

"Truly, truly, I have given no thought to Mr. Mansfield save such thought as one gives a good, good friend. He has seemed very 'attentive,' as the world speaks of such things, but he has been only kind—oh, so kind! You see, I look like—like someone he loved once, and so he was my friend from the first.

"He saw how miserable I was, dear, about your going off on that trip to which I objected. He realised the pain I felt at your seeming indifference—for, indeed, I thought you cared nothing for me any more! Oh, was I not foolish? Do I not see now in your eyes; do I not feel by the clasp of your arms, how much you loved me in truth?

"But I was wretched, and Mr. Mansfield discovered it, and because he felt as a friend to me he thought of this plan. He and Mrs. Percy. She, too, has been, oh so good to me. Together they contrived it all. She was to see you and tell you when you arrived and I was to go off with the Wentworths on the yacht, and with Mr. Mansfield. It was all to keep up the appearance of the comedy we were playing! And it was to have been kept up much longer; I was not to divulge the truth to you until you were well tried. But I cannot, cannot play this farce another moment when I love you so! I see and feel that you so love me!"

She was weeping now in his arms. Tightly clasped, Herbert held her. When at length she looked up, his face was changed. —graver, colder, firmer than she had seen it.

"Yes, dear Lena, the comedy was played long enough, child, long enough. The lesson has been well-learnt. It has been taken to heart."

A fortnight later Reginald Mansfield returned to London. In the evening he went to Mrs. Percy's. She greeted him with an exclamation:

"Where have you been all this time? In hiding? In every manner I have tried to get news of your whereabouts. And not only I, but Lena, and Herbert Latimer himself. I think the latter wants to thank you honestly for bringing him to his senses. He has already thanked me. Never was a conspiracy crowned with more admirable success. They are turtle doves now—turtle doves! Herbert will remain to the end, I believe, a model mate; and as for Lena, she is supremely, completely blissful. You have done good work my dear fellow."

She paused, and then something caused her to regard him more attentively.

"Turn your face to the light," she said brusquely. Off his guard, he did so. Thereupon Mrs. Percy gave a low expostulatory cry.

"Reginald, that is not why you have been in hiding, is it—not truly this, boy?"

At the tone of deep, interested sympathy, Reginald covered his face with his hands. After an interval he raised his head.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I am afraid it is so. I care for her. She is another man's wife, and it has an ugly sound. But the feeling I have for her could not stain a flower. I thought it was only friendly interest at first, because she was so like—— But she was too like! It was playing with fire. I have been suspecting my real feeling some time. I knew it when Herbert came back, and by the look in his eyes I realised how much he cared for her, and that they would be reconciled." He got up. "Well, I shall have to live it down, as I did the other."

E. Barton.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
MARY MASON, Lady Maitland's maid.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

"The Bond Between."

"I AM 'at home' to no one to-day, Lawson," Lady Maitland said slowly, as she crossed the hall on her way to her boudoir; "remember—not at home."

She had been out for a short drive, yet strangely enough the keen, cold breeze of the January afternoon had brought no tinge of colour to her pale, creamy skin, and a restless, alert gleam had lately taken up its residence in her proud, violet eyes. She sank into a low chair by the fire, and let her long fur coat fall loosely from her.

Outside she had met Doctor Gray, and had heard that his patient was progressing as well as could be expected. The fever had not abated, but the wound in the head was healing.

"He will be better—soon," she thought. "Then I can no longer keep him from asking questions. He is clever in spite of his youth; the man Chase will tell him what he knows and suspects—and the girl will speak. Oh, I see clearly the whole panning out of events when that boy rises from his bed!"

She rose quickly and walked to the window, pressing her hot brow against the cold panes.

"And it was that miserable chit who came between me and my future peace!" she muttered, biting her red lips in a spasm of remembrance; how she had been outwitted by a girl whom she despised and used as a tool. "Had she not interfered with the open window, much might have happened that would have simplified matters for me; but as it is, I owe her something for having dared to come between me and my plans. She, the village foundling!"

She caught her breath with a sudden catch at the recollection of that low, cautious outcry of Nurse Beaumont, when she had claimed her attention to a mark on the sleeping girl's brow two nights ago.

What if there really could be anything in it? What if that pale-faced, quivering-mouthed girl were—— She laughed harshly as she had laughed in the presence of the woman who had pointed it out. "A mere coincidence," she had said, "an idle phantasy of an ill-educated, emotional brain, that could only adhere to one view about a particular mark on the brow of any chance child, that it should necessarily be the one remembered years ago!"

She flung back her head and whispered fiercely to the empty room:

"No! That infant, whether stolen or alive, is dead to me; as dead as though I had seen the earth shovelled upon it. No beggar's brat shall be palmed off on me by any hysterical woman. I have turned my back upon the spectres of the past, and shall brook no hand tearing aside the curtains I have drawn. They are dead—dead as—the man they found in the spinny!"

She put her hand to her mouth, to stifle the words she barely breathed, and a slight shiver shook her, as she walked back to the glowing fireplace and held out one slender, white palm to the flames.

It was cold outside, and the dainty boudoir was like a bird's nest—warm and cosy; but the graceful woman in it was like an ice queen, so bloodless and chilly were her hands and feet; even her heart scarcely seemed to beat, the cold was so intense; but her brain was burning, as it had done since the night of the ball, and the internal fire within her seemed to have fuel added to it with each hour.

"Bah! What a fool I am!" she laughed. "The twilight brings shadows out that haunt me! I will ring for the lamps!"

As she raised her hand to the button on the wall, the door opened, and Lawson came into the room.

"If you please, my lady," he began hesitatingly, "Mr. North would like to see you. I said you were 'not at home,' but he insisted on coming in, as he wishes to say 'good-bye,' and would not be able to come again."

"Of course, Lawson; show Mr. North in here at once," Lady Maitland said, "and bring the lights and tea. Where is Miss Maitland?"

"Helping the nurse, your ladyship, with Master Jack," the man replied, and left the room to usher in the impatient visitor.

Alone, Lady Maitland clasped her hands with a sudden nervous gesture.

"Good-bye!" she thought; "then—then Heriot North knows—something! But how much—I wonder, how much?"

The next moment he was in the room, and she with difficulty repressed the exclamation that rose to her lips. They had not met since the night of the *bal masqué*, when she had given him her confidence to the extent of trusting him with a secret commission, and that was nearly a week ago.

But the days that had passed might have been years three times multiplied, since they had glided over the head of the man who had given her his allegiance, even unto the eternal unrest of his future life. His face was grey, and lines stood out where before there had only been faint indications of thought and study; and in his earnest eyes, that had formerly been humorous or tender, was an expression of horror and abasement.

While the servant was in the room, arranging the tea-table and drawing the blinds, they talked commonplaces, as people are wont to do when great issues are at hand. But so soon as the door was closed upon his figure, Lady Maitland turned to her visitor with a world of inquiry in her voice.

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

"You have not come to say 'good-bye'? That was surely only an excuse to see me?"

He bowed gravely. "No, it was not, Lady Maitland. I am going to London to-morrow; then shortly, I hope, back to India!"

The level, beautifully-marked brows of her ladyship puckered ever so slightly.

"India, Mr. North? Somehow I imagined that you had given up all such ambitions, to remain in England near your friends—the friends that need you!"

"Then," he said bitterly, speaking in quick, uneven tones, "then it was that I thought I had a career of honour before me, even if love had gone by me. But—but since then, I have lost my honour, my self-respect, and everything that an English gentleman holds dear. Now, all that remains for me to do is to return to India, where, in some remote hill station, I may bury myself and try to live down memory!"

"Will you be so good as to tell me when this strange decision was arrived at, Mr. North?" she said quickly, and the cold note of reproof in her voice acted as a lever to the rising passion of the man.

"Need you ask? Can you really mean that you are in ignorance of what has so recently taken place?" he breathed, in a low tone of intreaty. "Why should you and I play at phrasing speeches, when we—know what we do know?"

The heart of the woman fluttered beneath her lace, and her lips quivered faintly as she listened. But she raised her eyes boldly to him and said:

"You have not yet answered my question, Mr. North. When was it that your thoughts turned again to India?"

"On the night, or rather the early dawn of the morning after the *bal masqué*, when I was burning—something," he replied, his voice hoarse with emotion—"that morning saw the night of my honour, and—and of yours! Oh!" he cried, "I trusted you so fully; why did you not repose just a little confidence in me before—that—took place? Surely, surely, there was some other alternative?"

There was a short silence, broken only by the dropping of a burnt out log into the china fireplace, then she answered him:

"Why do you speak in such ambiguous language, Mr. North? I am not afraid of anything you may say, so why wrap your pill in sugar for me? Perhaps," she went on bitterly, "I made a mistake in supposing that you would be my friend, or that I could trust you to do something for me without afterwards throwing it in my teeth. Well, even the loss of your friendship, I suppose I shall survive; but at present it hurts me to find how little I knew you after all."

Stung by her words, he relented a trifle from the harshness of the attitude he had adopted, and replied gently:

"I saw the contents of your parcel; the heat of the fire opened it, almost as though it recoiled from the contact! The slippers, handkerchief, wig—all bore testimony to some strange errand in which you had wished concealment! Then—then—oh, Heaven," he cried passionately—"the agony of saying these things to *you*—the woman round whom I built the worship of my life—is like smashing the panes of a stained glass window and finding that, after all, it was only a reflected glory!

"Then the following morning I heard of the finding of the body of—that creature in the spinny, and my hideous doubt grew into a more hideous certainty. But even now," he said, drawing closer to her, and grasping her delicate wrist, "I will believe in you if you swear that this is all a strange coincidence; that in spite of your having sent this poor wretch money to London, and again meeting him near the Manor gates when you told me it was the girl at the lodge; even then, I say, I will gladly believe your word if you say that it was not *you* who on the night of the ball met that soul before he went to his reckoning!"

Swiftly and cautiously Lady Maitland pondered her reply. It was imperative that this man should not learn the truth; as she knew it, yet, since he suspected so much that was detrimental, he must be told something that would paint his divinity in less sinister colours—be given some reply that would point to extenuating circumstances.

She turned to him with a sudden impulsive frankness that was not without its charm for the shame-stricken man whom she had chosen for her tool:

"Yes," she said, in a low voice; "you shall learn what has cost me much to keep apart from those I love—much, but not—what you think! For my conscience is clear from that graver charge—I swear that on my word!"

She stopped and flung her white, glistening hands out before her in an abandon of outraged honour.

"Do you think I could have touched my son, whom I love, had such a stain stood between us?"

He bent over her hands silently, but the dread had gone out of his eyes, and he breathed more calmly.

"Put me out of my suspense!" he murmured; "then I will kneel for pardon!"

She smiled wearily. "I lied when I said I had never seen that man before, when you questioned me about him, after you had been to the Messenger Depot in Regent Street. I did not know you then, or I would have spoken more frankly, but I was afraid!"

"Afraid!" he murmured; "in what way?"

"Perhaps," she continued dreamily, "you have heard that when I married Sir Trevor, I was a widow?"

He nodded. "Yes; well?"

"Well," she went on, slowly, clasping her hands tightly; "that creature who was murdered the other night in the spinny, by some strange chance found out my address, and threatened to disclose to Sir Trevor some disgraceful secret he knew concerning—my first husband, unless I paid him for his silence."

She paused, and the lace on her gown rose and fell with her quickened breathing.

"I was terrified," she went on after a pause, "and in my distress made the fatal error of allowing myself to be blackmailed by that man. His demands grew more exorbitant each time, and before the night of the ball he threatened, even after all I had given him, to betray the secret of a dead man to my husband. I disguised myself, as you know, and went to meet him, to beg of him to go away and not worry me any longer."

He leant forward eagerly; each word she said was lessening his burden of doubt, and reinstating her in his holy of holies.

"I understand," he murmured; "how you have suffered, and what a brute you must think me for having imagined such cruel things!"

She raised her hand proudly. "Listen first, before you pronounce judgment! I was desperate when I went to meet that creature, and, had I had the opportunity," she whispered hoarsely, "would like to have silenced him! But when I got further into the spinny I heard a shot, and, afraid of being discovered, I turned and fled back to the Manor.

"The brambles had scratched my hands, hence the state of the handkerchief. Then, hearing that strange things had happened in the spinny, I grew frightened, and gave you the things to destroy. Now you know all," she finished, flinging her head back with its wondrous glory of hair, and looking at him with a sorrowful smile.

"Do you condemn me so ruthlessly after what you have heard? Were you not a little cruel to the woman to whom you vowed an eternal devotion, and then, when she cast herself on your mercy, to think the worst of her afterwards?"

He flushed darkly. "Forgive me; I can only repeat, forgive me! I was a brute; you are an angel wronged by brutes! But you may trust me," he went on, eagerly, "not to betray your confidence. I will cherish it—for it is a bond between us that can never be severed—not even by death.

"I will serve you and stand by you to the end! I believe in your integrity with all my soul! Do not think that I shall ever swerve from my devotion a second time! No mention of your secret shall ever pass my lips. We are knit together in life, in death, by a bond that neither can forget or ignore—for

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it is the bond between us of honour and shame ; silence and trust ! I am henceforth your liege knight ! "

He bent over her hand with an old-world reverence, and she smiled slightly. It had been an effort to bring this strong man back into his chains that had so nearly snapped. She was glad that he had not been present when Gilbert Chase had mentioned the woman he had met ! But now he was safely made secure, and she knew the voyage to India would not take place.

Suddenly she withdrew her hand with a sudden fear. The handle of the door had slightly turned, and her quick ears had been tuned to hear such delicate sounds.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

"When Greek Meets Greek."

As they moved apart the door opened and Agnes Maitland came in, smiling sarcastically.

" Ah, Heriot ! " she said, with one of her rasping laughs, " so I hear you are going in for dealings on 'Change."

" What makes you think that ? " he said, quickly recovering from his surprise.

She smiled disagreeably, and sent a swift glance in the direction of her step-mother, who was busy at the tea-table. " Oh, I fancied as I stood at the door, that I heard you and Lady Maitland mention something about ' bonds,' " she said carelessly. " Was I wrong to think that it was concerning stocks and shares ? " she went on innocently ; " or were you discussing ' bonds ' of a deeper nature, and with no relative value to the City ? "

The slim right hand of the woman holding the sugar tongs quivered slightly, but no other sign was forthcoming that the sharp innuendo of her step-daughter had gone home.

After a brief conversation Heriot North took his leave, and the two women were alone.

" Is Jack progressing ? " Lady Maitland asked in a careless tone. She was thinking about the story she had told the man who had just gone, and was wondering vaguely whether he had believed all the details she had given him.

" Yes," Agnes replied ; " the nurse seems to know her duty. By the way," she went on, glancing at the woman seated opposite her, " I met someone quite interesting when I was away ; doubly so, because you were admired fervently ! "

" Really ? " her step-mother murmured ; " who was it ? "

" A man called Heath," Agnes said slowly ; " Ernest Heath, I think his name was, and he happened to see the group I had taken of you all last summer, and immediately swore that you were the image of his second cousin, Margaret Heath. I said that I did not know your maiden name," went on the voice of the inquisitor, " but that you were a Mrs. Vernon before you married father. By the way, what *was* your maiden name ? "

Her ladyship's lips parted with a sudden terror. How she hated this woman with the dissecting tongue and ferret's eyes !

" My maiden name," she began slowly, stirring her tea with an icy hand, " was Pearl Lester ; so the man you met must have a cousin strangely like myself ! " and her eyes flashed defiance into the narrow, beady ones of the old maid in the chair. " I should like to see him ; he would be interesting, I should think."

Agnes smiled. " Then you will have that pleasure very soon, Lady Maitland, for I have taken the liberty of asking Mr. Heath to pay us a visit, and see the lovely double of his cousin."

The white, slender fingers of the beautiful woman listening to the hidden venom in the speech of her step-daughter played nervously with the long turquoise chain suspended from her neck and hanging almost to her waist.

Ernest Heath, the cousin who had been but a short time in the home of her girlhood, before going out to his ranch in California—what strange freak of fortune had flung him in the path of Agnes Maitland, she wondered feverishly ! At any cost she must so arrange her time as to be away from the Manor when this man arrived.

She looked up, and caught the ghost of a sneer on the thin, sour mouth of Sir Trevor's daughter, and that sneer braced her to buckle on the armour of self-defence once more

" I am glad," she said thoughtfully, " that you have met a man to whom you seem to be attracted, Agnes ! And I also hope that this time the event will bring about the desired culmination in wedding-bells at Melton Church."

An angry flush mantled the sallow face of Agnes Maitland. The shaft too well did its duty. She raised her eyes and said spitefully :

" Perhaps Melton will be busy with matters other than church bells. For instance, the murder of that man in the spinny. It is a known fact that there is a mystery about it, and I heard yesterday that the detective had picked up—startling evidence—I think were the words."

A tremor shot through the frail-looking woman leaning back in her chair ; but no other indication did she give that the speech had any particular import for her.

" Yes," she said languidly, " it is a dreadful affair ; why discuss it ? "

" Why ? " And Agnes Maitland rose to her feet, towering a lean, gaunt figure, with passion-distorted face, above the wife of her father, upon whose aureole of copper hair the firelight flickered. " Why ? " she repeated again, in a low whisper ; " because I am convinced that the murdered man is the same as he I saw that night walking past the old oak in the spinny—the night that I followed you, and was tricked so cleverly by you and your—accomplice in some secret. But what secret I have never yet discovered. *Do you have midnight rendezvous now,* Lady Maitland ? "

For an instant a steel band seemed to be growing tighter round the brain and heart of her ladyship, and a red mist descended upon her eyes—only for a moment, however ; the next she was laughing softly, and her eyes sparkled with amusement as she cried gaily :

" Why, Agnes, your visit has imbued you with the spirit of romance to quite an extravagant extent ! It must be the influence of your new admirer, Mr. Wreath—Heath, or some similar name suggestive of rusticity ! "

The baffled woman flashed a glance of mingled hate and doubt at her.

" You may laugh at me," she said, in a voice vibrating with suppressed passion, " but in time I shall know the truth regarding your strange taste for wandering about the spinny with tramps ; as well as the meaning of the secret sign you have with that fool Heriot North ; the bond between you is, I believe, one that reflects no credit to either of you ! "

Lady Maitland drew herself up with a calm dignity. " Do not let your foolish tongue go too far," she said softly. " Remember I am your father's wife. And," she added, " it seems rather a shame to call Mr. North a fool ! He nearly made you his better half, you know ! "

" And would have done," the desperate woman flashed, " had you not come between us with your smiles, and false, glittering eyes ! Even then I would not have felt it so much had you prized what you had stolen from me. But, like the rest, you made use of him, employed him as your lackey ; for with most women of your temperament, you prefer to wash your dirty linen in other people's tubs ! "

She paused, her passion spent. She had been wrung by her own stormy emotions, and the rage of vituperation had fallen foul of the woman upon whom it had been heaped.

She turned to leave the room, then wheeled round. " You think I am mad," she hissed ; " or, rather, it pleases you to think so ; but remember, I have not forgotten the little incident of the night when you were looking at a certain shining thing in your hand, believing yourself alone ! I saw it—I would remember it—again ! And I mean to find out all about the murder of the tramp in the spinny ; for if it is the same man I saw that night, *I know who killed him !* "

Her voice, low as it was, reached a figure that stood at the door which had swiftly and noiselessly opened to admit a man.

" *I know who killed him !* " The words fell like a thunderbolt at his feet, and he looked keenly at the two women as he came forward.

" So," he thought, " Miss Agnes is playing the game of Paul Pry on her own ! I wonder what she has got hold of ? Any-

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

way, her ladyship can be trusted to keep her own end up with that cat!"

After a few brief remarks Agnes left the room, and Lady Maitland sent a light laugh after her.

"Agnes has been entertaining me," she said. "She imagines that she has a clue to the murder in the spinny!"

Digby Scarlett eyed her curiously. Her cheeks were a pale pink, due to her recent encounter, but he fancied he could say something that would chase the colour from them.

"Agnes is clever," he said drily, "with the cleverness of a house tabby—it knows when to purr and when to scratch. By the way," he went on, "have you by any chance lost—anything?"

"Lost anything?" she repeated; "I fancy not. Why do you ask?"

"Because," and he took a step nearer, "because, in crossing the spinny the other night, I came upon a trinket. It was an oval-shaped locket of hammered gold, much stained—by—mud. I opened it, on one side there was no picture; on the other—one of a girl in her first youth. I thought it might belong to you?"

"No, no," she murmured, her teeth chattering as with sudden cold; "I have lost nothing of that nature; I hate lockets."

He smiled gently. "So I supposed. On the back of the photo I took out were two initials; they were 'M. from V.' But as it does not belong to you, I will take it to the police to-morrow—they may find it useful!"

He watched her narrowly, and saw her face blanch to a sickly grey, while her white, even teeth met over her red lips in an effort to keep back the scream that rose to them.

"I have not seen the girl Ivy," he went on carelessly. "It is time I paid my court to my future wife. I will make her a present of the locket!"

"Ah, you brute!" the desperate woman whispered; "why—why should I stoop to deny what you *think* you know? Supposing that locket were the property of the person you think—what then? I say, what then?"

"What then?" he repeated hoarsely; "why, your ladyship's life is in the hollow of my hand; one squeeze—and it is gone."

She laughed wildly. "Circumstantial evidence, Mr. Scarlett. What can that do, after all?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Deprive you of a great many things you love, Lady Maitland. Among others, your son Woolf!"

"May I see that locket?" she said calmly, forcing a smile to her lips; "then I can tell whether I have lost one like it or not."

He put his hand to his pocket and drew it out. "I usually keep it locked up, but to-day brought it with me."

With fingers that scarcely could hold the thing she had almost given her soul to possess again, she touched the spring and looked at the photo lying loosely in its place.

His eyes were on her, but as he turned to pick up a glove she quickly tore the picture out and flung it in the fire.

"You vixen!" he snarled, livid with rage; "I was a fool to trust you with it!"

He rushed to the grate, but she barred his way, once more a laughing, radiant woman.

"Outwitted again, Mr. Scarlett! The face you counted on is burnt to a cinder! Now take your locket, and go to the police—if you dare!"

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bird Takes Wing.

"Good-morning, Miss Mason; quite a Spring-like day, isn't it?" And Gilbert Chase caught up to the lanky figure of Miss Maitland's maid, who had been steadily tramping on ahead for some time.

She turned sharply to him, her long, narrow eyes greeting him with a brilliant flash. Mr. Chase had what the servants at the Manor described as "a way with him." But strangely enough it was not the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed Betsy, the under maid, nor the trim, dainty Parisienne Félice, her ladyship's special maid, that attracted the quiet-looking man with the rather weak eyes and diffident manner.

It was Mason, the bitter-tongued, sallow-faced woman with the weird eyes, that had a trick of suddenly flashing into your own when you least expected it, who had caught the masculine fancy of Mr. Chase. Perhaps it was not altogether fancy that actuated Mr. Chase's philandering, but, whatever his motive, it was never attributed to any other than her own surpassing beauty by the usually astute Mason.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Chase?" she said; "fancy meeting you here!"

"Yes; the unexpected always happens," he assented gravely. "Are you going to leave a message anywhere, or is this just a little stroll for the good of your health?"

"It's my afternoon out," she retorted; "I get it once a week, and every other Sunday."

"Ah; you have a good home, Miss Mason," he said, with a sigh. "I wish I had as good! A lovely house, and a beautiful mistress!"

Mason sniffed aggressively. "'Andsome is as 'andsome does is my motto," she replied; "and I'm not one as speaks without reason, too. I've my own opinion about her ladyship, and she's clever enough to pretend not to notice it; and I must say that she carries things off with a 'igh 'and!"

"Humph!" thought Gilbert Chase, "so there's bad blood between them, is there? This jealous cat will be a mine of information to me, so long as I can get her on the right tack!" Aloud he said:

"Oh, I suppose all big ladies are the same in their ways. They gets like that."

"Big ladies!" sneered Mason. "She may be now, but before she came to the Manor she was no one much; leastways, I've heard the housekeeper say she was a plain Mrs. Something, a widder."

"Plain! Never!" murmured the detective, whose eye had been attracted by the radiant lady of the Manor. But it was his business instinct that prompted him to learn about everyone, whether they came within the range of his professional calling or not.

It was now nearly ten days since he had been quietly investigating the inquiry about the murder of the ex-convict in the spinny. At the inquest the verdict had been given as "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown"; and the evidence brought up regarding the shots had evolved the strange fact that the bullet the doctor had extracted from the head of the dead man was of the calibre ·096, the same nature as that which had so nearly also killed the son and heir of Sir Trevor Maitland, both shots having evidently been fired from similar weapons.

But what had so puzzled the coroner and jury, as well as Gilbert Chase, had been a second bullet in the dead man's shoulder. It must have been fired before the fatal and last shot, as an after-death wound would not have closed up again.

The question that Gilbert Chase had asked himself ever since was, "Were there two people in the spinny that night both bent on murder?" for, if not, why was not the third shot similar in calibre to those which had brought both men down, one indeed, to his death; for the bullet in the dead man's arm had been of the calibre ·032, obviously belonging to a much lighter weapon than which had killed Mike Holland.

"Two revolvers," Gilbert Chase had argued, "did not necessarily point to the presence of two people;" but until Jack Maitland was allowed to see him and throw some light on the mystery, he ferreted and dangled the bait of artful questioning among the different people with whom he came in contact.

"How is the young lady now?" he said abruptly to Mason, who had from time to time stolen thoughtful glances at him; "I mean," he corrected himself quickly, "the young lady who lives at the lodge?"

"Oh, her," said the woman in a mollified tone; "she's a bit pale and peeky-like, but there's not much the matter with her."

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"She is very lovely," he went on slowly, "she reminds me of someone—or was it a picture?—that I saw years ago. I remember making that remark the first time I saw her ladyship. She has just the same type of face that haunts you. But returning to the young lady—Miss Strange, I think her name is; I suppose she was at the ball on the night of the murder?"

"The murder!" gasped the woman suddenly; "you mean the—man—Mike—Mike Holland?" and her quivering face and dilated pupils showed that she was strangely upset by the subject.

Gilbert Chase looked at her sharply. A sudden thought that had sprung into being died as he glanced at her pale face, and noted her trembling lips. The black hair, growing low down on the forehead, the long, cunning dark eyes, and cruel, vicious mouth reminded him vaguely of another face he had but recently looked upon—the face of the dead ex-convict Mike Holland.

"You are startled!" he said innocently. "What was Mike Holland to you?"

She looked at him strangely, battling for self-control; then smiled a stiff, distorted grin that accentuated the terror in her eyes.

"Nothing," she said thickly. "But I think I saw him alive—in the village—once or twice. The mention of the man's name upset me. It came so sudden like!"

"I suppose," he went on carelessly, "that the poor wretch never spoke to you? These tramps often spin yarns about themselves."

The woman shook her head. "No, I only passed him in the village—we—we never spoke."

"I'm sorry," Gilbert Chase murmured. "You might have told me if he was married or not. I should like to know that. It is important—very!"

She flashed a strange look at him.

"I tell you we never spoke," she said shortly. "If you want to ask those questions, you'd better go to——" She stopped, and with a sudden change of manner, said: "The girl from the lodge can tell you more than I can, Mr. Chase, if you know how to open her mouth; and someone else's too!"

Outside the "New Age" he paused, and said, "Will you come in and have some refreshment? The inn will not be full or noisy, it's too early."

She hesitated, then accepted with a show of diffidence.

In the bar-parlour there were one or two people, a woman and a couple of men drinking. As Gilbert Chase and his companion seated themselves in one of the partitioned-off corners, she cast a hurried glance round, then uttered a low cry that drew all eyes upon her.

The woman standing by the bar turned also, and put out a thin, dirty hand impulsively.

"Why, it's Polly!" she murmured. "Polly, you 'ere? Then you can tell me all abaht pore old——"

With a hasty gesture Mary Mason rose to her feet. "I'm goin' out," she said. "I'm took bad!"

Gilbert Chase followed closely on her heels, his professional scent again on the trail. Fear—large, shrinking fear—was written in the woman's eyes. As she hurried away he looked after her thoughtfully. "Very well, 'Polly,'" he said, with a grim smile, "we will resume our chat later!"

He turned back into the "New Age," and cast a sharp glance round the bar.

The woman from whom Mason had shrunk had vanished.

* * * * *

"Your ladyship will pardon me, but I must insist upon seeing Miss Strange now. I will not keep her long, but it is natural to suppose that she had some reason for her emotion of the other day, and she must, in the cause of justice, tell me what she meant by saying the things she did."

It was a couple of hours after he had re-entered the "New Age" that Gilbert Chase had requested to see her ladyship

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

at the Manor, and he was now in her boudoir, standing before her respectfully, yet firmly. A slight smile of amusement curved Lady Maitland's lips and deepened the violet of her eyes, as she said softly:

"And you really think, Mr. Chase, that that poor child will be able to assist you? Why do you so earnestly desire to speak to her? If I could only assure you of her utter inability to help you."

He bowed gravely, admiring the contour of her face and the creamy loveliness of her hands. The black velvet band that he had noticed before round one perfect wrist had gone, and he found himself wondering whether the donning of it had been a dainty woman's fancy, or whether it had concealed some more subtle motive. Then he pulled himself up with a start. He was actually attributing criminal reasons to the wife of the Chief Constable of Melton!

"I am sorry, your ladyship," he murmured; "but may I ask when it will be convenient to you for me to see Miss Strange? I can call later."

She shrugged her delicate shoulders carelessly. "She is lying down in a nice sleep, but if you will call at the Manor this evening about nine, I will see that she comes down to you. She is staying with us at present, not at the lodge."

He bowed again, feeling himself dismissed by the imperious woman whose beauty, like the perfume from a hothouse flower, overpowered him.

When he had gone, Lady Maitland quickly left her boudoir and went upstairs. Outside the door of one of the bedrooms she paused, and smiled grimly.

"He may call at nine and see her; but I fancy I shall know what she will say first!"

She pushed open the door and walked in. By the side of the bed Ivy was sitting. At the sight of the woman in the doorway she started to her feet, alternately paling and flushing.

"I have come to tell you," her ladyship said coldly, "that the detective is coming to speak to you to-night at nine about the insane words you dropped some time ago in his hearing. If you are not careful," she went on warningly, "you may incriminate someone you profess to love. I wish to impress upon you the necessity of being as reticent as you can, for your own sake—as well as for the sake of others!"

"A detective!" the girl murmured shrinkingly. "Oh, Lady Maitland! I can't see him—I can't! It is awful! He will know—he will find out. And then—and then——"

Her voice broke, and she flung herself down at the elder woman's feet in a tempest of fear.

"Keep me from him! Keep me from him!"

"You little fool!" Lady Maitland hissed. "Pull yourself together. Remember the dead man was—your—*father!* No one knows but you, and—I! It remains with yourself to bury the secret! Mr. Scarlett will forget it."

The girl drew her hand wearily across her brow. She was trembling, and the cold, icy face of the woman above her inspired her with awe and—dread. Oh, if only she had a mother to turn to—a mother into whose arms she could nestle, her heart would not be so sore.

She rose to her feet silently. And the sight of the ruffled hair on the girl's brow made her ladyship draw in her breath with a thrill.

"See!" she said, in a low voice, drawing the girl towards the dressing-table; "if you are in doubt as to your parentage—look! Have you never wondered at the significance of that mark on your forehead? Shall I tell you what it is? It is the brand of a felon! You are scared with the mark of your father's shame—a broad arrow!"

She flung the trembling girl from her with a scornful gesture.

"Now you know why I want you to be careful to-night! A false step on your part will perhaps be your ruin! **Remember!**"

She glided from the room, leaving the shame-stricken girl quivering with the burden of disgrace and ignominy that was too heavy to bear alone.

She pushed the soft hair back from her brow again, and felt with burning fingers the brand of shame with which she was doomed to go through life labelled.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. Her eyes were flashing, and an artificial strength lent energy to her tired limbs.

"They shall never know!" she murmured, "never! Better that I should——" She paused, then shivered.

And the shadows grew darker in the little room where she waited for night to fall.

At nine punctually Gilbert Chase presented himself at the Manor. Lady Maitland received him with quiet dignity, then rang the bell and requested Lawson to inform Miss Strange that she was wanted.

Presently the man returned, looking startled.

"Please, your ladyship, Miss Strange is not in her room; but I saw a note on the table, which I have brought down."

Lady Maitland put out her hand, but the detective interposed quickly:

"Allow me!"

He opened it and read:

"*I shall be gone from Melton when you read this. I could not face that man! Lies come strangely to my lips! I am for ever passing out of your lives. You will keep my secret!*"

He handed it silently to her ladyship, who took and glanced hurriedly at the trembling words. She was glad that this had happened—that the girl had gone, and the smug-faced detective cheated as she had been.

"Well," she said quietly, concealing her satisfaction, "what can be done now, Mr. Chase? The girl has evidently run away terrified. Had we not better let her go?"

Gilbert Chase smiled grimly.

"I fancy not, your ladyship. I shall apply for a warrant for the arrest of Ivy Strange—if alive!"

Lady Maitland sprang to her feet with startling eyes.

"Arrest! What for?" she breathed hoarsely.

He answered her gravely:

"On suspicion of being guilty of, or the accessory after the fact to, the murder of Mike Holland in the spinny!"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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The Deaf of the Present Day.

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Not Love, but Safety.

Cora: "Was it a love-match?" Mabel: "Well, as her money paid his debts, and kept him out of gaol, I should say it was rather a safety match."

She Might be Gone.

"Harry, please don't whistle 'The Girl I left Behind Me.'" "Why not, Clara?" "You know we haven't any idea whether the servant will be there when we get back home or not."

Success was Impossible.

Bill: "They tried to get cinematograph pictures of the actress when she was writing a stage letter." Gill: "How did it turn out?" "Failure! She wrote too fast for the machine to follow her."

Poor Pickings.

Carrie News: "Have you noticed the change that's come over Mr. Dudell lately? Something has been preying on his mind for the last two weeks." May Cutting: "It surely must be starved by this time, whatever it is."

An Easy Remedy.

"They say that Nell Gadleigh has broken off her engagement with Harry Hippleson." "Yes, she says he was so affectionate that he wearied her." "Oh! if that was all, why didn't she just marry him and have done with the wearisome part of it?"

Circumstances Alter Cases.

Husband: "What was that you were playing, my dear?" Wife: "Did you like it?" "It was lovely!—the melody divine, the harmony exquisite!" "It is the very thing I played last evening, and you said it was horrid." "Well, the steak was burnt last evening."

What's Bred in the Bone.

"So you think there really is something in heredity, after all?" "I do. Young Mundsley, who is trying to get up a North Pole expedition, is the son of a woman who used to be an inveterate house-hunter, not because she could have used a house if she had found one, but for the mere love of the thing."

Hard to Convince.

The other morning Mrs. Blank was talking to her husband. "I noticed in *The Daily Hoodoo* that Mr. Blifkins died on Sunday." "It's a mistake, my dear," replied the husband; "he died on Monday." "But the paper said Sunday." "I know it, but it was an error in the print." "I thought so, too, at first, but I got a half-dozen copies of the paper, and it was the same in all of them. They certainly couldn't have made the same mistake over and over again." The husband tried to convince her, but it was no use, and he gave it up.

What Might be Expected.

Gladys: "Isn't it odd that the honeymoon should last but a month?" Rich: "Not so very odd; bills are sent out monthly, you know."

Didn't Want Another.

"No," said Miss Elder, kindly but firmly, "I cannot marry you, but I'll be a——" "Thanks, Miss Elder," interrupted the rejected one spitefully, "but I have two grandmothers."

She'd Drawn Her Conclusions.

He: "I can't get away from my business. I'm wedded to it." She: "I always thought the things that men were wedded to were the very things they seemed to get away from the most."

Sale Made at Once.

"Are those shoes your best quality?" "We have only one quality, madam." "Then why the difference in price? A friend of mine paid 22s. yesterday, and these are only 18s." "We sell by quantity, madam." Quick sale.

Not a Society Person.

Mrs. Nexdoor: "I have found out one thing about that Mrs. Newcomer. Whoever she is, she has never moved in good society." Mr. Nexdoor: "How do you know that?" Mrs. Nexdoor: "She shakes hands as if she meant it."

A Word of Warning.

"Henrietta, dear!" "Yes, ma," from the daughter at the door, parting from her sweetheart, who is just kissing her good-night. "Tell George to look out for the paint." George does not kiss her again. Henrietta thinks it is awfully mean of her mother to give her away, until she remembers that the front gate has been just newly-painted.

It Couldn't be Done.

"It doesn't seem possible." "What's that, my dear?" "Why, Mr. Atkinson, the statistician, says that all the people in the world could stand in a field ten miles square." "Well, they couldn't." "But, hubby, Mr. Atkinson says so." "I don't care if he does. You don't suppose a woman could stand in a crowd like that, do you?" "Why not?" "Because nobody could see her clothes."

The Price of Tears.

A number of married men were recently dining together in a club house. The question was asked, "What trait in your wife do you consider the most expensive one?" The answers were as numerous as the men in the party. With one it was vanity, another religion, or charity, or love of dress. The last man to whom the question was put answered oracularly: "Her tears." There was a sudden burst of assent from every man in the party.

Men Require Catching.

She: "This is an awfully long play. The hero does not marry the heroine until the close of the fifth act. Five acts are too many." He: "But you forget that this is a modern love story, and the scene is laid in the present day. An author must make his play natural and true to life. Formerly love plays were quite short; but nowadays the men are so shy, from being hunted so much, that it takes the most attractive woman a long time to run a man down and capture him."

Too Enthusiastic.

"Teaching to me," said the enthusiastic young schoolmistress, "is a holy calling. To sow in the young mind the seeds of future knowledge and watch them as they grow and develop is a pleasure greater than I can tell. I never weary of my work. I think only of——" "I am very sorry," interrupted the young man to whom she was talking, "that you are so devoted to your profession, Miss Clara. I had hoped that some day I might have asked—in fact I called to-night to—but I hardly dare go on in the light of what you have just been saying." "You may go on, Mr. Smith," said the young lady softly. "I am a little too enthusiastic at times, perhaps."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

A Strong Bond.

"F. G. A."—I regret I have not May's address, so cannot tell you whether or not she is the same girl. However, if the answer I gave to her meets the case of yourself and your beloved I am very pleased. Naturally the same questions must occur in dozens of different cases, and the same advice can be taken by all. So to you I say, if you have been intimate with a girl for three years there must be some bond strong enough to inspire hopes of love in future.

A Word on Shoelaces.

"WOULD it be proper for a girl to allow a young man to tie her shoelace for her when she has only spoken to him once or twice?" asks THISTLE.

* * * * *

There's no reason why he should not perform such an act of courtesy. It is not a matter of the length of your acquaintance. But don't tie your shoes too loosely when walking about with young men you only know very slightly.

Not a Matrimonial Agency.

"DULL" wants to meet a young lady upon whom he could bestow his affections. He is a stranger in London, twenty-three, fairly tall, and in a good permanent position.

* * * * *

I cannot agree, "DULL," to your suggestion that I should be the means of introducing you to any lady readers. As I have often said, this page is for advice, and not any kind of agency. My advice to you is to live in as select a neighbourhood as your means allow, and by joining in local church work, amateur theatricals, tennis clubs, or musical gatherings, get yourself into the society of those women amongst whom you are likely to meet the one you seek. Nobody need really be "dull" in London if they only go the right way to work to make good friends.

The Age for Independence.

UNTIL what age should a girl obey her parents in her choice of a sweetheart? For instance, "CECILIA" is deeply in love with a young man to whom her parents have taken objection. "CECILIA" is seventeen, and wishes to know if she is old enough to stick to the young man, whether or not her parents approve of him.

* * * * *

"CECILIA" is certainly too young to disobey her parents in such a matter. They must be very much better judges as to a young man's suitability for her than she herself, and no doubt they have very excellent reasons for objecting to him. My advice is that "CECILIA" should do as her parents tell her about breaking off the engagement. Had she been, say, four years older, she might claim to use her own judgment in the matter.

Respect versus Love.

"J. A. R."—No, I do not think the case you refer to is the same as your own. But the answer will apply in your case. You say you respect and like the older man more than anybody else you know, and that your relationship with the younger has never developed into love.

* * * * *

Well, if you can definitely say you like and respect a man, that is almost strong enough ground on which to listen to his proposal, especially as the man to whom you refer seems devoted to you, and to be a gentleman in the highest sense. If you really like and admire him, depend on it in years to come the sentiment will mature into something deeper.

Getting a Proposal.

"EDITH" knows that her young man loves her, but though they have been walking out together for several years, he has never told her so. Her friends say it is about time they were engaged. Should she tell him this, or should she let him know by strategy?

* * * * *

He is evidently very nervous and reserved. Perhaps you had better leave the matter of speaking to him to your parents or guardian. He must confess something to them, and they are usually more skilful in the matter of extracting such things than a girl herself. Naturally you wish the matter to be settled. Strategy is dangerous, unless very skilful. I know of a girl who brought about a proposal by the simple device of flirting with others. I do not recommend this, though in some cases it has been very successful.

An Indifferent Lover.

"U. L." suspects her young man of being tired of her. They have been together for two years and a half, but lately he has grown very different in his manner. When asked the reason he told "U. L." that "he thought they saw too much of each other." "U. L." says they meet twice, at dinner-time and tea-time, and every night regularly. He lodges next door. How can "U. L." alter his attitude?

* * * * *

Well, "U. L.," it is quite possible for young lovers to see each other too often. A man ought to have certain intervals in which to see his friends or take exercise, and naturally he does chafe a little if always in his sweetheart's company. Why not suggest that he should transfer his lodgings for awhile to some other district? No doubt he is very fond of you, and after a week or so of absence would probably return to you fonder than ever. I have known such little absences work wonders in restoring jaded lovers to a proper state of warmth.

Choosing Between Two Girls.

"A YOUNG man knows two girls. From their manner he believes both are in love with him. One is bright and sparkling, the other sedate and fond of home life. He cannot decide which to marry. What is he to do?"

* * * * *

My correspondent had better leave off meeting the girls altogether. If possible, let him pay distinct attentions to one or other of them without committing himself to a proposal, and if he finds that he is growing in love with her, let him stick to her. Most men would select the bright, sparkling girl in preference. I do not know my correspondent's own temperament, so cannot say what is the case with him.

* * * * *

Usually the best marriages are between those who are opposite in the matter of "brightness and frivolity." Two of that kind are very likely to clash. A serious man is well suited in "a bright, sparkling wife," and a "bright, sparkling man" generally requires a sedate, home-loving wife to see that his vivacity does not lead him astray.

Cynthia

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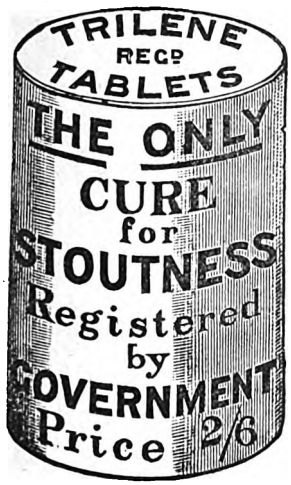
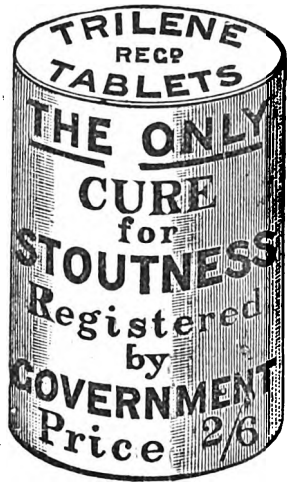


For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says "I weighed 12st. 6lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1899: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have don world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 33 inches. I hope soon to be 32. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 87 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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"No Better Food."

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Dr. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., etc., *lecturing on Foods, says: "The chief text in the Gospel of Nutrition is that Tea and Coffee are not Foods at all, while Cocoa is an admirable and sustaining diet. Than* **FRY'S PURE CONCENTRATED COCOA,** *no better food product of this nature can be obtained or used."*

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

SHORT STORIES

No. 760.] Week ending July 25th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Glaring through the window was a weird-looking man, holding up a hand which had lost the tops of two fingers.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Face at the Window." See inside.)

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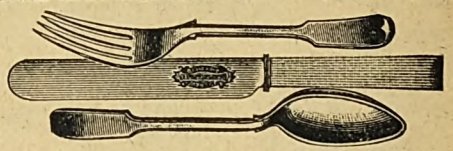
... THE ...

"ENTERPRISE" PARCEL, 25/-

Of Household Cutlery and Plate.

Containing: 6 Table Knives and 6 Dessert Knives, made of reliable Sheffield Steel and fitted with polished white 'Ivorette' Handles. "Ivorette" is the best substitute for genuine African Ivory. The Plate consists of 6 Table Forks, 6 Dessert Forks, 2 Table Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Tea Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, 2 Salt Spoons, 1 Pair of Sugar Tongs, 1 Moist Sugar Spoon and 1 Pickle Fork.

The Spoons and Forks are made of "Columbian" Silver, a hard white metal. It is the finest substitute for Sterling Silver known, will wear white throughout, and is unaffected by acids or exposure.



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FREE TRIAL PACKET on receipt of postcard to SAPON Ltd., Dept. 68, St. Swithin's Chambers, London.

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Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

Short Stories

No. 760.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 25th, 1903.

The Face at the Window.

Telling of a Ring and its History.

"MISS MORETON, Elsie! I must call you by that dear name! Let me tell you how I love you, how all-consuming is my passion! Nay, do not turn from me. Surely the objections which weighed in my disfavour eighteen months ago are no longer existent, and you can find some love, some pity, for me in your noble heart! Let me tell you what I have endured! Only let me plead my cause!"

The girl was startled by the passion that would show itself in spite of the speaker's efforts to suppress it. She saw the yearning look in his eyes, the agony of suspense in his whole countenance; at the first words she had involuntarily shrunk from his touch, although it was merely the placing of his hand lightly on her arm, but now came the revulsion of feeling. She was doing him an injustice and she was sorry.

"I am not turning from you, Mr. Kirke," she said hesitatingly. "But you startled me, and——" She stopped, but continued hurriedly as she observed that he was about to speak. "I was not expecting this! I feel that the time is hardly appropriate. My poor father has been dead scarcely twelve months, and Ralph——" Her lips quivered; she could say no more.

A strange expression flitted across his face; he bent over her hand and kissed it, and when he raised his head again his face was calm.

"It may seem so to you, Elsie," he said, more quietly and still making use of her Christian name. "To me, consumed by a passion which I can scarcely restrain, it is long, so long! Do not think that I wish you to forget those whom we both mourn, but would even they wish you to hug the cup of sorrow all through life! If they were not selfish——"

"Oh, no!" she broke in. "Ralph was the most unselfish of men, and my father too would not wish it. Yet it is not possible to efface grief so soon!"

Kirke bowed.

"Still, may I not dare hope that there is some chance of my having the supreme joy of devoting my life to making you happy? The tender memories will rise at times, but I shall not mind. Was not Ralph Moreton, your cousin, a friend to me? I did not grudge him his success in winning you, and I willingly stood aside; but since his untimely end, only a short time before that of your father, I have felt that I—— Elsie, dear, don't weep! I am so sorry!"

The tears had started to the girl's eyes. Fate had been very cruel to her during the past few months; she had lost her lover, who had died in Egypt, and her father, whose sudden death from heart failure had left her an orphan and heiress to much wealth.

The double blow had caused a breakdown in health, and had made her think that life had no further attraction for her. Youth, however, is buoyant, and time is a great healer or killer of pain, so she had recovered some of her old cheerfulness and much of her interest in life. Nevertheless, this incident had opened the old wounds and the pain was severe!

Basil Kirke watched her emotion with concealed vexation. His annoyance, it must be said, was tempered by a certain amount of gratification at the reflection that the girl had not rejected his advances; there was yet hope!

"I can afford to wait," he murmured inaudibly. "I have made the first open step, and I can go on! I may safely leave matters as they are for the moment; it will be unwise to push them further now."

Aloud, he said:

"Elsie, forgive me! I will not distress you by pleading my cause further. Some other time you will listen to me. I have bared my heart to you, and you will not wound it thoughtlessly?"

It was an artful speech, and had the desired effect. Elsie exclaimed:

"Oh, no, no! I feel so sorry for you, and I will try to——" Then she remembered the significance of her words and cut short the sentence in confusion.

Basil murmured something about leaving her to herself, and rose to depart. He shook hands with her and left the room; he knew the house well enough, and could let himself out as he had done before.

"Dear me!" So ran Basil Kirke's thoughts as he reached

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the hall and took his hat. "What a change in my sentiments. When she gently told me that she could not accept me, less than eighteen months ago, I wasn't so upset about not having her as I was because I saw that my rejection meant that I must do something more serious than love-making, and in another direction, if I was to get the old gentleman's money!

"But now I am really and truly in love with her, madly in love with her! I have risked the result of——" he involuntarily glanced round to see if even his thoughts had been overheard, and his face paled a little—"of what I did at great risk, in order to win that girl! I mean to have the money, but I want her as well *now!* Without her, what will it be?

"How strange that I should change so! What a wonderful power this sweet girl has obtained over me. I almost regret—— Bah! I can get through that! Sometimes her soft eyes will appear to be casting reproaches at me, but it will be nothing more than fancy on my part, for she will know nothing! How can she?"

He was staring at his reflection in the mirror in the hall-stand, staring without seeing; he came to himself with a start, and hurried towards the door.

As he placed his hand on the lock to open the door, he grated the knuckle of his forefinger against a sharp corner; it did not remove the skin, but he sprang back as if a serpent had bitten him.

"I had forgotten it," he said aloud, evidently referring to something other than the sharp corner on the lock. "Shall I ask her now or wait? Wait! No, it isn't safe; I ought to have asked for it sooner!"

Elsie was surprised to see him re-enter. She had dried her eyes, and was deep in thought.

"I came back to ask you what has become of that ring which I gave to your father on my return from the East," he told her. "Do you still keep it locked up in a box? I should like to destroy it! I always feel that it is unlucky and I reproach myself for having yielded to your father's love of curios. I have a creepy sort of feeling that it carries misfortune. Your father's death followed so soon after he had it, and I tremble now lest it should bring bad luck to you."

"Fancy you becoming superstitious!" Elsie smiled. "If it contained a wonderful stone which had once formed the eye of a wooden god in a temple and the Hindoos were after it, and so on—you know all the rest."

"Oh, there's nothing of that nonsense about it," he remarked, trying to imitate her light tone. "It didn't come from India at all; there's no stone in it, and it wouldn't fit the finger of an idol! No, you may rest quite easy on that score. Yet, I would rather have it and destroy it."

Elsie shook her head. "It hasn't brought ill-luck to me, and I have had it for a year in my box. It is quaint, and I thought I would wear it sometimes. See, I have it on now."

She stretched out her hand, at the same time he put forward his right hand as if to catch her arm; the movements were quick on both sides, and Elsie's hand slid along his cuff. His ear caught a grating sound, and he nearly cried aloud.

"What is the matter?" asked Elsie, noticing his perturbation.

Basil glanced hastily at his wrist and found that the skin was intact; on his shirt cuff was a scratch that seemed full of significance to him. He repressed a shudder with difficulty, and replied, in a voice that still showed signs of mental uneasiness:

"Oh, it is nothing. I must be a trifle shaken to-day—which is not extraordinary perhaps," he added, with a meaning glance. "Yes, I see that you are wearing the ring, and I want you to give it to me!"

"I will not encourage your superstitious fears," she retorted, with a laugh. "No, I have taken a fancy to it. It was a tight fit for my father's little finger, but it fits my third finger fairly well—just a little easy, but that is all. I intend to wear it to show that you are quite wrong!"

He was forced to give up the attempt, but his face was white and his expression hard, as he left the house.

Elsie took the ring from her finger and examined it. There was nothing particularly attractive about it; she wore it merely because it had belonged to her father, and it was taken from his lifeless fingers.

It was made of gold, with curious carved work all over it; in the place where a stone is usually set in rings of that shape, there was simply a boss of gold also carved with fine lines in fantastic patterns.

"I thought I heard it scratch something," she mused, her brows slightly contracting in the process of examining the hoop of gold. "And I thought once before that it caught in my dress. I don't see anything spiky, though!"

She replaced it on her finger and wore it till she retired for the night, when she put it back in the box where it had lain since her father's death.

"I will give way to his wishes," she said, a blush suffusing her cheeks. "Ought I to mourn so long? Perhaps I am wrong; perhaps I ought not to shut myself off from my fellow creatures, as I have been doing. And what am I to say to Basil Kirke? He has waited, faithful, to the words he spoke eighteen months ago. He still loves me—he loves me more than ever, if I read him aright! Oh, Ralph, Ralph, my love!"

She flung herself on her knees in front of a chair, above which hung the portrait of a handsome young man of three-and-twenty, strong, straight-forward, and bold; she buried her face in the cushions of the chair and wept.

Basil's persistence won for him a good place in the estimation of Elsie; she did not love him, but she recognised that she might do so in time. She threw off her sombre dress and emerged still more from retirement in order to accept the invitations which kind-hearted friends poured upon her.

She went to parties, to exclusive teas, and to many society functions, and she commenced to take much more interest in her surroundings.

Basil rejoiced; he was not rich—in fact, it was usually a struggle to prevent creditors from taking the final disagreeable step of issuing a summons for debt—yet he contrived to obtain invitations for most of the functions at which Elsie Moreton was present, and he engaged her attention as much as the conventionalities would permit.

At the end of another month he flattered himself that he was making splendid headway. True, Elsie had gently corrected him for using her front name, and he called her Miss Moreton, but she had done it in a way that suggested to him that he would have the right to call her Elsie before long.

The matter of the ring had only been mentioned once; that was when he asked her if she had put it safely away and she replied that it was in the little carved box on her dressing-table.

Elsie Moreton and the elderly lady who lived with her and managed the house, had arranged to attend a parochial entertainment on a particular Wednesday evening. On the very morning, Basil came to Elsie with three stall tickets

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for a special performance of a merry comic opera which was taking the town by storm, and he was visibly disappointed when he found that Elsie and "the dragon" could not go.

"I am very sorry, but I am positive that I mentioned this entertainment to you quite a week ago," protested Elsie. "How odd that you should have forgotten! Do you not recollect my telling you about the different things which the parish children had made? The poor children, I mean!"

Basil professed utter ignorance, but he passed the affair off lightly, saying that he would go alone. His face wore an expression the opposite of vexation when he left her presence and found himself alone.

Elsie and her escort attended the entertainment that evening, returning about half-past eleven. The two servants had been told not to sit up, as Miss Moreton and Miss Bland would take supper with the vicar after the entertainment and would be home late. The two ladies, therefore, let themselves in, and at once proceeded to their respective bedrooms.

Elsie was busy with her thoughts as she entered her own room, or she would have noticed that a light was burning. It was not till she had taken off her gloves and was extracting the pin from her hat that the fact struck her.

"How careless of Lydia," she murmured, moving towards a wardrobe in the corner. "She——"

At that moment, a muffled figure dashed from the wardrobe and made for the window. Elsie was a girl of considerable nerve, but this sudden appearance unnerved her for a moment, and in that time the intruder had reached the window, threw it open, and scrambled out.

Recovering herself quickly, Elsie sprang after him, but was too late; the burglar had dropped to the ledge overhanging the door, and from this point easily reached the ground. Elsie raised an alarm, but it was too late, and the robber escaped.

In the confusion and excitement that followed, Elsie was the only one of the four who kept her self-possession.

While a maid summoned a policeman, she examined her room to see what had been taken. Certainly it would be jewellery, which the thief could easily slip into his pockets, for he had taken no parcel with him, and he had not left a packed bag in the hiding place from which he had been driven by Elsie's approach.

She looked in her boxes, but nothing was missing. How fortunate! She had disturbed him. She shut up the boxes, but another thought took possession of her, and she again looked in the carved box in which she kept the strange ring; it was gone!

Elsie was puzzled. Why should anyone rob her of that ring? There were others far more valuable in the same box. For an instant the old story of Hindoos tracking and recovering a consecrated treasure came to her mind, but she dismissed it with disdain. That was no Hindoo whom she had disturbed, A Hindoo would have done the thing more artfully. It was a mystery.

Elsie decided not to mention the fact to the policeman, so that official looked important, and decided that the rascal had been disturbed before he had had time to plunder the house. He promised that inquiry would be made, but Elsie seized the chance and said that she did not wish to be further troubled, as she had lost nothing.

It was two days later when Basil came to tell her about the performance, and to hear her account of the parochial entertainment. He also brought two invitations to a ball to be held a week later.

"I want you to come with me!" he pleaded. "Will you?"

It would be tantamount to an announcement of their engagement, but somehow she could not resist. She seemed to be under a fascination; the fierce passion that lighted up his eyes acted strangely upon her.

Moreover, she was upset by the theft of the ring; now that the excitement had worn off, the mystery disquieted her. Perhaps there was some tragedy connected with that golden hoop, after all!

Perhaps—horrible thought!—it was not unconnected with her father's death! She felt that she was becoming hysterical, and she was glad of his protection.

She told him of the mysterious occurrence, and he looked very grave.

"I am thankful that it is gone," he said, and his tone was so sincere that it admitted of no doubt. Then he saw his advantage and he took it. "I should never forgive myself if I once became convinced that it was that ring which brought about your father's death!" he cried vehemently. "And to think that it was I who gave it to him."

Tender-hearted Elsie responded immediately.

"It wouldn't have been your fault in any case," she said gently. "It was done in ignorance; and, even supposing the idea to be correct, the responsibility rests with those who encompassed his death, and not with the innocent giver of the ring. But all this is foolishness on my part; I am distraught; we will not talk of it any more."

The subject was dropped, but, try as she would, Elsie could not entirely rid herself of the sensation of dread that had attacked her. She was easily startled now; sometimes the slamming of a door made her jump. The "dragon" insisted that a change of scene was necessary, and it was decided that they should have it after the ball.

The change did come after the ball, but it was different from their expectations.

Elsie roused herself for that night; she looked radiantly lovely, and created no small amount of envy among less physically-gifted and less wealthy young ladies; Basil was envied for his good luck by half the men present, and he knew it, but this made him the more happy.

It was a brilliant success, every dance on Elsie's card was claimed, and she had to dance them all. The music, the intoxication of exquisite dancing, and all the other attributes of a ball of that description had their effect on her, and she banished care and sorrow in order to enjoy life to the full.

The only bar to Basil's thorough enjoyment was the fact that he did not get a chance of drawing Elsie into the conservatory in order to ask her to be his wife.

"I must try to get my opportunity this evening!" he murmured. "I ought not to let this evening slip! But how? The dragon will be in the carriage with us!"

He left the ladies in order to make inquiry about the carriage, and returned with a look of vexation plainly visible on his countenance.

"There seems to have been some misunderstanding," he said gloomily. "Our carriage has not arrived! It is past the stated time, so I fear that it will not come. I have had to hunt up two hansom cabs! Couldn't do better!"

He conducted them to the entrance, and, by some manipulation and before Miss Bland realised what had happened, he placed her in one cab and sent it off, thus securing Elsie for himself. He was very careful about placing her in the conveyance, allowing her ample time to arrange her dress so as to avoid undue crushing, and then he got in, and away they went by another route. Basil was exultant; here was his opportunity, and he would make use of it as soon as they were fairly on the way.

"It's a good maxim that says you can *make* opportunities if you have a mind to do so!" he thought.

He turned to Elsie. Her face had lost its animation; some-

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thing seemed to oppress her. The sentiment appeared to affect him also; it was like a damp cloud falling round them, a premonition of coming evil.

He endeavoured to shake it off, and opened his lips to speak, but a frightened cry from Elsie caused him to look in the same direction. The sight filled him with terror.

Glaring at him through the window of the cab, with the light shining full upon him, was a man—a man with a weird aspect, wearing a strange head-covering, and holding up a hand which had lost the tops of two fingers!

The apparition vanished, and Basil fell back in the cab, shaking with fear. Elsie, greatly frightened also, was unable to say anything.

Basil did not recover his self-possession. The cab reached its destination, the dragon was ready to receive Elsie, but Basil could only muster up strength to shout out his own address and the cab rolled away, leaving the astonished women looking after it in blank surprise!

Elsie waited for Basil Kirke to appear on the following morning and make some explanation and apology, but when the visitor was announced by the maid it was in these words: "A gentleman wishes to see you, miss; but he will not give his name."

Before Elsie could reply, the stranger pushed his way in and the maid retired.

"Ralph!" Elsie gasped. "Ralph! I thought——"

Then she fainted in the arms of the lover whom she had believed to be dead.

"But how is it?" she asked later. "How did the horrid mistake occur, and how——"

"I came upon you too suddenly!" he interrupted regretfully. "I couldn't wait. I will tell you all about it.

"Basil Kirke tried to kill me. He wanted money, and he had resolved to have it. He determined to get rid of those who stood in his way—me, your father, and yourself! If I died, your father would leave all his money to you, and I should not be able to marry you, naturally. As you had rejected him once, so spoiling the chance of getting the money easily, he thought you would refuse again, and you were to be sacrificed!

"He did it, as he thought, by means of that ring. It had a receptacle under that boss of gold, with a tiny spring which, when the ring was pressed, caused a tiny point to protrude and scratch. That point, when hidden, rested in poison of the most virulent type.

"A mere scratch would cause death in two or three minutes, and the symptoms of death were those of syncope! You probably never discovered it, but when the upper part of the ring was pressed against the finger on which the ring was placed, that pressure caused the point to protrude from the outer and upper portion of the ring, ready to scratch!

"He tried it on me, and scratched me. My Hindoo servant sucked the poison out of the wound, for he knew what it was. Basil came in just in time to see him doing it, and he scratched the faithful fellow on the upper joint of two fingers. To save himself from death, the Hindoo lopped off the top joints without hesitation.

"Basil fled, believing that we should both die; but the Hindoo was safe, and he had done enough for me to preserve my life. The effect of the poison on me, however, was to rob me of reason and keep me in bodily weakness for many months."

"But why did someone not send word home?" asked Elsie.

"Because Basil had robbed me of all my belongings that might have shown my identity, and my servant, having been engaged by me as a temporary help in Egypt, knew nothing about me. Then we came home, and my servant tracked Basil, and saw him in the cab last night.

"In the meantime I had learnt, with the greatest grief, that your father had fallen a victim! Yes, it was so!

"Basil fell madly in love with you, and that fact saved you! He tried to win you, and so spoilt his own plan. Thank Heaven! He was arrested this morning, and confessed his infamy. The ring is in his possession now, it seems."

"Then it was he who entered my room the other night."

"Yes," returned Ralph gravely. "Now let us forget it. We are re-united and we will strive to make each other happy after much suffering, dear!"

George Day.

METCALF'S BOOMERANG.

Which Brought Great Trouble on his Household.

"Mrs. Metcalf," said the magistrate, "do I understand that you make a charge of assault and battery against Mr. Metcalf?"

"Not exactly, your worship; you see——"

"One minute," said Metcalf. "Permit me to explain the matter. Is your worship acquainted with the Australian boomerang?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, you will know that the peculiarity of the boomerang is when you throw it forward it flies backward and hits something behind you."

"When you throw it behind you what does it do?"

"Comes straight to the front. On Tuesday I bent the kitchen poker into the boomerang shape and began to study the scientific aspects of this remarkable weapon."

"What for?"

"Partly for the sake of developing scientific truth, partly for the purpose of killing ducks. If I want to kill a duck with a boomerang what do I do? I walk away from him. I go off in the opposite direction. This lulls suspicion in the duck's mind. Suddenly I take careful aim, say at Jones' man who is chopping wood in the next yard. I let fly, and the first thing you know is that the boomerang has gone whooping over my shoulder and killed the duck—dead—dead—dead as Julius Cæsar. It's one of the most beautiful sights in the world."

"Did you ever kill one that way?"

"Well, that is just the point. No, I did not. I am practising. This is what has excited Mrs. Metcalf. Wednesday morning, while I was in the yard trying the thing, I forgot. I aimed at the bird-cage in the porch, and the poker went over my head and straight through the kitchen window. I apologised to Mrs. Metcalf, and tried again. This time I aimed right at the kiethen window, intending to hit the bird-cage behind me. The boomerang must have got twisted somehow, for the scientific principle was temporarily suspended, and she went bang through the kitchen window again."

"Did it strike Mrs. Metcalf?"

"Struck her head, your worship. But I explained and bent the poker back to the proper angle. Then I aimed at the pump and let her fly. She went up, turned over, flew behind me, and nearly brained Matilda, the servant girl, who was coming out of the coal cellar with a scuttle of coals, unhappily, at that moment."

"Where is Matilda?"

"In the hospital. She is having a trepan—a kind of trap-door let into her skull. She will sue me as soon as she comes out. It is hard to suffer for scientific truth."

"But have you managed to hit any ducks yet?"

"I'll tell you. I caught a duck and tied it down to a gooseberry bush. I projected the boomerang at that duck two hundred and seventy-three times, not counting once when it slipped. I hit everything within forty feet of the bird; I hit all the loose ducks and chickens; I smashed the glass in the hot-bed; I sent the poker twice through a sheet on the clothes-line; I dug up all the flower-beds, smashed eleven flower pots, ruined two young peach trees, broke the top off the pump, and maimed one pet dog for life, but I never hit my particular duck once, I don't know why. Probably I haven't got the hang of the thing yet."

"And Mrs. Metcalf wants you to stop practising, does she?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm going to learn, if I have to go out to Australia to get the knack of it."

"Well, I hold you in £100 not to fling that boomerang again outside Australia until you learn how."

"Very well, your worship, but I'll leave for there by the first train to-morrow."

O. P. Arson.

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THE MAKING OF A MATCH.

How a Blind Girl Helped Two Lovers.

EVERY day the blind girl sat in her accustomed place facing the park.

She sold matches in little blue boxes at a penny each. A gentleman who lived at one of the houses close by frequently gave her sixpence for a box, and he never omitted to wish her "Good morning!" when he passed, and he talked to her as if she could see like other people, which pleased her very much, and she looked for his coming. She would lift her small face to him and smile as she thanked him, her beautiful blue eyes gazing blankly into his.

A card was round her neck hung by an old piece of black ribbon, bearing the words, "Totally blind."

The girl knew her benefactor's footsteps quite well; she could easily distinguish them from many others on the pavement at the same time.

She felt sure he was young, his step was so buoyant—and rich, for he constantly rode in cabs—and handsome, with curly hair, and dark eyes, like the heroes of stories that her grandmother read to her.

One day he asked her if she liked flowers, and when she said yes he gave her his button-hole, which was a beautiful gardenia, and she took it home that night and the grandmother pronounced it to be a "camilla," but in her young day she said they never smelt nice like this one. After that he constantly gave her his button-hole when he came home about seven o'clock before going out again.

One afternoon he had ladies to tea with him. They alighted from a carriage just beside the blind girl. Their dresses rustled, and they smelt deliciously of scent.

"Remember, Violet," one said, "it is no good your ever thinking of Harold St. Leger, he is only a younger son."

The other one laughed as she answered:

"My dear mother, he has not proposed to me yet." They went up the steps and the blind girl heard no more.

In about an hour's time they came out again and the harsher voice was thanking their host volubly for "such a pleasant time," and the silent listener on the pavement imagined the speaker was getting into her carriage as the gentleman said in an undertone, she thought, to the other lady, "Till to-morrow!—all the waltzes after No. 10."

There was no answer audible, and the carriage drove away.

The blind girl knew quite well that waltzes were dances, and dances were associated in her mind with beautiful piano-organs, which came and played in their street, and thrilled her strangely.

The music gave her visions of a world where no one was blind, and the men and women were like angels who danced all day long with rhythmic motions, in diaphanous draperies—and sang beautiful songs.

The blind girl helped to support her grandmother, who was bedridden but active enough in mind.

Jane kept her informed of the doings of the outside world in which the older woman had never lost her interest since she had been housemaid in "good families."

The girl would tell her of the crowds of carriages, the silk dresses which rustled by her, and little snatches of conversation which she overheard; and the shoutings of the newspaper boys were never missed. The old woman liked to hear of the great people who died and was duly interested in any "'orrible crime."

Jane told her of the kind gentleman who gave her sixpences instead of pennies, and the grandmother speculated as to who he could be; she surmised he was a "Member of Parliament," which was the greatest honour she could confer on him, for she had lived ten years in the family of a rich M.P., and she never tired of talking of the parties they gave in the season.

Jane had been doing very well lately, and as it was summer her grandmother thought the girl should have a new ribbon round her well-worn sailor hat and she commissioned a friendly neighbour to purchase a small length of a nice "maginta" or blue ribbon—blue of the shade known as "rial," for choice.

With the encouragement of the new adornment Mrs. Richards bade her granddaughter find out who her unknown benefactor was.

That morning the familiar footsteps approached as usual about eleven o'clock, but, alas! they passed her by without a greeting. He did not take a hansom that morning and she noticed that he walked slowly and heavily.

About two o'clock, when the streets were quieter, he came back, but not alone, and with him walked one of the ladies who had had tea with him—the one who had the nicer voice. The girl recognised her by the perfume she used. They walked up and down in front of the camp stool and its occupant, who heard their conversation quite clearly.

"Mother says if I don't marry Stornoway she will take me abroad at once, and I shall certainly never be allowed to write to you."

"Oh, darling, why am I doomed to poverty? Why am I not my elder brother?"

"I should not like you if you were."

"And I am not rich enough to give you the luxuries you ought to have."

"Oh, yes, you are, I know my own requirements; all the same, Harold, just at present I dare not see you again, it will be better for us not to meet for a bit."

"It is like starving a man—and I can't even have a crumb of comfort in the shape of a letter."

"No, dear; but trust me as I trust you."

"I do, darling."

"Good-bye!" and the blind girl imagined their hands were clasped; then the lady hurried away and the "gentleman" went straight to his house and the door slammed.

The next day he came as usual and walked straight to Jane.

"Good morning. Where's my box of matches?" and he tendered sixpence.

"Here, sir." And the blind girl lifted her sightless blue eyes to his face as she handed him a box.

He lit a cigarette.

"Isn't it awfully dull sitting here all day?"

"No, sir."

"Would you like me to try to get you into a home where they teach you to make all sorts of things?"

She hesitated before replying. "No, thank you, sir. I should miss the streets; it is so cheerful 'ere."

"Ye gods!" the man involuntarily exclaimed, "I wish I possessed your philosophy."

Jane Richards had the magenta ribbon in her hat and she remembered the grannie's injunctions to discover "the gentleman's" identity.

"Please, sir," she said timidly, "are you a lord?"

The man laughed outright.

"No; why do you ask?"

"Me and grandmother was wondering who you are. Grandmother expects you are a Member of Parliament."

The man laughed again.

"Oh, no, I am nothing but a younger son—my father is a lord, but that's no help to me—it is rather a drawback. I have two brothers older than myself."

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Jane was breathless with interest, but he was not disposed to tell her any more of the family history; he changed the conversation by asking her if she would like some fruit.

The blind girl hesitated—this time from shyness, but she finally said she would.

"Very well, come into my house, and my housekeeper will give you anything you like."

Very gently he led her up the steps, and when his man appeared bade him tell Mrs. Stiggins to give her whatever she liked to eat and drink.

This was a great day of events to detail to grannie, but she knew she would be disappointed that "the gentleman" was not a "Member of Parliament."

The London season was drawing to a close—on a Friday evening towards the end of July the evening newspapers had only one special piece of information to impart to their readers, and this the small boys shouted to the detriment of their vocal organs:

"Engigement of Lord Stonway!"

"Son of the Markiss of Ross about to marry!"

The door of the Hon. Harold St. Leger's house was opened and he himself called a paper boy, and then the door closed again. The blind girl heard. She, too, asked a boy for a paper as he passed her.

"Yer can't see to read," he jeered.

"No, but here's an 'apenny if yer'll jest read me the name of the lady that's going to marry that lord."

And the boy condescendingly spelt out the name of the Hon. Violet Staples.

The blind girl's heart beat with excitement and sympathy for "the gentleman."

Luggage was lifted on to a cab the next morning and he went away without a word of farewell to her.

The heat was stifling. Jane asked the girl who fetched her in the evenings not to come till nine o'clock as she got more air sitting there than in the stuffy little rooms at home.

It was nearly nine one evening a week later, when a cab dashed up and a lady hastily alighted, dismissed the hansom, stood still a moment, then walked a few steps one way, then as quickly turned and walked back again.

He placed an exquisite bouquet in her lap.

The blind girl instantly recognised the familiar rustle of her skirts, accompanied by a perfume which reminded her of lilac.

Up and down, up and down went the footsteps. Jane could hear her breathing rapidly, and occasionally she stamped her foot on the pavement in an agony of impatience.

"Can he have gone?" she murmured half-aloud. "He said if I was not here by eight o'clock he would know there was no hope," and she referred to a letter crushed in her hand.

The blind girl decided on action, and guided by a stick and her ears, she approached the lady.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but the gentleman 'as gone—he went about a quarter of an hour ago."

The lady started.

"What do you mean? How do you know I am waiting for anyone?" she asked guardedly but eagerly.

"I 'spected you were, as I thought 'e was waiting for someone too. I know the gentleman—'e is very kind to me."

The lady gasped.

"Then he has gone, I couldn't get here at eight o'clock, and now I am too late! Oh, what shall I do?"

"The address 'e gave the cabman was 4 Grindley Street, ma'am. I 'ear wonderful well, although I can't see."

"Oh, my good girl, how can I thank you!" And the lady grasped the blind girl's hand. The next moment she was hailing a passing hansom, and before she got in she took a sovereign from her purse and pressed it into Jane's hand.

"No thank you, ma'am, the gentleman is very kind to me. I'd rather not take it, ma'am, thank you."

"4 Grindley Street, and drive as quickly as you can," was the order given, and the blind girl heard the horse being thrashed, and it galloped away.

A feeling of great pride and happiness surged through Jane's simple soul to think that she had been the means of helping the pretty lady (she felt sure she was pretty) and the "kind gentleman."

The next morning the Hon. Harold St. Leger ran hastily down the steps of his house. His feet had regained all their old buoyancy. He went straight to the blind girl and he took her hand, and he pressed it warmly.

"What a kind and clever girl you are! All through you I am the happiest man in the world," he lowered his voice—"this morning I am going to be married to the lady to whom you gave my address last night; no one will know till it is all over but you! Her mother wanted her to marry someone she didn't love, but instead she is going to be my wife."

"Oh, sir, I am so glad."

"But if you had not acted so splendidly as you did by going to her and telling her that address it would have been too late, for I was afraid she would have to marry another man, and this morning I was going right away abroad. So you can imagine with what gratitude we look on you—and my future wife says she wants you and your grandmother to have a little cottage in the country quite close to our house."

"Oh, sir, I would like that. I have never 'eard birds sing or smelt 'ay growing in fields."

A few hours later a carriage and pair pulled up in front of her and someone alighted and placed in her lap an exquisite bouquet of gardenias and lilies and tuberoses.

The footsteps were familiar, but they had gone before she had time to thank the giver. But Jane knew it was the bride's bouquet, and her heart was full of pride, and she strained her ears to catch the sound of wedding bells which she knew must be ringing somewhere for "the gentleman" and his lady.

Ella MacLachlan.

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Barbara's Choice.

Telling of a Test of True Love.

"FATHER, may I have a word with you?"

"Certainly, Neil; what is it?" said Lord Ralston, glancing up from his paper, and then—frowning slightly as he caught the expression on his son's face—"Not another scrape, I hope?"

The Honourable Neil caught his underlip in his teeth—a characteristic trick of his when annoyed.

"I trust I don't quite deserve that, sir," he said reproachfully. "Upon my word, I've tried my best to be decent, and it's nearly two years since you had occasion to reprimand me."

"Well, now I think of it," replied the Earl, "you have certainly been pretty quiet of late. But—what is it then?"

Now, although the young man's eagerness to unburden himself was obvious from his manner, yet the abruptness of the question seemed to disconcert him not a little. He blushed all over his handsome, sun-tanned face, and thereupon commenced stammering something, the portent of which was more or less lost in his heavy military moustache.

For a moment the Earl regarded him doubtfully, his whitening eyebrows slightly elevated in surprise; but by the time his son had managed to articulate a fairly audible sentence they had dropped to the other extreme in a heavy frown of displeasure.

"I—I—the fact is, father, I want your consent to ask the lady, with whom you saw me yesterday, to be my wife."

It was out at last, and, hot and eager, the young guardsman stood—a disgrace to his regiment by reason of the limp absurdity of his pose—awaiting a reply. With irritating deliberation the Earl rose from his seat and carefully adjusted his eye-glasses.

"H'm," he grumped. "In the first place, Neil, what do you know of the young—er—lady's connections? Does her father follow any profession, or is he a gentleman at ease?"

"Mr. St. Moyes has been very unfortunate," said his son shortly. "He is, I believe, at present somewhere on the Continent."

"H'm!" grumped the Earl again. "Something somewhere on the Continent, eh? Probably a billiard-marker at Boulogne. Nice prospect, certainly! And the mother—is she on the Continent too?"

The whole sentence was one concentrated sneer, and the young man flushed hotly.

"Mrs. St. Moyes," he rapped out, "is too great an invalid to receive anyone. I have never seen her."

"So," commented Lord Ralston sweetly. "Father unfortunate, mother an invalid—promising relations, upon my word."

He fell to pacing the room with measured strides, his chin incircled by a lean finger. All at once he stopped, and, bending slightly, stared down at a photograph standing among several others on a small table near the door. It represented a young lady of very considerable beauty, posing in the costume of a bygone century.

"I don't remember that you mentioned the lady's *profession*," remarked the Earl, abruptly recovering the perpendicular, and resuming his perambulations. The inflexion was indescribable, and his listener visibly writhed.

"I never could see," began he, with some warmth, "why the Stage should be deemed such a discreditable profession. However undesirable it may have been in the past, rest assured, sir, it is very different now."

"Ah, well," replied the Earl languidly, "we won't go into that at present, I think."

And, dropping his eye-glass with a shrug, he resumed his seat.

The Honourable Neil pulled himself together before replying.

"I want you to understand, sir," he began resolutely, "that I have permanently made up my mind. I am determined, come what may, to marry Barbara St. Moyes; but would, of course, prefer to do so with your full consent."

Practised diplomatist that he was, Lord Ralston showed neither anger nor surprise.

"I presume, then, that you have already obtained the lady's consent?" he said tentatively.

"Well—no," admitted the young man. "You see, Barbara will not definitely accept my offer until she knows your views about the matter; so you can understand that I am anxious to know my fate."

The Earl rose, and laid a hand on his son's shoulder.

"My boy," he said, "all my wishes are for your happiness. However, this thing can scarcely be settled out of hand; for instance, there is your mother to be consulted. Suppose we leave it over until to-morrow? Come, now."

The young man looked his disappointment, nevertheless he bowed acquiescence. After all, twenty-four hours would soon pass; and besides, nothing could ever affect his determination to marry Barbara—nothing—nothing—never!

It had gone hard with better men than Neil in their attempts to outwit his distinguished father, so there was no necessity for the young man to call himself hard names when, the next morning, he discovered that Lord Ralston had left town "on urgent business connected with his estate."

Nevertheless, he did so anathematise himself—reviling his stupidity in not having clinched matters the day before. However, there it was, and there was now nothing for it but to possess his soul in patience until the Earl should return.

Very little time sufficed to put Lord Ralston in possession of ample information concerning Miss St. Moyes.

Her father, it seemed, at one time an artist of repute, had suddenly developed a mania for drink and gambling, thereby destroying all his chances of success, and ultimately resulting in his flight from the country, leaving his wife and daughter to manage as best they might. Ever since his desertion, some four years ago, Barbara had been obliged to exploit her histrionic gifts in order to procure a livelihood for herself and her invalid mother.

"H'm!" murmured the noble Earl. "There oughtn't to be much difficulty in disposing in these undesirables. Dissolute father, ailing mother, devoted daughter. I don't think I'm far wrong in crediting this damsel with sense enough to see that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' I'll try

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it, anyhow." Having delivered himself of which enigmatic utterance Lord Ralston rang the bell.

An hour or so later Miss St. Moyes was waited on in her flat at Kensington by a gentleman of polished manners and pleasing speech, who adroitly conveyed the intimation that, in the event of a permanent cessation of her intimacy, with a certain youthful scion of a noble house, a sum of not less than ten thousand pounds would be forthcoming, and no questions asked.

With swiftly growing indignation she heard him out, and then, springing up and facing him like a tragedy queen, she gave him her mind so vigorously that, with a nervous clutch at his hat, her visitor flashed out of the room, and gained the street with all speed.

Lord Ralston received the news of this initial rebuff with a smile, but not so the curt note he received from Neil a few hours later, containing the information that, owing to certain discreditable conduct on the part of a distinguished member of His Majesty's Government, Miss Barbara St. Moyes had decided to accept him (Neil) unconditionally.

By no means disconcerted at the unexpected turn affairs had taken Lord Ralston coolly played his next card; with the result that, a few days later, Barbara's name figured among the list of distinguished guests at Rotherfield Hall, the Earl's country seat.

Now poverty, with its endless shifts and contrivances, is apt to have a narrowing effect on the possibilities of a woman's nature; consequently, amid the luxury and refinement of her new surroundings, the little actress—conscious that at last she had found her true element—fairly revelled in the delights of the moment; determining that, if it lay in her to prevent it, the old life should never see her again.

The announcement of her engagement to Neil had been fixed for the end of the month, that arrangement, though she knew it not, being part and parcel of a deep-laid scheme, emanating from the fertile brain of the distinguished host, by which he hoped to be permanently rid of her at the end of that time.

Meanwhile, lulled into a false sense of security by reason of the charming treatment meted out to her on every hand, she thoroughly enjoyed herself.

By no means the least attentive member of the company was the noble Earl himself, who, several times took her over the estate, explaining at length the working of the huge coal-mine from which he derived a large portion of his income.

One thing, however, Barbara noticed, though without troubling herself to account for it, and that was that the Earl in the course of his remarks, was continually drawing comparisons between his own property and that of Sir George Meldrum, who owned the adjoining estate; and always greatly to the disadvantage of the former.

"Really, my dear young lady," he said on one occasion; "you should see Sir George's place! Why the fellow could buy me up twice over. He's the coal-king of the county, you know; whereas I possess but a single mine, and if anything happened to the place I should be practically a pauper."

It may, or it may not have been this newly-acquired knowledge that Sir George Meldrum was the "coal-king" which made Barbara so ineffably gracious to him throughout the whole of that evening.

The middle-aged Baronet had been a frequent visitor during Barbara's stay at Rotherfield Hall, and had contrived, one way and another, to pay more attention to that lady than the Honourable Neil quite liked.

Barbara found Sir George a distinctly pleasant, if rather ordinary sort of man, and as for the fact of his being a bachelor, that affected her neither one way nor the other, even if she ever gave it a thought.

She never quite knew what prompted her to sit out that last dance with him. Suffice it to say that, wearied by her previous exertions, she had suffered herself to be led away, and that the next thing she realised was that the Baronet was pouring out protestations of eternal love, with an earnestness that at once startled and repelled her.

Vexed that he had not known of her position, and angry with herself for having behaved to him in such a manner as to justify the course he had taken, she was about to disillusion him in a few well-chosen words when the sound of approaching footsteps fell upon her ears.

"A terrible thing," came in the deep tones of a man. "The workings are flooded . . . mine's no earthly use now . . . Poor old Ralston, I'm afraid he'll never survive it. Poverty comes hard to men like him!"

No more; the voices passed out of earshot. Stunned and dazed, Barbara tried to realise what it was that had happened.

Gradually out of the whirling chaos of ideas, her mind grasped the salient fact—that with her lay the choice—of poverty, with its mean surroundings, or of wealth, with all that makes life worth living. Poverty, want, and weariness; the cramped stuffiness of rooms in a suburban street; the hideous alliteration of a life of endless toil. The prospect sickened her.

Her mother too; how could she tell her that it had all come to an end? That the future held nothing for them but what was grey and gaunt and sordid. Oh, the unspeakable horror of it!

"Dearest," murmured the low, persuasive voice at her side, "may I take silence for consent?"

She came to herself then, and remembered. Neil loved her. Before all the beautiful women of his own set he had chosen her—the little actress. She could bring him nothing—nothing—but her beauty, her purity, and her love; his was the sacrifice. And she did love him? Oh, yes, yes! more than anything; more than all the wealth and luxury the wide world held; more than life itself!

"Oh, no, no!" she breathed. "Sir George, I am deeply conscious of the honour you do me, but—oh—it cannot be!" And then in a moment she was up and speeding from him as a wild thing flees from the foot of man.

* * * * *

"Oh, Neil, Neil!"—she was sobbing in his arms—"don't let it make any difference, dear. We are young, and we can work; and oh, my darling, I want you more than anything. Poverty doesn't matter if I have you."

* * * * *

The flooding of the mine did not prove such a serious affair after all; being, as a matter of fact, confined to a single "working" and a disused one at that. Also, when four men met in conclave in the Hall library, some things were said which threw a somewhat startling light on the occurrence in question. Two of the number were well-known sporting characters, the third was Sir George Meldrum, and the fourth was the Earl himself.

"All I've got to say," remarked one of the former, "is that the filly came out of the test well. You should have seen her jump though when Charlie, here, laid it on thick about the 'poverty.'"

The Earl smiled.

"Nothing like a trial to bring out the quality, is there?" he said.

"There isn't," agreed Sir George. "But"—with a comical grimace—"I half wish she'd disappointed you, Ralston, after all. I could have done with her myself."

"You!" laughed the Earl. "She's heaps too good for you. Look here, boys; that youngster of mine has hooked a treasure. I'm sure of it now; and although it's cost me over thirty pounds to flood that blessed "working,' I don't regret it."

Barry Sheil.

IN TWO WEEKS' TIME

we shall commence a

New Serial and a New Series.

Full particulars will be given next week.

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A BREACH OF CONFIDENCE.

Telling of how it Brought About a Wedding.

SHE sat with her pen in her hand, but she could not write. Her heart was full of a story that she had heard recently and could not forget—the story of a woman who had been happier than herself, and yet more miserable. She stared at the blank paper before her instead of writing, and she said to herself:

"Why are all the chances in life given to those who are not fit to use them? If such a love had been mine once I would never have let it go. There is no price that I would not have paid to keep it; and she—she threw it away for vanity!"

The story was very real to her, because she loved the man who had told it, and yet she had taken the telling of it to mean that the true history of his life was over, and that he had no love left to give again. The confidence he had reposed in her had been a compliment to her friendship, but a destruction of all her hopes of happiness. Before that confidence was made she had thought that his feeling for her was as deep as hers for him.

She had been married herself; but, though she had had a husband, she had never known true love.

Her marriage had been a sacrifice, made when she was very young, and when she acted almost entirely under the influence of a selfish mother. Her husband proved selfish, too, and—which was worse in her mother's eyes—not so prosperous as had been imagined.

Eleanor's life had been a hard one always, and now she was left alone in the world, except for the little two years' old baby. It was an ailing creature, fretful, and not pretty; but it was something to hold in her arms, if not enough to fill her heart.

She loved it the more passionately perhaps for its infirmities; but sometimes the loneliness of her life overpowered her like a flood of bitter waters; she wanted some mind to speak to, some heart to answer hers.

She was yet very young, only twenty-two years old, and all the currents of life beat strongly within her; all the imperative demands for love, for praise, for happiness, which make so large a part of our youth, were still alive in her heart, and would not easily be silenced.

Her income was insufficient for herself and her delicate child; she added to it in many little ways, as the opportunity was offered to her. She had written a few short stories for a new magazine, which could not yet afford to number famous authors among its contributors, and she had been paid for them.

An accidental meeting with another occasional contributor had given her a friend; and Ralph Webster was at that time, perhaps, the only person with whom she was on terms of familiar friendship, and to whom she could talk on a moral and intellectual level.

His sympathies and aspirations were not unlike her own; they always understood one another at least, even when they did not agree. To talk to him was, therefore, the opening of a new experience to her.

Language had before—at least, spoken language—been only a vehicle for the management of affairs, the expression of desires, the receipt of information. Now it served to exchange thought, to bring two lives into close mental relation with one another, to console, to suggest, to sustain. And she had thought he loved her.

He was a little more prosperous in the world than herself, and he did not guess that she was so very poor; but he was not rich enough to make her feel that she would take much more than she gave if she became his wife. They would work together, as they lived together and loved together. She had thought, with others:

Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.

And then he had received an appointment to travel as a special correspondent of a metropolitan daily, and he had come to say good-bye to her, and before saying good-bye, had told her this story. She had taken it for a final farewell.

Since his going, three days before, she had thought of nothing else. She had work to do, but she could not do it. How could she throw herself into dream-loves and dream-troubles with this pain of loss and loneliness at her heart? And yet the work was necessary, and she dared not delay it longer than that night.

She had, the day before, received back from her editor a story which she had hoped he would accept, with the intimation that if she would write him one half as long, to be ready in two days, he would almost certainly take it, as he wished to fill up a corresponding gap in the next number of his magazine.

She urgently needed the money. Her baby, little Lorna, was paler and thinner even than usual; the doctor whom she consulted said that the child needed country air. She had hoped to earn enough money to take it away for some weeks to a farm-house, when she sent that story to the editor of the magazine. She must not lose the opportunity which he had offered in its place.

She had thought of a plot—a foolish little, common-place affair—but she could not breathe any life into it. When she forced her thoughts into the necessary channel they flowed back again to another story.

She saw Ralph Webster standing before her; she heard his voice again, telling her the simple tragedy of his life. How graphically he had told it, though not with many words! She could fill in the details for herself.

It was a story of true and patient love, and of shameful faithlessness and falsehood; a story in which the wrong-doer pitied herself and fancied herself a victim, while she accepted her husband's sacrifice and spoilt his life. She had been cruel to him with the cruelty which demands everything, and gives less than nothing in return.

"And yet," said Ralph, when he told the story—he had never repeated it to anyone before—"I never ceased to love her while she lived; and when she died the world seemed empty to me. I suppose it was only this, that I could never take back what I had once given."

There was not much in the story itself, but it held Eleanor's thoughts fast, and would not let them go; because the love that had been so scorned and wasted would have made the happiness of her life.

She must write her tale, but how? She could not cast into its foolish incidents the burning thoughts that possessed her; these were all woven about another thread.

And while she still thought, her child cried, and she had to leave her work to soothe it. She lay down on the bed beside it, and fell asleep. She awoke in the dead of the night.

The anxious thought which watches ever beside the pillow of the unhappy leapt at once to its place in her mind, giving her no respite. "You must write your story," it said. She got up with the resolution of despair, and went back to the table.

"I will write this," she said, "and have done with it."

There was no difficulty now. The facts in her mind ranged themselves instantly into dramatic shape; living words—

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words that throbbed with her own love, and pain, and regret, and longing, shaped themselves into eager thought.

When vain desire at last, and vain regret,
Go hand-in-hand to death, and all is vain.

That was the burden of the writing, and it was a very old one; but it seemed new now, because she wrote it with all her heart.

When dawn broke she had eased herself of the phantom that had haunted her, and was free. How strange it is, this relief that comes to some of us after we have put into words the thoughts that torment us! She was free now, and she wrote the other story—her tale for the magazine; but she knew that it was a miserable affair.

Lorna was worse that morning. Her mother took her into her arms and looked into her suffering face.

"If I keep her here she will leave me, too," she said to herself. "I shall have nothing left."

She wrapped up her manuscript and took it herself to the editor. She wanted to bring his answer back. He was, in fact, waiting for the story, to put it in the hands of the printer, and he was willing to look at it at once. She sat and watched him as he did so, with very little hope in her face. He read it carefully at first, then he turned over the pages rapidly, and finally put the manuscript down.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but it won't do, it isn't up to your usual level. I would make it do if I could, but—it isn't possible."

"I knew," she said, "it wouldn't."

He looked at her in surprise, for she was unfolding another roll of manuscript.

"If you will look at this," she said, "you won't say the same."

He took the paper and began to read casually; then he became interested. He read to the end without speaking. When he had finished he rang the bell and gave the manuscript to the young man who answered his summons.

"This can go to the printer at once," he said; "you have had the necessary directions already."

Eleanor half rose to her feet, and then sat down again. She did not utter a word.

"You have never done anything so good," said the editor; "it is an unpleasant subject, but you have treated it cleverly, very cleverly."

"I shall never do anything so good again," was her strange answer. "I knew you would take it. Would you mind paying me for it *now?* For I must go into the country to-morrow."

He gave her the cheque she asked for, and she took Lorna away next day.

A month after she saw Ralph Webster again. He had returned unexpectedly, and he sought her out at the farmhouse where she was living with her baby. But they did not meet as friends; she saw him with a shock of surprise, and he looked at her as she had never seen him look before.

"Mrs. Wakefield," he said, "I have no right to follow you here, but I came to ask you a single question." She wondered for a moment—but only a moment—what was coming.

Then she turned to him with a look full of sadness.

"I will answer any question you like to ask," she said.

He had a magazine in his fingers, and he opened it at a page that she well knew. Were not the title letters of it, the whole aspect of it, burnt into her brain? They were part of the crime that she felt she had committed.

"There is a story here," he said, "that occupies a very prominent place. It is called 'Hand in Hand to Death.' I think that you wrote it."

"Yes," said Eleanor, in a low voice; "I wrote it."

"There is no one in the world, except you and myself, that knows the whole of that story. I told it to you because I intended, the next time I saw you, to ask you to be my wife. I wanted you to have time to think of it first. You might not have liked me so well after knowing it."

She folded her child closer in her arms, and bent over it, that he might not see her face.

"I need not speak to you of such a subject now. I know how much you value my esteem—my confidence. You have *sold* my trouble to the world. I suppose you sold it?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, in a still, strange voice; "I was paid ten pounds for it." She was remembering that she changed the first sovereign to purchase her railway ticket, and that she had calculated how many weeks it would keep her in the country.

"I knew that a woman I loved might despise me," said Ralph; "but I could not guess that a woman I trusted would betray me—for money."

She did not answer him anything. There was that in his tone which made her not care to defend herself. She had injured him in a deadly and cruel manner. Let him say to her what he would. But he said no more; he lifted his hat and went.

A year after that found Ralph Webster a successful man. He had written a novel that hit the public taste; it was full of bitterness and scoffing, but the public liked such bitterness and scoffing, and bought the book.

He wondered sometimes what had become of Eleanor Wakefield. There was no trace of her at her old home, and the editor told him that she had sent him no more contributions.

She had seemed to Ralph a noble woman—a woman whom he might love on an equal footing, with all trust and reverence, without pity or forbearance. And she had failed him strangely and meanly, so that the sting of her offence had not yet left him entirely; but it troubled him a little to remember that she had made no defence. This had put him in the wrong, and made him wonder what her defence could be.

It was in the dusk of evening that he stepped into a railway carriage, which had only one occupant—a lady who, sitting just opposite to

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him, whose face was now turned from him, and it was only when he had been seated some minutes that something in her intense stillness attracted his attention.

She had desired him to forget her presence, or not to notice it, but the effort defeated itself, and his first half-curious, half-unconscious glance at her made him lean across to her.

"Mrs. Wakefield!" he said.

"Yes," she answered, "it is Mrs. Wakefield." Then she added quietly: "I should like, if I may, to congratulate you on your great success."

"You may spare me your congratulations. My success is built on my great unhappiness. None should know that better than you."

"Is it not so with many people?" she asked, gently, ignoring his last remark. "But some are unhappy without success."

He looked at her more attentively. She was in mourning, and she was much changed. The passive attitude of her hands on her lap told him this, as well as the tone of her voice.

"You never followed up *your* success," he remarked. "Mr. Blakely told me that he expected great things of you."

She answered him nothing.

"Mrs. Wakefield," he went on, vaguely hurt by her silence, which tormented him with an impression of his own cruelty, "I want to apologise to you for what I said when we last met. It was too much."

"It was not too much. I have said more to myself before and since. And yet," she said, turning her eyes full upon him, "I do not ask you to forgive me, because I do not repent. I would do it again, if the past came back to me. It is right that you should know how evil I am. I do not repent. I would do it again. Yet I hate myself for doing it. Besides," she added, in a lower tone, which she could hardly have meant him to hear, "it spoilt my happiness as well as yours."

"I do not understand," he said.

"Why should you understand?" she answered. "It does not matter."

The train was whirling on in the darkness. The noise of its rush, the flashing of lights in the city they were leaving, seemed to increase the solitude of these two, who were so near, yet so far apart; so much akin in spirit, and so hopelessly estranged.

"If it had been for Fame," he said, "I could have understood the temptation better. It would have been a higher sort of temptation. But you did not even sign the story, and you have not republished it."

"I hoped," she said, "that it would be little read and soon forgotten. You had gone away for a long time. I thought that you would never see it. And no one else could ever guess where I got it from."

"You made it very clever," he replied. "I wonder, having gone so far, that you go no farther."

"I shall never write again," she answered. "I have no motive. And what I did write has cost me too much."

He did not understand her; he had not known of her past poverty, nor of her recent loss. But he went on to say: "When I look at you it seems impossible to believe that you did such a thing without a reason. It may have seemed a little thing to you, but it was so much to me."

"I knew how much," she answered; "I knew all the meanness of what I did, the treachery of it, and that it would hurt you if you knew, but I thought that you would never know."

"And you did not love me," he added; but he was watching her keenly as he spoke.

Her eyes flashed upon him for a moment.

"Oh," she said, "it was *because* I loved you that I could not help doing it. If I could have escaped from the memory of what you told me, and have thought of other things instead, it would never have been written. If I could only have forgotten you!"

He was startled and astonished. He caught her hands and then let them go again.

"I wish I could believe you," he said.

"You need not. Why should you?" she answered. "I have nothing left to give you. What is a love worth that helped me to betray you?"

"And are you still *glad* you did it?" He had taken her hands firmly now, that he might look into her eyes. There was no tenderness there, only a desperate defiance.

"Am I glad of anything? Can I ever be glad of anything any more? It is only that I would do it again for the same reason. And yet I did not get the thing for which I paid such a heavy price."

"Will you tell me what the thing was?"

"It was only," she answered, "that I thought that treachery the price of my baby's life—and now my baby is dead."

She drew her hands away from his as she spoke. There had come into her eyes a grief that awed and restrained him. He could see that it had nothing to do with himself. Her tone was very quiet. It seemed to leave him at a great distance from her.

For a moment he felt that he had got his answer, and could speak of love to her no more in the presence of such a sorrow. Then his courage came back, and with it resolution. If he was sure enough of his own love for her he could not fail in the end to drive away both her sorrow and her remorse.

"I have been cruel to you," he said; "can you forgive me?"

"I?" she answered tremulously; "how can *I* forgive *you?*"

"Because I have been a fool, and quarrelled with my own happiness." And then he added, speaking slowly: "The story was a part of your own life. You had a right to do what you wished with it. At least, you can make it a part of your life if you will be more generous to me than I was to you."

She let him take her hands again. She looked into his eyes searchingly. What she saw there seemed to satisfy her, for she answered irrelevantly:

"Oh, I have been so lonely. To live in the world with nothing but myself and your contempt! You cannot guess what it was like."

"Will you live in the world with me and my love, and see if you like it better?"

She had been too long without happiness to fight against it now, and her answer ended his trouble and hers.

A. Armitt.

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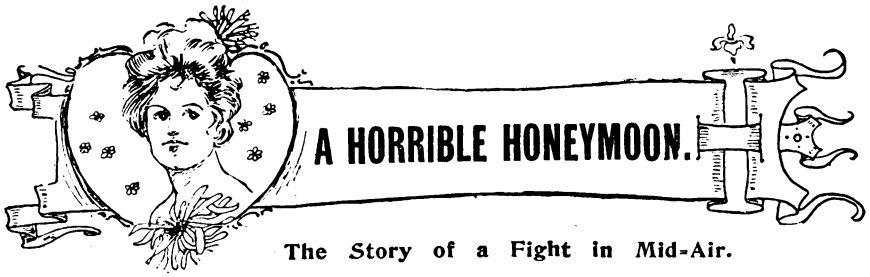

A HORRIBLE HONEYMOON.

The Story of a Fight in Mid-Air.

Hector Eric Gower, artist and journalist, strolled leisurely along the Brighton esplanade, and, with a cultivated eye for colouring, watched the deepening glowing glory of the setting sun and its kaleidoscopic tintings of the blue water below.

He was a handsome man, well set and well groomed, and, from the swift, intelligent flashes of the clear blue eyes, and the frank, impulsive nature which the whole face betokened, one might have set him down as a clever and a brilliant conversationalist.

But there was something about the poise of the head that did not harmonise with the rest of his bearing, and which, though inexplicable to the casual eye of a stranger, was understood by his more intimate acquaintances. And there was a good deal of excuse for it. In a word, the world had been very kind to Hector Gower.

He had distinguished himself as a war-correspondent in the recent Boer war, and Fortune had smiled on him. There are few men who can retain their humility when the world claps its hands. The adulation of the multitude and the undisguised envy of his fellows had added the leaven of conceit to his otherwise healthy character.

It was more than probable that time would eradicate this unwholesome habit of self-applause, and it was hoped so by those who knew him best, for he was one of the best fellows in the world, and no man more richly deserved the fame which had fallen to his lot.

But evolution is a terribly lengthy process, and Hector Gower might have gone on indefinitely in his self-pride but for one unlooked-for circumstance. Sorrow is a swifter factor than time, and pride, they tell us, goes before a fall!

Presently Hector Gower turned in his walk and retraced his steps to the hotel in which his bride of but three short, blissful days was awaiting him.

They were spending their honeymoon at Brighton, the resort of so many when they are on a similar happy errand.

That he and his pretty girl-wife were madly in love with each other, no one who knew them doubted. But, even in this divinest of all earthly joys, the leaven of self was not wholly absent. True, this had been stimulated and fostered by his young wife's passionate devotion and admiration, and therefore in this, as in all other views of the case, there was excuse for the man.

But he had grown to expect this adoration of the "one" just as he did the praise of the multitude, as his natural right, demanded by his genius and his recognised superiority over other men. And his wife was too much in love to deny it him.

So, in his vain-glory, he thought, as egotists are wont to think, that no one but himself occupied a place in her heart or provoked a single thought or remembrance. It is small wonder then that his awakening was as startling as it was wholesome. And it was to come very soon.

Arrived at the hotel, Hector Gower entered his suite of apartments and looked round for his wife. But she was not to be seen, and, after a moment's hesitation, he entered her dressing room.

Still she was not to be seen, and he was just turning away when his eye fell on a daintily-bound morocco writing-case which lay on a small table by the window. He went casually over and looked at it. It was open, and several sheets of note-paper lay on the table.

Unthinkingly, he lifted the sheet of blotting-paper by the side of the writing-case, and, to his astonishment, saw a letter lying underneath. It was in his wife's handwriting, and, picking it up, he began to read it. The action was not positively wrong, but it was not over nice, and it brought its own punishment. For this is what he read:

"Dear Jack.—*I received the letter you sent me yesterday by your servant. I cannot tell you how grieved I am that you should have followed me down here. You must know that it is impossible now. If my husband were to find out, he would kill you, and perhaps me too. You must write no more letters to me, now or hereafter. I am sorry to be forced to write thus decisively, but I have really no alternative.*

"*If you feel but one tithe of the love that you profess towards me, you will think first of my happiness and leave me in peace. I had hoped we might have continued friends, but you have made that impossible. I am deeply sorry for you but you must ask no more of me —now. Good-bye, dear Jack, and forgive me if in any way I have encouraged you in the pursuit of what is now doubly impossible.—Yours very regretfully,*

"Cora Gower."

Hector Gower sank into a chair with the letter still in his hand and tried to think. What did it mean? His wife—the wife whom above all other women he had loved and chosen to bear his name and share his fame—and she could write to another man—like this!

His face went very white and the hand that held the letter shook perceptibly. Was this the way she returned his love? The thought stung him to the quick, and his face hardened. And what did the letter convey?

He read it through a second time and groaned. Every sentence pierced him with a new and a horrible significance. Was his wife—guilty? The bare suggestion was agony, but the letter admitted of no other construction. And now the guilty admitted, not the virtue, but the expediency of innocence and acted accordingly.

There was a look of stern resolution in his face as he reached this point in his reasoning.

The door opened, and, looking up, Hector Gower saw his wife standing before him. One quick glance had shown her both the letter which was still clutched in her husband's hand and the terrible construction he had put upon it.

Mutely she stood there, awaiting what she well knew, by the expression of his face, was to follow.

She was very beautiful—a picture of perfect womanhood; but she possessed a spirit which already began to rebel at so swift and hasty a condemnation. So she stood still and waited. Then he rose to his feet, and, tossing the letter on the table, said with a sneer:

"This is interesting, but, if you will pardon the addition, scarcely praiseworthy. A better example of cold rebuke and warm affection I have never seen. The only pity is that it should have been written by a married woman to another than her husband. But that is, perhaps, a mere trifle."

He paused, regarding her sternly. The woman made no reply. She still stood tense and motionless, and, with set face met the terrible accusation made against her in silence.

"You do not even attempt to defend yourself," pursued the man. "And perhaps that is as well, since, in the light of this letter, defence would be fruitless. Well, madam, there is but one course for me to pursue. I will relinquish the love I thought I possessed an hour ago, in favour of my more fortunate rival—'dear Jack'—and will therefore bid you—'Good-bye!'"

With a low bow, in which there was more of mockery than politeness, he turned swiftly, and, putting on his hat, went out of the room without once turning back.

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Cora Gower stood still, rigid and dry-eyed, till he had gone. Once she tried to speak, but her voice seemed to have forsaken her.

Had she been moved by one passion only, the result might have been different. But bitter indignation was struggling with her love, and before the mastery was won her husband of three short days had gone. Then she sank into a chair, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into a passionate flood of tears.

* * * * *

It was a week later, and the Greens were thronged with eager sightseers. The entire Brighton population seemed to have turned out to witness a spectacle which, it was announced, was to take place that day.

Mr. John Terrett, the well-known aeronaut, was to make an ascent in a balloon of exceptional capacity, with a view, it was whispered, of crossing the Channel. There was a light breeze from the north-west, and, in the centre of the Greens, the great unwieldly giant of the air was slowly being filled with the gas necessary to its ascent.

The aeronaut was himself superintending the work, and a good trip was expected. Mr. John Terrett was a tall, lithe, sinewy man of thirty, with dark, half-Spanish face and flashing black eyes, in which there was more love of adventure than of humanity.

At last all was ready. A dozen men stood about the car, firmly gripping the ropes which held it fast. The sand bags were all in, and the necessary instruments for accomplishing the voyage secured in their place.

There was a momentary hush as John Terrett looked round in search of his aerial companion. A man was making his way through the crowd, and, passing the barriers, entered the inner ring and approached the aeronaut. The man was Hector Gower.

With a curt nod of greeting he followed the aeronaut into the car, and the latter gave a signal for the great straining monster to be cast loose. At that instant a woman's shrill cry rang out among the crowd, and Cora Gower, pale and agitated, rushed into the ring.

"Hector, Hector!" she cried in an agony of supplication. "Don't go! For Heaven's sake—for my sake—don't go with him! You don't know him—oh, you don't know him! He'll kill you! Oh, don't go!"

Hector Gower looked once at the appealing figure of his wife. In the impulse of his heart he almost leapt from the car and took his grief-stricken wife in his arms. Then he remembered, and turned away his head.

There was a cruel gleam in the aeronaut's dark eyes, while a sneer curled his lips as he looked at the woman. Once more he gave the signal to ascend, and, with a mighty bound, the great giant of the air shot upward, amid the cheers of the crowd and the straining of many ropes.

Cora Gower gave one look upward, and then sank unconscious to the ground. Hector saw her there as he leant over the side of the rising car and his heart began to condemn him. But it was too late now.

Presently Hector Gower turned his eyes from the things around him to the aeronaut who was seated at the opposite side of the car.

Somewhat to his surprise, he saw that the man's eyes were fixed upon him with an expression which was anything but comfortable. It might have been only his fancy, but, though he turned his eyes away, he was conscious that those other eyes were still regarding him.

For a few moments he avoided them, but, in the end, met the fixed stare of the man before him. He was not a coward, but there was something in the lack-lustre expression of those horrible eyes that was anything but reassuring. Still the man stared till Hector Gower, unable to endure it any longer, said coldly:

"You appear to be more interested in me than your knowledge of me would seem to warrant."

The man made no reply, but, looking out of the car, watched the now rapidly disappearing panorama of busy Brighton. They were too high up now to be distinguished by the inhabitants of earth, and a gleam of satisfaction came into the dark eyes as he turned them once more on his companion. Then, for the first time since their ascent, he spoke:

"Hector Gower," he said slowly, "you wonder why I scraped acquaintance with you when I found you, like a miserable fool, nursing your wounded vanity in the little inn where you had hidden yourself, like the veriest cur, from the wife you had deserted. I am acquainted, you see, with the position of affairs." And he smiled grimly into the face of his astonished listener.

One quick glance showed her that her husband had seen the contents of the letter he held.

"You may be aware of what has transpired," retorted Hector Gower, "but it is scarcely any concern of yours, I think."

"I have made it so," said the aeronaut impudently, "and that is enough for you. But, in case you still wonder how I obtained this information——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Hector, "the problem has no interest for me."

"I may as well explain," continued the man, utterly ignoring the interruption, "that your wife herself acquainted me with the facts of your separation, and that I—John Terrett—am the 'dear Jack' whom, in company with your wife, you so virtuously condemned.

"We are cousins—she and I, and were brought up together as children, which accounts for her use of my Christian name, though you, in your unreasonable vanity and self-conceit, put quite another construction on the circumstance. She only made one mistake, and that was in imagining I had followed her to Brighton.

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"This ascent was billed long before I knew you were coming here, but I had persecuted her so much before that she had cause for that supposition. There is, in this wide world, Hector Gower, no woman more pure and true than she who has honoured your name and dishonoured her own by becoming your wife."

An angry flush dyed Hector Gower's cheeks, but the man only laughed scornfully, and went on:

"But you were vainer than any miss of seventeen, and were filled with self-righteous anger when you discovered that one of the worms who crawled the earth beneath your masterful feet had won but a word from the wife whom you had so magnanimously raised to the dignity and glory which appertains to the name of Gower."

Had the speaker held a whip above his victim he could not have stung him more. Every word was a deep home-thrust to the self-accusing man, who now, for the first time, realised his true position. He had been wrong—almost criminal—and he would go back to his deserted wife and ask her forgiveness. But he could endure this man's taunts no longer.

"Look you!" he said, leaping to his feet till the car rocked and swayed in mid-air. "We have had enough of this. Get to earth as speedily as you can, and have done with matters which do not concern you."

Again the aeronaut laughed and said slowly:

"So I sought you out, my strutting peacock, and, pandering to your vanity, persuaded you to accompany me on this aerial voyage. And why?" He rose to his feet and drew from his pocket a glittering revolver. "Because, Hector Gower, I will not see the life of this priceless pearl of womanhood cast before swine to be trampled under foot. You shall go down into the deep sea, and none shall know how you went."

He lifted the revolver and took deliberate aim. There was a sharp report, and a bullet flew past the head of Hector Gower. The swaying of the car had saved him.

With a bound he crossed the car and grappled with his adversary. A wrench of the wrist, and the revolver dropped from the hand that held it and fell into the airy abyss below. But the man's hand was free again in an instant, and the struggle began in deadly earnest.

To and fro they reeled in the rocking, heaving car of the great balloon. Now in the centre, now leaning perilously over the edge, till it looked as though both men must be hurled into the horrible gulf below.

Once more they neared the edge of the car which was rocking violently, so that they could hardly maintain their foothold. Hector Gower gave a momentary glance downward, and to his astonishment, found that the great balloon was rapidly descending.

A faint humming sound high above his head told him that the gas-valve was open and the gas fast escaping from its silken prison. In the struggle, the rope attached to the valve had been entangled among the outer ropes of the car, and the huge balloon, fast losing its buoyancy, was speeding downward into the wide expanse of blue waters below them.

But he dared not relax his hold of the aeronaut. If death came, it should not be by him. So the struggle continued, fiercer than before, while each man's breath came in laboured gasps and the sweat stood on their foreheads.

At last, with a supreme effort, Hector Gower pinned the aeronaut to the floor of the swaying car, and, holding him there, looked about him.

They were within five hundred yards of the water, descending with marvellous rapidity, and death seemed inevitable. But, glancing out on the other side, he saw, to his unbounded relief, a Channel steamer not a hundred yards from the spot where they must soon strike the water.

It was evident that the captain of the steamer had seen their peril, for a boat was being rapidly lowered and manned by the crew. The next instant the car struck the surface of the water. There was a momentary rebound, and, in that moment, Hector Gower released his hold of his adversary and sprang into the sea.

A moment later the aeronaut had leapt to his feet and followed his example, so as to escape the death-trap which the collapse of the great balloon would speedily make for anyone who remained therein.

The two men were quickly rescued by the crew of the boat and went on board the Channel steamer which was on her way to England.

No one had witnessed the terrible fight in the car of the balloon, and its descent was attributed to accident. So Hector Gower held his peace, while the aeronaut slunk out of his way and went below. A few hours and they were in England.

Without a moment's delay Hector Gower took train for Brighton, where he hoped to find his wife. But inquiry at the hotel elicited the information that she had left two days after his desertion, and a great fear came into his heart.

Where to turn he knew not. Perhaps she had returned to her people. He went to the station and caught the night-train to London, determined to find out if this were so. But it was too late, on his arrival, to make inquiries that night, so he went to a hotel and tried in vain to obtain forgetfulness in sleep.

Early in the morning he went in the direction where his wife's people lived, and in doing so passed very near to the spot where the house he and his much-wronged wife had chosen for their future home stood.

As if drawn to the spot by some inexplicable law of attraction, he turned into the street in which it stood. To his surprise he saw clearly that it was tenanted. A maid stood at one of the windows, engaged in some part of her duties.

With a quick hope at his heart, he mounted the steps and rang the bell. He was admitted, and, no comment or surprise being evinced by the maid who opened the door, he passed in and went from room to room in search of his wife.

At last he reached her dressing-room, where she sat arranging the coils of golden hair upon her head. She saw his image in the glass before her and with a little glad cry, sprang up to meet him. Going up to her, he took her tenderly in his arms and kissed her.

"Cora," he said humbly, "I do not deserve one word of forgiveness from your lips. I have been a scoundrel, and have had my punishment. Nay, more, for I must always have my punishment with me, since I can never forget that you too, who did not deserve it, have shared the misery and bitterness of the past week. Dearest, is there forgiveness for me? I am humble now. There is no more pride or childish vanity in the heart of the man whom you honoured by becoming his wife."

Cora Gower placed a trembling little hand over her husband's lips.

"I do not like to see my husband humble himself, even to me," she said tenderly. "I have forgiven you long ago, dearest, and now that you have come back to me I can be happy."

He took her in his arms again and kissed her passionately.

"Why did you come here?" he asked presently. "I thought you would have returned to your people?"

Cora smiled into his face, and the light of love beamed in her eyes.

"Because," she said proudly, "I knew you would come back to me. Because I trusted you, my husband, and would not shame you by speaking ill of you even to my own mother."

"God bless you, darling," he whispered huskily. "Truly it is you women who teach us how to love!"

By-and-bye Hector told his wife of the terrible fight in mid-air which he had had with John Terrett, and a few days later came the sequel, in the news that the famous aeronaut, who had for some time past suffered from some mental disorder, had lost his reason and was confined in a private asylum.

"I am not surprised," said Hector, when he had read the account. "But, even in his madness, he spoke many truths and saw things more clearly than I in my boasted reason."

Thus ended the honeymoon of Hector Gower and his young wife, and, though they have never forgotten it, its effect on one of the two at least has been to imbue him with a deeper humility, a greater unselfishness, and a broader sympathy with those who are about him than ever he had in the first flush of his fame—a fame which so nearly spoilt a kindly nature and a noble heart.

Walter J. Mowbray.

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Four more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

EIGHTH LIST.

85. AEGILMR	**91. ABEHMNOST** .....
86. ADENORSTWY	**92. ABEEHIMNNOST** .....
87. ACEKOORT	**93. AEFHIINRW** .....
88. ADEFILNRZ	**94. ABEEMRSTY** .....
89. AACEEHHONNS	**95. ACDIKKLRY** .....
90. ABENRTOY	**96. AACDEHRRSTY** .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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RED POPPIES

Telling of How a Lover Proved that He Was No Coward.

A BOAT was idly rocking on the blue waters of the bay. Overhead the golden sun shone down with dazzling brilliancy, warming the waters to an almost tropical heat.

Not a sound was to be heard in the deep stillness which prevailed. Not a breath of wind ruffled the surface of the water. But for the boat and its two occupants one might have imagined the lonely, rock-girt bay to have been part of some far-off desert shore. Yet it was in sunny England, cut deep into the Devonshire coast.

Away over the great, rugged cliffs a little fishing village nestled peacefully in the valley beneath, through which a silvery stream made music as it sped by to the shining, sunlit bay.

A narrow, winding path ran along by the side of the stream, under the shadow of the great grey cliffs, which the fisher-folk used in order to reach the bay where their boats were anchored.

There was another path, leading from the village up the rugged cliffside to a height of some four hundred feet. But though this led to the very summit of the cliff, overlooking the bay, there was no means of descent on the other side, where the towering sentinel of the bay shot down perpendicularly into the blue water.

When the tide was low the foot of the cliff was fringed with great jagged rocks, black and threatening, like the fangs of some great sea-monster. But the tide was up now, and the deep blue waters of the bay hid them from view.

The boat drifted on to the very spot where the rocks lay, far beneath her keel, and the girl looked up at the beetling cliff above her head. She was not exactly beautiful, but there was an indescribable freshness and wondering innocence in the fair, open face that was irresistibly attractive. There was a soft dreaminess, too, in the large, violet eyes, as she lifted them from the book in her lap to the great grey cliff overhead.

"Well?" said her companion—a tall, dark, handsome man of thirty. "Is your hero dead, that you look so sweetly sad, or is your heroine dying, becomingly and gracefully, in his strong arms?"

The girl made no reply.

"But perhaps your sympathies are with the villain?" went on the man banteringly. "That is not an altogether unfeminine view of a novel. The cliff seems to hold some attraction for you. Has the poor wretch been thrown over by the hero? Put me out of this suspense, Pearl, for pity's sake!" And he assumed an expression of mock supplication.

The girl laughed and looked down at him.

"No," she said. "The hero is pledged to get his lady a spray of edelweiss. They are in Switzerland, you know, and he will have to run terrible risks in order to get it. But he will do it—I am sure he will! Ah, it's only a story! Real men are too prosaic to do such things. It is only we women who are silly enough to be romantic."

"Humph!" responded the man doubtfully. "And what immeasurable and eternal benefit is the getting of this edelweiss going to procure for your heroine?"

"Don't be silly, George!" said Pearl with a pout. "He is going to do it in order to prove his love."

"Is that necessary?" asked George.

"No, but—— Oh, you know, you silly boy! She wants to have a greater proof of it than she has now, and—and she wants to have something that will remind her of how brave and fearless he is!"

"Ah!" responded George, not yet seeing the expediency of the act. "So she has asked him to try to break his neck! Well, I hope he may do it! He has my very best wishes!"

The girl's eyes flashed, while a flush heightened the colour of her cheek.

"That is just what I said just now," she said scornfully. "Real men are too prosaic to do such things. I think, too, there is too much of the coward in them to risk the possibility of so much as a scratch for the sake of a lady's wish!"

"A lady's whim!" corrected the man.

"A lady's wish!" persisted Pearl, becoming a little—just a little—angry at her lover's criticism of the case. "Take yourself, for instance. Would you do it?"

"No," said George quietly. "At least, not without better reason than that you have described."

"Precisely," said Pearl, with a disdainful curl of her red lip. "But you are deceiving yourself. It is not a question of sufficient reason. It is the fact that a natural cowardice stands in your way. In a word, you dare not!"

There was a flash in the man's dark eyes as he heard the words.

"Be careful, Pearl!" he said in a suppressed tone. "Or you may yourself create the 'sufficient reason.' 'Dare not' is a term that no true Englishman can brook."

The girl laughed a silvery, rippling laugh. She had roused him at last. She was very thoughtless. He had sneered at her romance and she longed in some way to punish him for it. And now she had touched the right chord. She meant to make the most of it, and, in her thoughtlessness, forgot that her words could move the man more than the sweeping away of nations.

He loved her—she knew that—but he had no right to laugh at her romance, and she was going to punish him as he deserved.

Once again her eyes wandered up to the sides of the cliff, four hundred feet above their heads, and rested on a bunch of red poppies, growing in a little hollow of the cliff side, some two-

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thirds of the way up. With a mischievous light in her violet eyes, she pointed out the poppies to her companion.

"See!" she cried with a laugh. "There is the very thing! Poppies are as good as edelweiss. Now then, George Drake, you dare not get those poppies for me by to-morrow night! Now mind—it won't do to sneak off to some meadow or cornfield, and pick two or three there, for I shall come here to see if these are gone. You must get these or none, and, if I know you, George Drake, it will be none. Because, as I said just now, you dare not!"

She did not for one moment believe that he would attempt it. Otherwise she would have hesitated before taunting him so. But she liked teasing her handsome lover, and, when he made no reply, she laughed again, merrily and triumphantly, seeing not the flash of the dark eye and the steadfast, determined compressing of the firm lips. For George Drake had heard and accepted the challenge.

The morning had gone, the golden sun had passed its zenith, the boat lay high on the shining sand by the mouth of the stream, and the blue bay, sparkling with a thousand dancing lights, lay quietly sleeping through the golden hours of a summer afternoon.

It was about four o'clock when a figure appeared on the edge of the cliff, high above the blue waters, and stood for an instant gazing out to the great grey headlands beyond. In his hand he carried a long, stout coil of rope, a pointed bar of iron, and a huge hammer.

Slowly and deliberately he moved along the edge of the cliff, until he had reached a spot where the rocky wall, after jutting out into the bay, dropped back again, sheer and precipitous, forming a miniature inlet in the towering cliff.

Half a dozen yards from the edge, he began to drive the long bar deep into the solid earth, bringing down the great hammer with strong, swinging strokes. Soon it was set firm in the rocky soil, and, with an evident purpose in view, the man carefully bound one of the ends of the rope to the still projecting head of the iron bar.

Then he bound the other end securely about his muscular body, close under the armpits, and tested the long rope in twenty different ways. It was evident the man was practical, even in so perilous an undertaking, for his purpose was now apparent.

George Drake was not the man to neglect precautionary measures in a task like this. But the rope held firm, and, gripping it close to the iron bar, he turned his back on the sea and paid out the rope, hand over hand, while he stepped slowly and cautiously backwards to the edge of the cliff.

Close to the brink, he stopped, and, kneeling down, shuffled over the remaining foot of rock, and then slipped over the edge amid a cloud of dust and falling fragments of the cliff, and disappeared from view.

The rope strained, but held firm, and George Drake, feeling its strength, heaved a sigh of relief and went slowly and painfully down, hand over hand, till he had reached the end of the rope, and was able to release his aching hands. There he swung in mid-air with the rope tight about his body, a mere speck against the frowning, beetling cliff.

A moment to recover his breath, and then he began to look about him. Ah, there were the coveted poppies, growing in their little crevice, and tempting him, as Pearl had done, to pluck them! But they were far to the left.

Slowly he began to swing his body, keeping his hands against the cliff side to steady him, till he looked like a huge pendulum as he swayed from side to side.

At last he reached the little group of rocks which formed the crevice for the sheltered poppies, and, putting forth all his strength, he clutched a jagged projection, and held on with straining sinews and set teeth. With a supreme effort, he resisted the recoil, and then, putting out one hand, while he held firmly by the other, he plucked the precious poppies and swung back again to his former position.

For full ten minutes he remained motionless, recovering the strength he had lost in the perilous feat. Then, with a light of triumph in his dark eyes, he fastened his treasures to the collar of his coat, where no harm could reach them, and looked upward, preparatory to climbing the long stretch of swinging rope. But what he saw there made his dark, handsome face grow blanched and haggard as the fear of a terrible death stared him in the face.

The swinging of the rope, drawn tight by the weight of his body, had chafed the straining strands against the edge of the cliff, and George Drake saw, with horror, that the rope was now worn half through. Would it hold when, strained still further, he drew himself up, hand over hand?

The sweat stood upon his forehead as he thought of the hungry black rocks below, and he looked wildly round for some means of escape. But the great towering cliff frowned back at him and gave him no hope. But he must make the attempt.

Gripping the rope high above his head, he drew himself slowly up, while the rope strained and the strands above his head split still more under the added weight. Once

Putting his hand to the collar of his coat, he unfastened a wet spray of red poppies.

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more he tried, but the rope severed again, and left but one of the three strands supporting him in mid-air. The task was impossible.

Slowly and very cautiously, he let himself down to his former position, and once more looked about him. Beneath him were many projections, but none so large that it might be used as a ledge. And below them again, were those horrible black fangs in the sea, cruel and sharp, ready to rend him if he fell.

All at once, he felt the rope yielding above his head, and, with a quick catch in his throat, he stretched out his hands in a vain attempt to grip the pitiless wall of the frowning cliff. Then the rope broke with a snap, and he fell.

Oh, the horror of that fearful drop! The blood rushed to his throbbing temples, a thousand sparks danced before his eyes, a blinding dust choked him as he sped down over the crumbling rock, and, with fingers torn and lacerated, he dropped into the abyss that yawned at his feet. And then, with a shock that well-nigh shook the breath from his aching frame, he struck a projecting rock and stopped.

It strained beneath his weight, and innumerable little cascades of dust broke loose from its black sides and slipped down the face of the cliff.

The *débris* which he had displaced on his descent went rattling downward about his ears, but he remained hanging upon a morsel of rock, which might, at any moment, be torn from the grey wall of the towering cliff and send him hurtling down to his death.

But the rock resisted his weight, and held fast to the cliff side. How long could he remain thus? He was lying across the rock, his arms on one side, his feet on the other, and he dared not move more than an inch or two.

Once more he looked about him. He had not fallen more than forty or fifty feet, and, even now, he was not quite half-way down the straight, beetling cliff.

He looked below—still those hungry rocks, for the tide was out now, and little pools lay between the sharp, black fringe of rocks. The sun, too, was sinking down in the west, and the thought of the night that was to come struck him with an untold horror.

What was his fate to be? His only prayer—the only one he could reasonably pray—was that his death might be a speedy one. And so night fell, and the stars shone in the purple sky, while the proud moon swept like a queen across the studded heavens, and, in her turn, went down too, to give place and sway to the orb of day.

The tide had risen in the night, but, when the dawn broke, it was ebbing fast, and presently the sharp black needles of rock pierced the blue waters of the bay and renewed their menace to the helpless, terrified victim above.

How he lived through that night, George Drake never knew. But when the morning dawned, calm, serene, peaceful, he lifted his haggard eyes to the pitiless sky and wondered how long the end would be.

There was no hope from the bay, for the projections which formed the miniature inlet in the cliff side effectually shut him off from the view of fishing boats. From the headlands of the bay to the mouth of the stream, where the boats were anchored, was a straight course, and he was quite out of the line of vision. It was only a tiny rowing-boat, whose occupants were bent on pleasure, that came his way, and the little fishing village was too unimportant to make this a frequent occurrence.

And above him? Well, there might be a bare hope there. Someone might climb to the top of the cliff and discover the severed rope. But, even then, what could they do? And then an idea suddenly flashed into his mind, and his dark, haggard eyes kindled with a new hope.

The rope! There it hung, sheer down the face of the cliff more than a hundred feet below him! It had been severed at the very top, while he hung helpless at the bottom. And, when he had been stopped by the projecting rock, the long rope had swept by him into the abyss below, till reaching its full length, the loop about his own body had stopped it and held it fast.

If he could get to the bottom of that rope, not more than a hundred feet would lie between him and the black rocks below. Even that would suffice to crush out his life, if he should fall back on to those horrible fangs. But the tide would turn again, and be high above the rocks before the golden sun had reached its zenith.

He could not go upward. To stay where he was meant a slow, torturing death. And, downward, there might be a chance.

With trembling fingers and throbbing heart, he hauled up the long rope, till he had the end in his hand. Then, cautiously and breathlessly, he swung it to and fro under the projecting rock, till it curled upward on the other side and dropped limply on to his back.

Trembling with excitement and hope, he made a running noose in the rope, drawing it tight about the projecting rock, thus using the rock as he had done the iron bar on the previous day. And then he waited—waited long hours of suspense and dread, till the tide should be at the flow.

As he lay there, he narrowly scanned the rocks below him, searching for a deep hollow, where he might strike the water with tolerable safety. Then, as the tide rose, he grasped the rope in his torn hands and slid off the rock into the abyss below.

Once again the rope stood his weight, and in a few minutes he had reached its limit and looked downward at the rapidly rising waters of the bay. Presently he took from his pocket a large clasp-knife, and again looked at the rising tide.

The minutes went by with painful slowness. One by one they wore out their allotted time, till the tide was at its height.

There was a swift, determined stroke of the knife across the strands of the rope, a snap as it severed above his head, and George Drake went hurtling down into the blue water beneath him. Would he strike a rock? Some of them were not many feet beneath the water. There was a plunge, and the water, churned into foam, bubbled up and over him, as he went down to the rocks below.

He had calculated well. Right between them he went, striking the hard sand as he touched the bottom. Then, with a desperate effort, he struck out for the surface and looked about him.

How fervently grateful he was now for the skill he possessed in all athletic exercises! But he was terribly exhausted, and it took all his remaining strength to reach the mouth of the little stream, where the frowning cliffs ceased and the golden sand sloped gently down to the edge of the bay.

And what was happening on the cliff above?

Pouting at her lover's absence and supposed neglect, Pearl Seymour put on her hat, and, leaving the village behind her, began leisurely to climb the steep, precipitous path up the side of the cliff.

Reaching the top, she crossed over to the other side, overlooking the bay. A rope lay at her feet, and surprised, yet without thinking, she stooped and touched it. The end of the rope came over the edge of the cliff, and, to her horror,

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she saw it had been severed by the rock against which it had been drawn.

Instantly, her words of yesterday flashed into her mind. The poppies! Surely George could not have taken the taunt seriously. And yet her own heart told her that it was not wholly in jest that her words had been uttered. She had been angry too. But was it possible?

Something glistened on the ground at her feet, and, stooping, she picked it up. It was George Drake's ring! With an agonised cry, she sped back down the steep path of the cliff, and up along the stream, till she had reached the bay.

As she did so, the figure of a man emerged from the water and stood before her. He was terribly cut and bruised, and his face was white and haggard. With a little stifled sob, she rushed up to him, and, flinging both her arms about his neck, cried to him to forgive her.

For a moment the man never spoke, but putting his hand to the collar of his coat, he unfastened a wet spray of red poppies, torn almost to fragments, and held them out to the sobbing girl.

"Don't!" she said, as she pushed them away. "Oh, how could you? How could I have been so wicked, so cruel, so heartless? Oh, my love, my love, can you ever forgive me?"

The man took her in his arms.

"Yes, dear," he said gently. "But you must never say to me again: 'You dare not!' I have been very near death, dear, and have lain all through the long night across a narrow rock on the face of the cliff, with no help, no hope of rescue. But—I have got your poppies!" And again he held them out to her.

She took them and kissed them almost reverently.

"Yes," she said, with deep humility, "I will keep them. Not as a test of your love, nor as a proof of your courage, but as a living reminder that the words of a foolish woman may lead a brave man to his death. And when I grow vain and apt to think over-much of my unworthy self, the sight of these poppies, withered and torn, will awaken the memory of this thoughtless folly of which I am now so bitterly ashamed, and teach me the lesson of all others which I need—the lesson of humility and wisdom."

George Drake drew her into his arms and kissed her.

"It was worth the risk, and the long, long hours of suffering," he said, "only to hear you speak thus nobly. I want you to be a true woman, dear, thoughtful, tender, kind, in whose heart the petty things of life shall find no place. The world is a school, wherein we learn many things, and I, as well as you, have learnt something to-day, which I shall never forget."

And they went back, hand in hand, to the little village in the valley.

M. J. Walters.

PATERFAMILIAS: "Clara, I see that the front gate is down this morning." Clara: "Yes, papa; you know love levels all things."

MISS ANTIQUE: "Are you quick to take a hint?" Young Harum-scarum: "Yes, very." "What would you do if I should turn down the gas?" "Call for help."

SHE: "Surely, my dear, you will consider the matter carefully before consenting to Clara's marriage with old Mr. Cashman?" He: "Certainly. I shall have his books examined by an expert."

CALLER: "You call this garden scene 'June,' but the leaves are all on the ground instead of on the trees." D'Auber: "They were on the trees, but the picture got such a withering criticism from the committee that they curled up and fell off."

SEASIDE VISITOR (at crowded hotel in Margate): "How much do I owe you? How much is my bill?" Clerk: "Let me see, your room——" Seaside Visitor: "But I didn't have any room. I slept on the billiard-table." Clerk: "Ah, well, then, eighteenpence an hour."

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

THE eighth list of letters in the competition will be found on page 111. Four more lists will appear.

THERE is a gold-plated pencil-case waiting for the person who most nearly places the stories in this number in the order of merit in which they are regarded by the majority of readers. On the back of a postcard write the names of the stories in the order in which you prefer them and then send your postcard to PREFERENCE No. 3, SHORT STORIES, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than by first post on Tuesday, July 28th.

IN response to my inquiry as to what readers did with their copies of SHORT STORIES after they have finished with them, I have had shoals of letters; the following are extracts from a few of them:

"I invest every week in six copies. Five of them I send to friends in the country with the request to pass them on to another friend when read. The sixth copy I read myself and then put it aside with a collection of literature to send to a hospital or workhouse."

"I think SHORT STORIES the most delightful and cheapest little paper ever published at the price. It is interesting the whole way through. After reading my copies I put them away until I get about a dozen or so, and then send them to friends. I call it my little book of sunshine, because when tired I can often sit and read just one story and enjoy myself for a few minutes."

"I am pleased to say that when I have read my copy I give it to my husband, who, after reading it, sends it along with a copy of THE BIG BUDGET, and sometimes PEARSON'S WEEKLY, to a friend of ours who is a sergeant in the 2nd South Staffs Regiment, stationed at Agra, India."

All the other readers from whom I have heard say that they send their copies of SHORT STORIES on to friends or to a hospital, or some such similar institution. This latter is, I am sure, a very excellent means of disposing of them. The patients like something both light to read and light to hold, and SHORT STORIES meets those requirements admirably.

IN two weeks' time a new serial by Mr. Henry T. Johnson will be starting. It is rather a different style of story from the present one. "THE BOND BETWEEN," but it will be none the less interesting for all that. The number of SHORT STORIES containing the first instalment will be dated August 8th. Readers should give their orders now for a copy to be reserved for them. Mr. Johnson's work is well known to readers of the *Daily Express* and THE BIG BUDGET.

I HOPE to be able to announce the result of the "Buried Stations" Competition shortly. The amount of work entailed in checking the attempts necessitates the delay.

THE summer is pursuing its course and the autumn days are drawing nearer, but still there is plenty of time for many more FRESH AIR FUND excursions to take place. Contributions have been coming to hand very satisfactorily so far, but it will not do for there to be any falling off, otherwise so many little mites will have to forego their one hoped-for day in the country.

You are not asked to give great sums—ninepence from each person who reads this will be a great help—if you can afford to send more, so much the better. Instead of waiting to see whether at the end of the summer you will be able to afford more than you have saved at present, send what you can now, remembering that "he gives twice, who gives quickly." All contributions should be addressed to the Hon. Sec., FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and they will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Collecting cards can be had on application. **Your Editor.**

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In the Whispering Gallery.

A PRETTY LITTLE LOVE STORY.

"Now, really, Howard, this thing must stop, it's getting on my nerves," Muriel exclaimed as they walked home together through the long twilight of a Spring day from Mrs. Mortimer's "At home."

Howard looked penitent but persistent.

"You know how you can stop it, Muriel," he suggested.

"There you go again"—vexedly—"and I protest I will not stand it! A woman does not have to accept a man more than once, and I do not see why I am called upon to refuse you times out of number."

"Neither do I. Accept me and get it done with."

"Don't be ridiculous, Howard! If I ever had any notion of doing so you have put a quietus on it, for I *could* not marry a man of only one idea. For the past month 'Will you marry me, Muriel?' has been the only connected remark you have been capable of, and when you've been too far away from me to say it you have looked it. It has become monotonous and you interfere seriously with my plans."

He smiled down at her indulgently, maddeningly, as one might smile at a spoilt child.

"If I did not know you so well I should lose faith in you," he told her. "'Your plans' are all very well for you to tease me with and toy with, but my Muriel—the Muriel I have known all my life—would never carry them out."

She laughed defiantly, if rather mirthlessly.

"And why not?" she asked. "Even before there was any ground for planning, I told you that if I ever married—which is a matter of much doubt—it would be for the sake of making a startlingly brilliant match. The chance for that has come to me, and I am not going to have it spoilt by any absurd young man who, after having confided his love affairs to me from the time he was old enough to have any, suddenly takes it into his head to fancy that he has fallen in love with his *confidante*."

"Perhaps it's the fact that I did not have sense enough to do it in the first place that you cannot forgive?"

"Forgive! There's no question of forgiveness; except the fact that you hung around me this afternoon like a thundercloud, thereby keeping the Duke——"

"Where it's best that he should be."

"You are incorrigible, and I tell you this must stop. I've got to have a clear field just now and a steady head. You must leave me alone for—well, we'll say for a month."

"Do I interfere with the steadiness of your head?"—innocently.

"Why, yes—no—of course you do. It's—it's disturbing to any woman to be proposed to indiscriminately, and when the same man does it it waxes boresome. It's grown to be so much force of habit with you that you do it now unhesitatingly and without any sign of embarrassment—quite unromantically."

"Thought you did not believe in romance?" he reminded her.

"Well, I don't, but I do believe in—plans. That is why I insist that you leave me in peaceful pursuit of mine. At the end of a month you may come to see how they have prospered; and incidentally tell me what new fields you have conquered."

"Muriel, do you mean——"

"That at dinners, at balls, at teas, or any place where there is the remotest chance of your proposing to me you shall studiously avoid me. Not only this, but if chance throws us together you will act as though I were only a casual acquaintance."

"But people will talk," he objected.

"Not any more than they do now; and, anyway, I think I shall give them something new to talk about."

"You'll be sorry if you marry the Duke, dear," he said, as they stood on her doorstep.

"Why, may I ask?" she flashed at him.

"Because," he said deliberately, taking her hand, "because you love me."

For just a moment she seemed to waver, then she wrenched her hand free.

"Oh, the conceit of man!" she mocked. "Well, this month will show whether you or I know my mind best."

"You shall have the month, if that's what you want," he agreed unruffled—a bit too unruffled was Muriel's thought—"but don't play too hard with the fire. I don't want to see my little girl get scorched. When the month is up," he continued more gravely, "I will come and give you just one more chance to refuse me. If you avail yourself of it that will be the end. I love you very dearly, but I do not intend to let your perversity spoil my life."

Howard, the long-suffering and forbearing, had rebelled! This was an issue upon which Muriel had not reckoned. Still more to her surprise he made no apparent effort to circumvent her decision, so that she now saw him not at all save at a distance. She tried to fancy that he looked haggard and dejected, but was obliged to confess to herself that he appeared instead most aggressively healthy and contented.

"So much for the constancy of man!" Muriel mused. "Who would think to see him that he was a repeatedly rejected lover?"

Meanwhile her plans, like many unwise ones, were working out beautifully. The Duke pressed his suit assiduously, and she knew that the day was not far off when she must give him his answer. What was it to be?

In this perplexed frame of mind she drove down into the City one day with a friend who wished to make some research in the library at St. Paul's. As they ascended the steps of the cathedral Howard chanced to pass that way, and when his delighted eyes fell on Muriel the temptation to follow her was greater than he could resist. In the gloom of the vast interior he could watch her unobserved, and he fancied that she would seem in some way nearer to him there than when she was surrounded by glitter and glare and other men, as she had been always when he had seen her during these few, interminable weeks.

Muriel and her friend paid the fee and ascended the shallow-stepped winding stairway that leads up to the library and goes on far above it. At the entrance to the library Muriel paused a moment for breath.

"Do you know I have never been to the whispering gallery," she said. "While you get what you want I believe I will go on up."

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"Yes, do—it's quite wonderful," the other girl replied; and Muriel began to climb again, unconscious that a man came softly after her, not far behind, but effectually hidden by the ever-recurring turns of the broad, spiral way.

Muriel, when she reached the whispering gallery, chatted a moment with the old custodian who dispenses information to the public, then walked to the opposite side of the gallery so that she might test the marvellous acoustic properties of the place. She placed her ear close to the wall in readiness.

"Do you hear, miss?" came a queer, muffled voice.

"Yes," replied Muriel hesitatingly; she had expected to hear more distinctly. Nor was she disappointed.

"Haven't you missed me at all, Muriel?" was the startling question which followed, very clear and in a voice that she knew well.

"Why, Howard!" she exclaimed, entirely taken by surprise.

"You didn't say anything about churches," Howard went on, "and I haven't proposed to you any way. Have you missed me, dear?"

"I believe I have," Muriel admitted.

"Then do come round and tell me about it," he begged; and Muriel went. The sympathetic custodian discreetly turned his back at her approach.

Muriel dimpled and blushed hesitatingly as she gave Howard her hand.

"How's the Duke?" he asked interestedly.

"Quite well, I believe," she replied indifferently. "I'm to give him an answer to-morrow," she went on without looking at him.

"And you'll say 'no'?" he asked breathlessly.

"Not—not unless I've said 'yes,' to someone else first."

Howard's heart beat so that he felt that she must hear it, but he managed to speak calmly.

"The month is not up yet," he said, "and it's to be the last time of asking. What would you say to me, I wonder, Muriel?"

"Oh, Howard!" she cried, as he led her round a sheltering turn in the stairway; "don't be so judicial."

"What then?" he asked, less steadily. She was tantalisingly close to him now. She laid her little gloved hand on his arm with the sweetest timidity imaginable.

"My old Howard of the one idea," she answered softly, and was gathered without further ado into a close embrace.

"This has been the very longest month I've ever lived," he said.

"I should think it had. I thought you'd never give in."

"But you said a month, sweetheart."

"I've said lots of things I didn't mean," she twinkled.

"The Duke?"

"Of course the Duke. As though I could have! But you took such an awfully long time to fall in love with me that I wanted to be quite, quite sure of you."

"You haven't said 'yes' to me yet," he reminded her after he had tried to prove to her the certainty of his devotion.

"'You haven't asked me, sir, she said,'" she laughed happily. "And, Howard, that girl downstairs will think I've tumbled over the rail."

"Then we will go and tell her that you were merely stopped by the male—the very happiest male in the whole world, darling!"

Winifred Alan.

NEARLY A TRAGEDY.

Telling of How a Wife Realised the Value of Her Husband.

"CORA, dear, will you have me? I've run away!"

Cora Dainsford started up from her cosy corner, her eyes dilating with genuine astonishment.

"My dear Mrs. Denman, this *is* an unexpected pleasure."

The rich tones rang a trifle insincere, and the dark eyes glinted unpleasantly; but the pretty, irresponsible being, who called herself Wilfrid Denman's wife, noticed neither.

"I'm so glad you're glad," she said, effusively kissing the olive cheek of the woman who, not so long ago, had been her rival; thereafter subsiding into a chair and pulling the dainty gloves from her white, be-jewelled hands.

"Of course I'm pleased to see you, Winnie," responded Cora. "Why shouldn't I be? The past, so far as I'm concerned, is dead and buried long ago. But"—suddenly—"why haven't you brought the husband?"

Winnie looked up mischievously.

"Didn't I tell you I'd run away. Will doesn't know where I am."

"You odd child! What *do* you mean?"

Cora Dainsford drew up a chair, and sat down opposite the little woman, with clasped hands and inquiring eyes. She had never really forgiven this dainty beauty for supplanting her in the affections of handsome Wilfrid Denman. On the contrary, the thorn had rankled badly, and still—although many months had passed, and she herself was now the wife of another man, still it remained in the wound.

"You haven't quarrelled surely, you two?" she queried, fixing her black eyes on the other's face with an intentness that was almost embarrassing.

"No," said Winnie, "that is, not to say quarrelled exactly. But Will is so different somehow. When we were first married nothing was too good for me, and now—well, I'll just give you an instance.

"Yesterday we went out to Madame Rénaud's, and I wore a lovely gown—white lace over pink. It's a perfect dream, and suits me to perfection; but when Will saw it, instead of going into raptures as he used to do, he actually frowned."

There was more than a suspicion of tears in the big, baby-blue eyes.

"'Don't you like it, dearie?' I asked him. 'It is very pretty,' he said, quite slowly; 'but, Winnie, you had that blue one only last week, and, honestly, I can't afford it.'

"Men are always saying things like that, aren't they? But really I never thought Will would turn out like that. He's so glum and preoccupied too. I can't imagine what's come over him."

Winnie threw out her sweet lips in a pout that most men would have voted adorable. She was so fair and pretty that she had been rather extensively idolised by her parents, and her big, hulking brothers, so her little imperious airs might readily be forgiven her.

Cora thought of this, and wondered if it were possible that Wilfrid Denman had some trouble, which he dared not reveal to this gay, child-like little wife of his; and there and then she determined to question her own husband on the subject; confident that if anything were amiss with the firm of

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Denman, Roper, and Co." he would not be without some knowledge of it.

"He neglects me, too," went on the petulant voice. "Would you believe it, Cora, we haven't been to the theatre for weeks—the opera season, too. It's positively scandalous! And, to crown all, he actually rushed off to business this morning without kissing me! What do you say to that? Don't you think I'm justified in teaching him a lesson?"

Now the path of Cora Dainsford's duty lay straight and plain before her, but she chose to ignore it. The opportunity for creating a rupture between those two hearts recommended itself to her as too good a one to be let slip. The old thorn rankled anew, and the vindictive element in her nature re-asserted itself.

"Yes," she said, "I think you are quite right, dear. Wilfrid oughtn't to treat you so, and a little reminder will do him good. You are at liberty to stay here as long as ever you please, dear."

"You darling!" exclaimed Winnie, jumping up, and flinging her arms round the other's neck. "I knew you would sympathise with me. But, oh!"—drawing back suddenly—"what a lovely gown!"

Cora smiled.

"I'm glad you like it," she said. "I donned it a moment ago in honour of a visitor."

"A visitor?" Winnie looked her inquiry.

"Yes. None other than Captain Marshall, your old admirer. He's dining with us to-night. Isn't it a coincidence?"

"Mercy!" cried Winnie. "It's more than that. Why, do you know, I've actually brought that hapless pink dress with me; so at any rate I shan't disgrace you at dinner. What splendid luck!" And, laughing together, the two women made for the upper regions.

* * * * * *

The dinner that night proved an eminently successful function. There were several other guests besides Captain Marshall, friends of Hubert Dainsford, so Winnie gathered from a formal introduction; but the Captain from the first had devoted himself exclusively to her.

He was excellent company, this notorious flirt and flatterer, and although Winnie knew him as such, a pleasurable thrill went through her in response to his honeyed words. It was pure mischief and coquetry too, which led her to acquiesce when the Captain proposed a visit to the conservatory.

Silently, her bare shoulder brushing the sleeve of his coat at intervals, they strolled down the miniature avenue of ferns and palms, to where the fountain hissed and sparkled in the moonlight. Arriving there, they stopped, leant together on the edge of the marble basin, and smiled into each other's eyes.

The Captain was giving little, nervous tugs at his long moustache, a sure sign that he was stirred. He was one of those men who do momentous things on the spur of the moment, without forethought and with a fine disregard of possible consequences.

Similar circumstances had sufficed to draw avowals of love from his lips on more occasions than he cared to remember; nor was he proof against them now.

In a moment he had forgotten Wilfrid Denman, forgotten prudence, and was pouring passionate words in the ear of the woman at his side.

"Winnie, my darling, I can keep silence no longer. I love you; and when I see you as you are now I realise that I can never love anyone else but you!"

His arm was about her, his bold, black eyes were close to her face, and realising then her danger, she sprang away from him, with an exclamation of fear and repulsion.

"Captain Marshall, this is an outrage! How dare you speak such words to Wilfrid Denman's wife! Leave me—instantly. Go, I say!" And she stamped her tiny foot passionately upon the tiled pavement.

* * * * *

Left alone, for the Captain had slipped away with his head down like a beaten dog, the little lady smiled bitterly to herself. Such then were the fruits of her foolish escapade.

Poor Wilfrid! She had treated him vilely. She had been selfish and foolish—a most unwifely wife. But she would go back to him at once. She would implore his forgiveness, he would give it with many kisses, and they would be infinitely happier than before.

Full of this new resolution she gathered up her skirts and hurried off in search of her hostess; but at the foot of the main staircase she came to a sudden stop as the sound of voices from an adjacent room were wafted out to her.

"They say the firm can't stand the strain any longer. Roper must have been mad. And as for Denman, he can't see an inch in front of his nose except where it concerns that extravagant little wife of his!"

Winnie, gripping convulsively at the hand-rail to support herself, recognised the voice as belonging to Cora's husband, next moment Cora herself was speaking. There seemed to be a note of triumph in her voice.

"And does it mean complete ruin for them, then?"

"I fear so. Denman's wife's extravagance will have been the last straw. That woman has simply no idea of the value of money."

"I know; but really I can't say I'm sorry. In fact, I'm rather glad. I hate the pair of them!"

"Tut, tut!" came again in the deep tones of the man. "What a little spitfire you are, Cora!"

Sick and faint, Winnie waited to hear no more, but flew up the staircase, and ten minutes later was out of the house and speeding homewards in a cab.

She thought the man eyed her pityingly as she stepped into the full glare of the electric light in the hall, and a cold shiver ran down her spine.

"Where is your master, James?" came at length, faintly, through her quivering lips.

"In his study, ma'am."

Winnie tore off her wrap, and stole softly up to the door. There was no sound within, so she pushed it noiselessly open and entered.

Next moment a wild cry burst from her as she flung herself headlong upon the man who sat there, grey-faced, with her photograph propped up on the desk before him, and the shining barrel of a revolver pressed against his temple.

Winnie broke out into a cry.

"Oh, Will, Will!"

The weapon went crashing into the empty fireplace, two soft arms stole round his neck, and gradually the despair on the man's face melted away, as he gazed into the blue eyes, dark now with anguish, of his truant wife.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, brokenly, "another minute and—— Oh, Will, it would have killed me. I've been a horrid, thoughtless, selfish little wretch, dear; but, oh, my husband, I have learnt a lesson now! I'm going to be so good in future—indeed, indeed I am!"

"In future!" A spasm of pain crossed Wilfrid Denman's face. "My darling wife, you don't know, and how can I tell you. An awful thing——!"

She stopped him with a kiss.

"I know," she said softly. "I know all. I heard it only half an hour ago, and that was why I came back. Why didn't you tell me before?"

He crushed her to him then, and kissed her all over face and hair.

"But, dearest," he said at last. "Have you thought? Do you quite realise it? Perhaps in time, with luck and the help of friends, I may be able to retrieve poor Roper's errors. But it will mean years of pinching and economising, and I dread it for your sake, darling."

With an impulsive movement she nestled closer to him; love and hope shining together in her brilliant eyes.

"Dearest," she murmured, "it will come hard at first, I know, but sooner than lose you, my husband, I would endure anything—even the poverty of rags and wretchedness. I love you so."

B. A. Lerish.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
MARY MASON, Lady Maitland's maid.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Man of the Hour.

JANUARY was nearly over, and a chastened, humid February with shy suggestions of latent Spring in the air, loomed near. The trees in the parks waved their stately branches, and whispered among themselves the coming fashions in green, rejoicing that the cold wind would shortly cease to whistle through their vivid garments, as it had through their bare, brown branches.

Under one of the larger trees in Hyde Park a girl was sitting, watching with dreamy eyes the ebb and flow of life as it passed before her.

Beyond the park gates the murmur of the traffic fell upon her ears; and the distant calling of the birds as they flew from tree to tree, reminded her of the country woods and fields she had so recently left.

Presently she rose with a shiver; it was chilly, and her thin coat was but a poor protection against the bleak winds. As she strolled towards the exit that led to Hyde Park Corner, a beggar stopped her—one of the usual specimens that drift from pillar to post, living on the charity of chance pedestrians, when not shadowed by that blue-coated bugbear, the police.

"Please, kind lidy, a copper!" the woman whined. "I'm just out of the 'orspital, and am walking to see my sister wot's in the country."

The girl stopped; her gentle heart stirred by the woman's miserable condition. Rags, dirt, and decay were all written in her low-bred face; and, unnoticed by the girl, were the evident signs of drink in the sodden eyes and bloated skin.

"I am afraid I have not much to give you," she said in a kindly tone; "but I will give you sixpence. Have you far to go?"

The woman nodded, and cast a hasty glance round in search of her mortal enemy, "the copper." He was not in sight, however, so she pocketed the sixpence, and said:

"Yes, lidy; I'm going to Melton in Leicestershire."

"Melton!" the girl gasped, with blanched cheeks and startled eyes. "Did you say *Melton?*"

"Yes, lidy," the woman whined, wondering at the interest so suddenly evinced by the lovely young girl with the "angel face" and sad eyes. "I'm goin' back to visit the grave of my pore 'usbin', 'e was murdered in the wood, and I'm a widder without a penny!"

For a moment it seemed that the girl before her would faint, she swayed and trembled like a leaf, while her eyes looked staring and wild.

"Your husband!" she whispered; "how—how awful! What—what—was his name? I—I—once knew—Melton."

"Mike 'Olland, miss," the woman said dolefully, glad to have created an interest in a "lidy" who might be prevailed upon to dispense her charity more liberally under the influence of pity. "Me and 'im was as 'appy as could be till we lost our little girl, and then——"

She stopped abruptly, startled by the frozen look of horror on the white face of the girl, who threw out one trembling hand to steady her tottering steps.

"Don't—don't say any more!" she gasped. "See! I will give you nearly all I have; I must keep a few shillings, but you may have the rest. It is only half a sovereign," she said, with a pitiful smile, as she pushed the money into the astounded woman's hand; "but—but take it, for the sake of your—your little girl!"

Without waiting for the ragged specimen of humanity to speak she turned and hurried away with swift, eager steps, almost as though she expected the woman to follow her.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated the outcast, in a puzzled tone; "who would 'ave thought that I should 'ave touched lucky in the park! All along o' bein' tru'fl, s'elp me if it ain't! I calls that real encouragement to go straight—till I'm pinched!" she added, grinning. Then, biting the piece of gold she disappeared among the trees.

In the meantime her benefactress had got half way down Piccadilly before she pulled herself up. The chance meeting with anyone who knew Melton had been an unexpected shock, but the terrible communication the dirty, ignorant, creature in the park had made to her had been a greater shock than she had felt able to bear.

Her only desire had been to tear herself away from the glance of those dark, evil eyes, to hide from the sound of that coarse, illiterate voice.

The woman in the park had been the wife of—of the man whose name she had not dared to breathe, lest it should be suddenly whirled away by the wind, and shrieked over the housetops till it reached the spinny in Melton Wood! That woman—his wife, then the "little girl" that was lost must have been——"

She bit her lips in an agony of shame, as she remembered how she had yearned to lay her head upon a mother's breast, to feel a mother's kiss upon her brow! Now the name she most dreaded was that of "Mother"!

"And he was going to find *her* for me!" she thought, with a bitter smile. "Thank God that he will never do so now! He will forget when he is better, while I——"

She shivered wearily. It was now nearly three weeks since she had flown, like a thief in the night, from all that she had loved. The long tramp across the country, in order to avoid Melton, to the further station of Chorlton, where she had waited for the London mail; her sole possessions a handbag and Sir Trevor's Christmas present to her of five pounds; that, and a few trinkets, given to her by the boy who had once been her lover, in the days when their love had promised so fair and sweet!

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She had come to London and had been fortunate in finding a kindly landlady, who let her have a small bedroom for five shillings a week, in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury. Then there had begun a weary search for employment.

When the last of her little all began to diminish, she had paid an entrance fee at an agent's where posts were found as governesses, companions, and secretaries, but so far had met with no success.

Afraid of being traced by her own name, she had called herself "Ivy Lodge" in the books of the agents, and remembered with a start that she had received a typewritten letter from them that morning to call at the office in Cockspur Street at four in the afternoon. It was nearly that now, and after reassuring herself that she was not followed by the beggar in the park, she turned her steps in the direction of Cockspur Street.

Suddenly she stopped; the street boys were calling out the latest editions of the evening papers, and carried pink placards in front of them. One caught her eye; and the words she read in the huge letterpress were to her like a flaming sword of justice. She reeled like a drunken woman, and caught at a lamp-post to steady herself. The words that had roused her from her lethargy were:—

THE MELTON MURDER MYSTERY!
A Missing Link!
Where is Ivy Strange?

She felt her face flushing and paling with the sudden horror of being confronted by the sight of her own name on the long line of pink placards, and, to her own sensitive imagination, she seemed conscious that the passers-by looked at her suspiciously, as though they had already guessed the secret she had thought so secure.

An insane impulse seized her to stop and cry aloud that "Ivy Strange" was in their midst, and had run away from Melton because she was afraid to stay! But the impulse passed, and with quivering limbs and strained, hunted eyes, she made her way to the agent's office, hearing all the while the clamorous words that flared on the placards:—"Where is Ivy Strange?" "Where is Ivy Strange?"

In the waiting-room she regained a little of her self-control, but looked pale and frightened as she went into the inner office.

"Ah, Miss Lodge," said the lady clerk, regarding the trembling girl before her coldly. "I have a most exceptional post open for a secretaryship to an author. In fact, I would hesitate to have sent for you as you have no experience of any kind, were you not a good Latin scholar, but none of the ladies on my books just now are acquainted with the language. I am afraid, though, even now, that you look too delicate for the work."

The girl flung out her hands eagerly.

"Oh, no, don't say that! I am stronger than I look; indeed I am; and I will work so hard to please him if you give me the post. My languages are good, and I can easily learn to type. Besides, I understand shorthand."

She stopped abruptly, colouring hotly with the passion of words she had let loose from her heart. It was urgently imperative that she got this post, for now her store of ready money was perilously low, since she had been so liberal with the woman in the park.

A strange voice answered her—the voice of a grave, white-haired man, with sad, hollow eyes, and a sweet smile that spoke of past sufferings.

"I think this lady will suit me admirably, madam," he said slowly, looking at the girl with a puzzled expression; "she will regain her strength, perhaps, when her mind is at rest."

"Very well, Mr. Vivyan," replied the woman briefly; "of course, you are the first person to be consulted, and I am glad you came to choose for yourself, instead of letting me send them up to you." Then turning to Ivy, who stood listening in a tumult of relief, she said. "When will you be ready, Miss Lodge, to take up your duties?"

"I am ready now," she replied simply.

Mr. Vivyan rose. "Then you had better come to my house at Surbiton to-night, Miss—Miss Lodge," he said. "I have a housekeeper who will receive you, and to-morrow we can begin work. This is my address."

He handed her a card, and with a bow that included herself and the clerk, he left the office—a strangely distinguished figure that had "tragedy" writ all over it.

When he had gone Ivy glanced at the card and read:

Mr. Vernon Vivyan,
"*The Retreat*,"
Surbiton, S.W.

"I suppose you know who he is, Miss Lodge?" said the voice of the clerk.

"I am afraid I do not," she replied; "I have not been reading much lately."

"Then I will tell you," said the woman. "He is the author of that celebrated book 'The Pariah.' He has become the man of the hour, like Byron; for one morning he woke and found himself famous. You are very lucky to work for him.'

In the meantime, the man of the hour, Vernon Vivyan, was driving to Waterloo Station in a hansom. He was thinking about the face of the girl he had engaged as his secretary. It was so sad, so haunted by the intangible presence of fear—as his had been once—that immediately he had felt a wave of interest go out to her.

She seemed alone, isolated by Fate from the common daily intercourse with her fellow creatures—as he had been for so many awful years—that he was glad he could, in a small way, make her life a little less burdensome.

Besides, something in her had sent his thoughts backwards on a trail of painful memories. She had one or two little mannerisms—a lilt in the voice, a gesture with the hand, and a movement of the head—that reminded him of the one woman who had been, for a brief month, the Alpha and Omega of his life, and whose delicate soul had been crushed under the Juggernaut of shame until it had killed her, and with her—their child!

Nearly three months had passed since his book had been accepted, and published immediately afterwards, and from that hour he had not looked back.

The book, written with his life's blood, had, indeed, proved a life preserver, and now he was making money; and money to him did not spell luxury or forgetfulness, but—revenge, and the resurrection of a name that had been dead for nearly twenty years.

He had not sent his work into the world labelled by the name of an ex-convict, but had, for the furthering of his plans, adopted his first two names, "Vernon Vivyan," that in no way connected the once shabby, down-at-heel ticket-of-leave man, Vernon Grant, with the author of "The Pariah."

Invitations and offers of friendship he had quietly and firmly refused, his whole heart set on two objects—the work that was part of his soul, and the revenge that was part of his life. To see his enemy in the dust, and—for the sake of those dear dead—to stand an honourable man in the eyes of the world.

When Ivy "Lodge" reached the "Retreat" that evening, she was received by a mild-faced, motherly-looking woman, who showed her to her bedroom and the little sitting-room that had been reserved for her special use.

"Mr. Vivyan would like to see you after you have dined, miss" she said. "He will be in the study."

The girl, refreshed after a dainty meal and a warm bath, brushed her clustering, burnished hair, and fastened a piece of white lace round her neck, as a substitute for the more sedate appearance of the morning, then went slowly downstairs to the study of her employer.

She felt almost happy in the peaceful Surbiton villa, remote from the tear and bustle of London traffic and the title of her new home brought a flood of relief to her heart; for was she not seeking a "retreat" in very truth, where she might not be haunted by the flaming placards with their harsh demands to know where "Ivy Strange" was! Here she was safe, for no one would think of seeking for her in the house of the author, Vernon Vivyan.

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As she entered the study he rose to greet her, kindly, and with an awed deference, as though the society of a woman was a rare experience to him.

"I hope you have not been disagreeably impressed by the loneliness of the 'Retreat,' Miss Lodge." he said gently. "You are young, and youth loves Life's fanfare of trumpets, while I am old, and only care for the softened shades of life that mellow existence!"

"Oh, no," she said, eagerly; "I hate London. It frightens me, and reminds me of a great, big, human 'Zoo,' where all the animals try to outvie each other in making the greater noise."

He smiled. "Then you were not born within sound of Bow Bells? What part of the country do you come from, Miss Lodge?"

She turned a startled glance upon him. "I—I—come from the—north," she answered evasively; then went on hurriedly, "Did you wish to speak to me about my work, Mr. Vivyan?"

"I only wanted to tell you that I will dictate to you every day from ten to one and three to five," he said slowly. "Your time after those hours will be free to spend as you choose—with your friends or elsewhere."

"I have no friends," she said sadly. "When you do not require me I will be in my sitting-room."

"No friends!" he said, looking at her with interest. "It is an odd coincidence, Miss Lodge, but we are very similar in our circumstances! Are you an orphan?"

"Yes," she answered, with a slight shiver, thinking of the dirty tramp in the park. "I have no parents."

"Poor child!" he murmured, "poor child!" Then he added suddenly: "How old are you, Miss Lodge?"

"I shall be eighteen soon," the girl answered simply.

"Eighteen!" That would have been about the age of the child he had never seen! The child that had never lived to call him father! He could almost have imagined that this girl, with the strangely haunting eyes and manners of speech, might have resembled that child when a baby! Her presence was a painful pleasure to him, in recalling the years that had gone, the years that might have been!

He woke from his reverie with a start, to find his secretary waiting patiently in the room.

"We will begin my new book to-morrow, Miss Lodge," he said gently. "The title is already chosen; I am calling it 'Canker,' and although the subject is tragic," he added smilingly, "perhaps the writing of it may bring us both what we most need."

"Forgetfulness," the girl desired, and the man wrote to keep remembrance green.

The following day they began work, and for a week time passed busily, yet happily, in the "Retreat," for the two human souls so strenuously seeking a refuge from their pasts, those pasts as far apart as the poles, yet knit together in a tie closer than death!

"Miss Lodge," said Vernon Vivyan one morning, "I wonder if you would go to the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street for me, and order this list of stationery to be sent up, we shall want it soon?"

Agreeing readily, the girl started, glad of a chance to work for the kind, considerate man who was her master, yet never failed to treat her as a friend, rather than as a servant. His sad face and hungry-looking eyes—as though always searching for someone he never could find—filled her tender heart with a sense of sympathy and fellowship she could dimly feel without understanding.

She carried out her commission at the Stores, then went slowly down the steps, intending to get a 'bus to Waterloo Station.

Suddenly, as she stood on the threshold, a man in a hansom uttered an exclamation of mingled astonishment and exultation, as he caught a flashing glimpse of the slight, delicate girl in black, eyeing the traffic with wide, interested eyes.

It was the work of a moment to stop his hansom, run swiftly up the steps towards her, and take hold of her arm in a firm grip.

"Found at last, my little winged bird! At last my patience is rewarded!"

With a sickening feeling of deadly terror, Ivy raised her head sharply, and gazed into the dark, powerful face of the man she dreaded above all others—the man who knew most of the shameful secret of her life, and whom she had hoped never to meet again. It was Digby Scarlett, and he was looking down into her face with a grim smile of triumph and derision!

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

In Temptation's Grip.

She opened her mouth to speak, but horror froze her tongue to her palate, and she could only gaze at him dumbly.

"You are surprised, Ivy," he went on softly, his hand still holding her arm closely. "You do not seem so delighted as you should, considering that after all these weeks you have come face to face with your future *husband!*"

His words had the effect of loosening her speech.

"No, no!" she murmured; "that is all over, Mr. Scarlett. I can never keep my promise now. Let me go! Please let me go!"

His smile deepened, and his voice grew even more caressing as he said:

"Are you aware, my pretty Ivy, that you are wanted by the police in connection with the murder of the tramp in the spinny, and that, if I choose, I have just to lift my little finger and hail the nearest policeman and give you in charge?"

The girl's face blanched, and into her eyes there stole a look of horror and hunted fear as she returned the gaze of the man who held her liberty in his hand.

"How cruel you are!" she moaned, with quivering lips. "Can you not have a little mercy, and let me go? I am doing no harm; only trying to forget the past."

"Why did you run away," he said, softly, "if you were so innocent? Remember, little Ivy, I first did you a service in thrashing that same tramp when I found you in the wood together. You had a secret with him. I listened, and gathered——"

"Gathered what?" she said, with frightened eyes.

"That he was blackmailing you for some reason, and you were terrified lest he should betray you," he replied, watching her closely and noting the sudden gleam in her eyes. "Was that secret yours or—someone else's?"

"It was——" she began, then stopped abruptly. She could not tell what she knew for the dear sake of her lover. Rather anything than let Digby Scarlett guess the truth! "It was—mine!" she said, lifting her head with a haughty gesture. "Now, please let me go, Mr. Scarlett. I—I—am in a hurry."

"You shall not slip through my fingers again, Ivy," he smiled; "you shall either consent to marry me immediately or I shall give you up to the police! Ah, don't struggle, my pretty bird! I have you now, and your answer will decide your fate."

She bit her lip and cast a nervous glance round, as though to seek some way of escape from her custodian. At any cost he must not know where she was staying, for then she would know no peace of mind; and yet she dared not refuse to seem to be falling in with his wishes, or the alternative would be fatal.

"I will agree to your proposition," she said, in a low, strained voice, "on one condition—that you let me go now, and do not follow me. I will meet you to-morrow anywhere you like, but I can't stay now. Oh, please! If you have any regard for me whatever, let me go now!"

He looked at her curiously. Her opposition only increased her charm in his eyes. She reminded him of that other woman who had defied him so often, and sometimes successfully. Now the thought of bringing this girl to his feet was a joy that made him dizzy in anticipation of the working of his hatred upon the woman who had outwitted him so daringly.

When this girl was his wife, then he would drain the cup of vengeance to the dregs. But he would not lose sight of her. That would be too perilous a proceeding. Besides, he was

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curious to learn what she had been doing all the time she had been in London, while he had employed those weeks in searching high and low for her.

"Let me convince you that I am not your enemy, Ivy," he said, caressingly. "It is as much for my own sake as for yours that I wish to help you to evade the police, who are on the look out for you. Trust me! Be my wife!—and then, together, we will go to the sunny south of France, where all fear and misery will be over.

"As 'Ivy Strange,' the 'suspect,' your liberty is not worth a handful of salt; but as Mrs. Digby Scarlett, the rich woman, you will begin to live a new life, Ivy—a life of peace, sunshine, and love. For I do love you, little one, though I may express myself harshly at times. It is the knowledge that I am so far below you that makes me so.

"Come! Tell me that if I get a special license to-morrow, you will meet me and marry me; then we will leave the past behind us, and severing ourselves from all connection with—with the murdered man in the spinny, and obscure relations—only live for the future! Choose, Ivy, between the picture I have painted for you, or the dreary cell of a police-court and the shameful publicity that will follow!"

He paused, and with burning eyes and dilated nostrils waited for the girl by his side to answer him.

For a moment she was silent, carried away by the vehemence and passion of his pleading, and the prospect of the dreadful alternative that awaited her decision if it were not favourable.

She drew in her breath with a long-drawn sigh. If she could only forget the past, how much easier it would be—how much pain she would be spared!

Then, into the tumult of her thoughts, there came the picture of the unconscious form of Jack, the lover who had defended her from the insult of the man to whose wooing she was now half yielding, and there flooded into her heart a great glow of passionate tenderness for the boy she loved, though she might never see him again.

Was it possible, she wondered feverishly, to marry the man who inspired her with no other feeling but fear and hate, while her heart was bound up with another?

She looked round wildly, afraid to say the words that would bring disaster in their wake whichever form they took—whether acceptance or rejection!

"I—I—give me time," she murmured. "I cannot think now; my brain is in a whirl; this is so unexpected."

Digby Scarlett smiled. He almost fancied he had won, and the thought made him concede a point.

"I will give you five minutes," he said, "that will be ample time in which to make up your mind. Remember, your choice lies between myself and—the police! It rests with you whether you spend to-morrow evening in Bow Street cells, or at a hotel in Paris!"

She turned away, and gazed with unseeing eyes into the crowds of passing faces, that crossed and recrossed in an ever-recurring stream.

How to escape? How to frame the words that would satisfy this man and yet not implicate herself, was the question that kept reiterating in her brain.

Suddenly she uttered an exclamation, and made a sudden dart forward, but her arm was closely gripped by Digby Scarlett.

"Come! Your answer!" he said roughly. "Don't dare to play with me. In another moment I will summon that policeman, in whose society you will probably feel more at home than in mine!"

She turned a white face to him in which despair was largely written.

"How cruel you are! Do you consider it a manly thing to hound an innocent girl as you are doing? But since you have driven me to bay, I am forced to answer you. I will, on *one* condition, marry you, since it is, after all, only exchanging one gaoler for another," she said bitterly; "and that condition is that you tell me whether Jack Maitland is still—alive—or not? If he is—I cannot, even if I rest in a police cell, marry anyone else, for I love him! But if he is dead, then all men are alike to me, it matters not which one I marry!"

His dark, restless eyes flashed with a sudden rage, but he answered her glibly enough:

"Oh! I imagined you knew already; the poor chap died a week ago. It was in all the papers at the time."

Her eyes filled with a sudden mist, as she saw the sunset of her love, and the blow was doubly hard to bear because she heard it from the lips of the man whom she hated.

"Then I will marry you," she said slowly. "My address is——" She stopped suddenly. She could not give him her employer's address, that would be madness. She would instead give him the address of the room she had occupied in Bloomsbury. She had left no trail behind, and he would call only to find that the landlady was as much in the dark as himself.

"My address is," she went on, "18 Upper Guildford Street, Bloomsbury."

"I will go with you there," he said pleasantly. "We will take a hansom, and then can resume our conversation and discuss our marriage."

She shuddered, and, as he strolled towards a waiting hansom, threw a desperate glance round, that suddenly changed into an exclamation of startled joy, for coming towards her was the figure of the kindly man who had taken her into his house, and had been almost a father to her.

"Mr. Vivyan," she cried impulsively rushing towards him. "I want you! I want you!"

But the man to whom she appealed did not hear her cry. He was walking with that abstract look that betokens a mind wrapped in contemplation.

With a terrified glance the girl looked towards the man who held her liberty in his hands, and to her amazement saw that he had forgotten her existence for the time being, and was staring with a livid, frightened face, at the man to whom she had cried.

For a moment she paused, wondering at the strange expression on her enemy's face at the sight of the author, Mr. Vivyan.

Did he know him? she wondered. Or was he acquainted with the fact that she was Mr. Vivyan's secretary?

With a sudden bound she leapt into a passing hansom, and as she drove off, Digby Scarlett, roused from his strange abstraction, darted after her, with a savage exclamation, into the middle of the road, but the hansom had disappeared in the tide of traffic, and he was obliged to return to the pavement, or risk being run over.

"Anyway, I have her address," he muttered. "I will find her later. But that man! To see him, above all others, well-dressed, prosperous, and within a stone's throw of his—daughter! What does it mean? Except," and he shivered—"except bad luck for me!"

Then he followed swiftly the man whom he feared.

That same evening Digby Scarlett made a discovery and an appointment. The discovery was the address of the author, Vernon Vivyan; and the appointment was with a man named Steeve Lampit, the proprietor of a low doss-house down the river way, near Rotherhithe, who did shady deeds for a still more shady price.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

The Deed in the Dark.

When Ivy reached the "Retreat," her heart was in a flutter of fear lest she should have been followed by Digby Scarlett.

That he would do his utmost to trace her she knew only too well, and also feared that in his wrath at having been outwitted, he would give information to the police about her presence in London; or, on the other hand, he might have followed Mr. Vivyan, and acquainted him with the fact that his secretary was none other than the "wanted" Ivy Strange; and then once more she would be an outcast, the child of a criminal, and a pariah, branded by the bar-sinister of the broad arrow!

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When Vernon Vivyan came into the room later, she started to her feet, eager to know the worst—that he had decided to dispense with her services there and then. But his face wore the same kindly expression, and in his voice there was the caressing deference it always had when he spoke to her.

She sighed with relief. For a little while longer then she had a roof over her head. Fate had staved off the blow this time.

"You look tired, Miss Lodge," he said. "I hope your journey to town has not knocked you up?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Vivyan," she replied simply. "I am not very tired."

"I am glad," he smiled, "for I wish you to preside at my dinner-table to-night; I have a guest coming."

"A guest?" she murmured, with frightened eyes and trembling lips. "Is it a lady?"

He shook his head. "No, Miss Lodge, you are the only lady I have spoken to for many years. It is a man whom I met quite recently. He has taken rather an interest in my first novel; and though I would prefer not to invite him here, I feel compelled to offer him some sort of hospitality; and as I belong to no club, the 'Retreat' is the only place to which I can ask him."

She made no response; a horrible dread was making her dumb with fear. Suppose this man was the one from whom she had fled earlier in the morning! Suppose when she descended into the dining-room she came face to face with Digby Scarlett!

She turned desperately to him. "Oh, you have not told me the name of—your guest, Mr. Vivyan," she murmured, forcing a smile to her lips. "I should like to know it."

"Do not be afraid, Miss Lodge," he said quickly. "He is no one who will need an unusual display of costumes. He is a Mr. Heath, from California, over here for a short time."

She breathed softly. How foolish it was to have imagined that it should be Digby Scarlett!

Later, when she entered the dining-room—a slim, girlish figure in black, with wide, violet eyes, and a waving abundance of copper-tinted hair—the man standing beside Vernon Vivyan started as though he had been confronted by a ghost.

"Let me introduce you to my secretary, Miss Lodge," his host said smilingly. "Miss Lodge, this is Mr. Ernest Heath."

The girl bowed silently, noting the shrewd, kindly face of the guest, lit by a pair of keen, blue eyes, and a humorous smile.

At dinner she was very quiet, listening to the two men discussing the different questions of the day; when suddenly the guest of the evening said something that sent the lights in the room whirling round and round in wild disorder, while a strange surging sound buzzed in her ears.

"I see, in the evening papers," Ernest Heath was saying, "that the police are confident of securing the girl concerned in the Melton murder mystery."

Vernon Vivyan raised his eyebrows. "I am afraid I have not read the subject up," he said carelessly. "Who is the girl?"

"Oh, that is not quite clear," said the other. "Her antecedents are at present under a cloud. But her name is Ivy Strange."

The tortured girl took up a glass of water, and put it to her burning lips. The horror of hearing her awful secret discussed so coolly made her want to shriek it aloud, and defy them to betray her! But she sat calmly in her seat, forcing herself to listen.

"Ivy Strange!" Vernon Vivyan murmured. "What a pretty name! And uncommon, too! By the way," he said, turning to his secretary, "your name is 'Ivy' also, is it not, Miss Lodge?"

She moved her lips, but they had grown stiff with fear, and no sound would come forth, except a faint murmur.

"Do you feel ill?" he said quickly. "If so, Miss Lodge, we will excuse you; you ought to go to your room and rest; you have had a long day."

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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She rose unsteadily to her feet, conscious of the keen scrutiny of those piercing blue eyes that watched her with a cynical smile, tearing away the veil from her innermost thoughts.

"Thank you," she murmured; "I feel rather faint—if you will excuse me." With a mechanical bow she went to the door, which was held open by Mr. Heath.

"I trust the effect of the—heat will soon pass off, Miss Lodge," he said politely; but his words sent a shiver through the girl.

When they were alone, the guest said quietly: "How long has Miss Lodge been with you, Vivyan?"

The other started. "Oh, a couple of weeks, nearly," he replied carelessly. "Why do you ask?"

Ernest Heath was silent for a time; many thoughts were passing through his brain.

Then aloud he said: "Oh, nothing, only she reminds me strangely of a cousin whom I last saw about her age—nearly twenty years ago now; but this girl is exactly like Maggie was before I went to California."

Vernon Vivyan started. "Maggie!" Strange that there should be yet another woman in the world with the same haunting eyes of his secretary! "Maggie——" Then he suddenly saw a red mist before his eyes, as a thought rose and shaped itself in his mind.

This man's name was Heath! He had not noticed it at first in the excitement of becoming famous, and the name was a common one. But "Maggie" might stand for "Margaret," and——

"Tell me," he said, lighting a cigar with a shaking hand; "what was the name of your cousin?"

"Margaret Heath—the same surname as my own," replied the other. "I heard she married afterwards. Then, when I came home the first time and called on the old aunt, I found her dead, and so lost all trace of Maggie's married name."

Vernon Viyvan was silent. He could have told the transatlantic rancher the latest details regarding his beautiful cousin of twenty years ago; but they would have been such details as would cause him to rise and revile the man who was his host—the man whose shame had been the means of killing two human souls!

"Well, I have much to do to-morrow," said his guest, after a while; "I shall look you up again after my visit north, Vivyan. It will only be for a few days."

"Where are you going?" said Vivyan, rising also.

"Up into Leicestershire, to visit a famous Manor, known as Maitland Manor," replied his friend. "But the odd thing is," he went on, "the Maitlands are the people who have since had so much trouble over the murder of the man in the spinny, and the missing girl, Ivy Strange, is a foundling they brought up. I am rather interested in Lady Maitland also."

Vernon Vivyan was silent. He had no interest in the history of the unknown Maitlands, who moved in a sphere far apart from his own. His thoughts were set on the strange coincidence that he should be entertaining the only relative of his dead wife, Margaret, and the agony it was to hear Ernest Heath dilating on possible likenesses.

As his guest strolled towards Surbiton station, he murmured aloud:

"That girl puzzles me. Her terror was so apparent, and she was so obviously afraid of me, that I almost believe that the secret the police are searching for is to be found in my friend's house. Her description tallies exactly with that of the missing girl, too."

In the meantime, Vernon Vivyan was reading a letter that had arrived by the last post. It was typewritten, and ran:—

The writer has a trinket belonging to your dead wife, Margaret Grant, and a photo of her baby girl. Both will be given to you if you will be outside the "Great Dane" Inn, Rotherhithe, at half-past eleven to-morrow night.

"How does this correspondent know my new name and address?" he wondered feverishly. "It must be someone who has watched me for a long time! God bless whoever it is, for giving me the chance of possessing something of my dead Margaret's and our child! I will go to-morrow!"

Pressing the paper to his lips, he murmured again: "It's a strange place for an appointment, but I will be there!"

* * * * *

The sky overhead was dark and murky, and the fresh breeze from the river blew keenly in the nostrils of the man who waited in the shadow of the "Great Dane" riverside inn at Rotherhithe.

Suddenly a step came along, and a tall, dark form stood irresolute outside.

"Mr. Vivyan?" whispered the man hoarsely. Then receiving a reply in the affirmative, he said quickly: "Come this way, sir. She doesn't like the glare of the public. She'll be lower down, near the wharf."

He hurried the visitor along by his arm, staving off impatient questions of the new-comer with grunts; and after a time the river came in sight, dark and turgid, lit by the red lights of sleeping barges.

Suddenly the man stopped with a cry, and tried to pull his arm out of the grasp of the taciturn ruffian by his side.

"Where are you taking me to?" he said quickly. "Tell me at once."

He stopped; another form had risen out of the gloom, and bore down upon them.

"What can I do for you, Mister?" he said, with a grin, "a cold bath, or——"

Flinging out his arm wildly, Vernon Vivyan struck the man nearest to him a blow between the eyes that sent him down like an ox. Then, before he had time to turn or cry out for help, a sudden crash descended on his head with a sickening thud. His hat was knocked off, and under the weight of the blow he staggered and fell on to his knees.

Then, as he tried to rise and meet his assailant, two strong arms gripped him round the waist as in a vice, and struggling, writhing, and panting, the two men rolled together towards the river.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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No Fear of Bashfulness.

ETHEL (who thinks her country cousin nervous): "Can't you find anything better to squeeze than a felt hat?" Country Cousin: "Wait a bit. I'm only reducin' my energy, for fear I might hurt you."

An Inspiration!

SHE (poetically): "With this golden bright sky, the sighing of the balmy zephyrs, and the far vista across the foamy waves, one can't but dream they are in sweetest Italy." He: "Good idea! Suppose we have macaroni for dinner!"

John Thought he Was a Model.

MRS. FOLEIGH: "Oh, John, the paper is offering a prize for a description of a model husband." Mr. Foleigh: "You want to have a try at it?" Mrs. Foleigh: "Yes, please." Mr. Foleigh: "All right. Just get the pen, ink, and paper and I'll dictate to you."

The Process was Unsatisfactory.

"YOUNG man," said a stern old professor to a student who had been charged with kissing one of his daughters. "Young man, don't get into that habit. You'll find that kissing is like eating soup with a fork." "How so, sir?" asked the student. "Because," answered the stern old professor, "you can't get enough of it."

Smart Husband, that.

"WELL, my dear," said he, as he was dressing, "I s'pose you were right when you told me last night that there were burglars in the house." "Why?" "Because all the money that was in my pockets when I went to bed is gone." "Well, if you'd been brave and got up and shot the wretch you'd have had your money this morning." "Possibly—but then I should have been a widower." She gave him back half his money.

A New Line of Defence.

"So you deny that you ever asked my client to marry you or that you promised to marry her?" queried the counsel for the plaintiff in a breach of promise case, with a comprehensive gesture and an air of surprised incredulity. "No, sir, I admit it," responded the defendant promptly. "You admit it," shouted the lawyer, leaping to his feet and casting a triumphant look about the court-room. "Yes, I admit it, but the conversation alluded to occurred on Sunday evening, and I believe contracts made on that day are void."

The Favour She Asked.

"PAPA, do you know this is my eighteenth birthday?" "Yes, my dear." "Papa, I want you to do me a great favour on my birthday," and the beautiful girl buried her glowing face on the paternal bosom. "And what is the favour my little girl wants?" "Papa, you have influence with the Town Council, haven't you?" "Well, yes, my dear." "Then have them move that gas-lamp away from in front of our gate." Thus it was that the fond father discovered that a daughter isn't a little girl always. She had a young man.

The Objective Case.

"IF I were to offer to marry you," said a particularly disagreeable young man to a pretty young lady, "in what case should I find you?" "In the objective," she sweetly replied.

Hadn't Time for Himself.

"OH, yes," she said, as they were conversing, "I have studied your character, and I think you are above the average of men." "I don't think much of myself," he answered. "Why not?" "Because I'm always thinking about you."

The Feelings were Chronic.

SHE (gushingly): "There are days when we seem more in unison with Nature than at other times; when our hearts seem to beat in accord with the sublime harmony of the universe. Have you ever noticed it?" He: "Indeed I have. It is always that way with me on pay day."

Taking No Risks.

HE (shortly after the introduction): "Excuse me, miss, but do you think you could ever love me if—well—if you should try?" She: "Well, I must say this is——" He: "Oh, don't be offended. It cost me more than £100 to find out whether the last one loved me or not, and I've got to economise, you know."

His Reason was Practical.

OFFICER'S WIFE (fondly): "Do you remember, John, how you used of an evening to hold my hand—my sweet little roseleaf you used to call it, you funny boy—for hours and hours. How silly, silly my old boy used to be!" Old Boy (grumpily): "Nonsense, Jane, don't be stupid. I was always practical and business-like. I did that just to keep you from the piano."

Risky Economy.

WIFE: "But, my dear, we can't afford to stay at home this summer." Husband (in surprise): "Good gracious, can't afford it? Why, we owe the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker, and everybody else, and haven't a farthing to pay them with." Wife: "Yes, but if they saw we couldn't afford to go away they would come down on us for the money, and we would have to go either into bankruptcy or starve to death."

Another Sort of Trial.

THEY had tried all the penny-in-the-slot machines on the pier, until at last they came to one that didn't respond to the magic bronze. "Look here, my man," said Crumbles to the pier attendant, "that machine is to try your weight; the next your strength; then your sight; and now I've put a penny in this thing, but I didn't see what it's for." "That, sir," replied the pierman; "oh, that's one to try your temper, sir." And it did.

A Ruse that Succeeded.

MISS JINKS was out walking with an admirer on each side. A storm came on, accompanied by lightning. Jones said he was frightened. Brown thought it a capital opportunity to show off his superior courage before the adored one. "What are you frightened at? I am as cool as can be." "Yes, I should not fear," replied Jones, "if you and I were alone, but I am afraid of Miss Jinks in this lightning, she is so attractive." Brown is still a bachelor, but Jones is not.

Got Him this Time.

MRS. DECOURCEY: "By the way, Pauline, as I passed the drawing-room last evening I heard you and Mr. Millions engaged in an animated discussion on some question. What was it about?" Pauline DeCourcey: "Why, you see, ma, he was trying to maintain that in spite of a short acquaintance it was a girl's duty to kiss her acknowledged lover." Mrs. DeCourcey: "Well, the idea! I never heard of such audacity. Of course you upset his argumentative fabric?" Pauline: "I did, ma. I convinced him in no time that it was the lover's duty to kiss the girl, and while he did it Johnny took the photo. Oh! he can't break away now!"

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Signs of Admiration.

How can a girl tell when young men admire her? "E. M. C." is sixteen, and knows very few of the opposite sex. Her parents are very strict, and do not allow her to go out much. There are several young men who look at her when they meet her out. But they do not try to get an introduction. Do they really admire her, or is it her fancy? "E. M. C." has been told several times that she is pretty.

* * * * *

It is a way with young men, "E. M. C.," to look at a pretty girl. They do not always mean that they really admire her, not as would-be lovers, that is to say. If you are pretty, you will have to endure the gaze of the opposite sex. It is generally those who have the least intentions, too, that stare the most at a girl.

* * * * *

You should avoid anything like staring back at these young men, as no pretty girl should cheapen herself. One of these days, the right kind of young man will see you and admire you, and, depend on it, if he is really worth anything, he will find some other way of getting to know you than trying to attract your attention outdoors.

❦❦❦

An Awkward Position.

"JACK" writes to tell me a curious example of parental interference. Some years ago, a new manager came to his people's business, and brought his family with him. "JACK" fell in love with the eldest daughter, and all went well until a few months back, when an unpleasantness took place between the manager and "JACK'S" principal. "JACK'S" people now wish him to break off his engagement with the girl, and are trying their utmost to get her to consent to doing so. If "JACK" persists, he would be unable to bring his wife to meet his relations, and runs the risk of being "cut off with a shilling."

* * * * *

As you say, "JACK," it is unfair to vent the unpleasantness with the girl's father on you and your sweetheart. But the case is one which calls for delicate handling. It would not do to appear to be taking the part of one who has quarrelled with your own people. I advise you to allow matters to lapse for a while between you and your sweetheart—at any rate while there is still any heat between the parties.

* * * * *

Don't break the engagement off, but agree not to see each other for a while. In course of time the incident will be forgotten and probably the girl's father will have gone to live elsewhere. Then, there would be no harm in your bringing about a social reconciliation, even if business relations ceased between the father and your relatives. It would, however, be unwise to fly in the face of those to whom you are bound by interest.

Going to a Wedding.

YES, "H. G.," if you accept an invitation to a wedding it is usual to take or send a wedding-present. You say the engaged couple are only slight acquaintances of yours. Well, in that case, if you cannot afford a good present I think it would be better to send your congratulations by telegraph, or letter, and not to be present in person.

❦❦❦

A Choice of Two Loves.

"DEPRESSED" is thirty-six, and engaged to a girl of seventeen. Lately he has met another lady, this time aged twenty-seven, and, since meeting her, finds that his former love is dwindling somewhat. He is becoming passionately fond of the older lady. Should he break off the engagement with the first one?

* * * * *

I cannot imagine a case where an engagement could be better broken off. The second lady is nearer your own age, probably more experienced, and is therefore more likely to make you a good wife than a young girl. Besides, it would be cruel to the latter to continue engaged to her if your affection has gone. However, I strongly disapprove of your changeable views, and only hope that if you do break off the engagement the young lady will be the gainer, and will meet someone nearer her own age, and of a less fickle disposition.

❦❦❦

A Too Poetic Lover.

"RHODA" suffers from a too poetic sweetheart. All his love letters are couched in verse, and though he pays "RHODA" some very beautiful compliments, she thinks they would be more sincere if uttered in ordinary prose. What do I think about it?

* * * * *

Well, if I were "RHODA," I should certainly grow a little weary of love-letters in verse, especially if the verse were not particularly good or original. If "RHODA'S" sweetheart wants her to take compliments to herself in poetic form, he had much better present her with marked copies of the great poets. When he wishes to say the right things himself, it would be far more genuine to express them in ordinary prose. If I were "RHODA" I should ask her lover to try his hand at commonplace letter-writing to see how he got on, though he might, if he liked, drop into poetry occasionally when so inclined.

❦❦❦

Should Lovers Write About Business?

"BELLA" has a love-letter trouble of quite a different character. Her swain is a prosperous shopkeeper in a provincial town. He writes to "BELLA" every day, but instead of poetic raptures, he tells her all about the day's business, what kind of customers have called, how much they have ordered, and what business troubles he has had. "BELLA" asks me if I think he ought to tell her so much about business matters, and if I think a lover ought to write in this way?

* * * * *

I admire "BELLA'S" young man far more than the poetic type. After all, their future happiness must depend much on his success in business, and it is only right "BELLA" should know the ins and outs, so as to be able to give her help and advice when they are married.

* * * * *

I know one tradesman who owed his success in building up a large business entirely to the interest taken by his young and pretty wife in the concern. She regularly opened all the letters, and having a keen woman's insight, lifted many a load from her husband's shoulder, and by sheer tact and good sense brought about many a big order. Let "BELLA" imitate her example and show as much interest as she can in her future husband's business affairs.

Cynthia.

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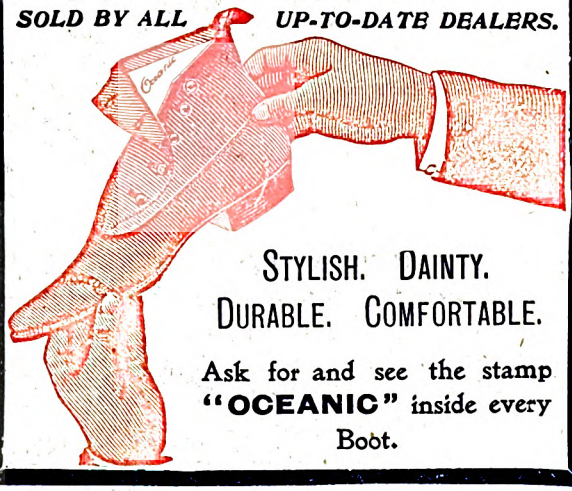

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Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

Crossing the First.

"You know that we are having a visitor to-night, Dallas?"

"No, Mrs. Chaloner."

Dallas East turned from the verandah-rail upon which she had been leaning. She was a tall, graceful brunette, with a quick, almost haughty glance, and a clever, thin-lipped mouth. Her short skirts and the brown locks, caught back from her temples with ribbon, were those of a girl still in the schoolroom. But there was something in her shrewd, sensitive, clear-cut features that stamped them with a look of womanhood. They bore the lines of habitual reserve, even of resentment.

Mrs. Chaloner leant back among her cushions and rocked indolently in the bent-wood lounge-chair that held both her and them.

She had laid down her novel, and the afternoon sunshine stole in at a corner of the verandah to illuminate the carefully-waved grey hair, regular white teeth, and wrinkled, yellowish complexion, as if they had been under the theatrical limelight.

"Sir Francis Brunton," she said, "is coming down from Westminster with Mr. Chaloner for the week-end."

"Oh!" answered Dallas, gazing abstractedly out over the green lawns that, shaded by a great old tree or two, swept away to the edge of the silver Thames; "he has been here quite often lately. But you would scarcely know he was about the place. What with his fishing and his Parliamentary papers, he doesn't seem to have a thought to spare for ordinary mortals and their doings."

A slow smile contracted her companion's acute, selfish countenance.

"That's where you're wrong, Dallas," she observed. "Sir Francis has had a good many thoughts to spare for somebody—and that somebody no less a person than yourself."

"Me!" exclaimed Dallas, and added disdainfully, "Oh, I suppose I get on his nerves. I do on most people's."

Mrs. Chaloner rocked calmly. "You do indeed," she retorted, "but it is not Sir Francis' nerves you have contrived to affect, but his heart. He has spoken to Mr. Chaloner about you—amazing as it seems, he is genuinely smitten with you—he wants you to be Lady Brunton."

Dallas stood as if turned to stone.

"Lady Brunton," she repeated. "He wants me to—to marry him! Oh," she added hastily, "I—I don't love him; I—I've never taken enough notice of him to like or dislike him. And he's ever so much older than I am."

"As thirty-eight is to eighteen," said the other; "but no matter, I was sure you would look at it in that light. That is why I told Mr. Chaloner to explain to Sir Francis that I thought it wise to inform you of his proposal myself. There are several considerations that you ought to have a chance of weighing before you commit yourself, in your usual impulsive fashion, against the offer."

The younger woman knitted her brows. "I suppose you are going to remind me," she said hotly, "that I am a pauper on your bounty?"

Mrs. Chaloner winced. "I am going to do nothing of the sort," she rejoined, "I am only going to point out to you that neither Mr. Chaloner nor I are able to provide you with a dowry, and that, should we die before you marry, you will be penniless. Every shilling we have passes to a distant cousin."

She regarded tolerantly the pale, proud face of Dallas East.

"Of course," she continued, "it is not your fault or ours that your mother's property barely realised sufficient for your education and upbringing. Women should never dabble in business; your mother had quite an absurd idea of what her investments were worth. Though she was my friend I must say that she was shockingly deficient in common-sense, or, for instance, she would never have married your father."

The listener bit her lip, and her brown fingers caught nervously at each other.

Mrs. Chaloner rose—the sun was inconveniencing her.

"If you accept Sir Francis," she said, "your future will be secure. You will have wealth, position, a title, and a husband who is embarked already upon a distinguished political career. If you were anything else but what you are—a sentimental, self-willed child—I should have come to you and congratulated you on the astonishing piece of good luck that has brought a future Cabinet Minister to the feet of a dowerless schoolgirl. As it is, I do my duty in warning you of the folly and ingratitude you are quite capable of committing in refusing him."

Dallas East confronted her critic, her eyes blazing, her limbs rigid.

"Have you finished?" she said fiercely.

Mrs. Chaloner shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes," she replied, "and if your expression does not belie your thoughts, Dallas, you had better not begin."

With which dexterous thrust she stepped through one of the French windows into the drawing-room behind her. Dallas watched her with a hard, stern anger.

"It's true," she murmured. "I am a pauper! All I have is myself, and so I must sell myself or go on sponging on people who make my existence odious to me. Oh, why wasn't I born where I could have learnt to earn my own

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living, instead of having to stand mute out of an intolerable gratitude and hear my father and mother insulted!"

A sob choked her utterance, and descending hurriedly the verandah steps, she darted across the lawn, to thread the winding pathways of the riverside garden, and at last to fling herself down in a grassy corner sheltered by tall privet-hedges.

She lay thus for some time, and then a ripple of clear, bird-like notes fell on her ear. They were too melodious for the voice of any feathered songster, and the air was an operatic one, given with a multitude of delicate variations. The notes were those of a flute, played as that abused instrument is but rarely played out of a great orchestra.

Dallas started up on to her knees, brushing back her brown locks. The music came from the other side of the hedge; she sprang to her feet, went to the leafy wall, and putting her fingers into her mouth, whistled expertly.

A moment more and the musician had leapt through a gap in the bushes, his flute in one hand, a dewy damask rose in the other. A slight, boyish, hatless figure, grey-eyed, and with crisp, brown curls, his grave yet handsome face showed that shy sensibility which goes to form the composition of the true musician.

"I'm so glad I've found you," he said. "I've been playing up and down the hedge for an hour or more. See, there is another of my roses out." And he gave her the splendid scented flower.

Dallas put it to her nostrils and stood with drooped head, drinking deep draughts of the odour.

"Thank you, Kenneth," she murmured, "it is very, very beautiful, and they are larger and darker this year. The bush is improving."

The flute-player paused, watching her. "That is because it is blossoming for you," he said. "Do you know, Dallas, it is just a year to-day since we first spoke to one another over the fence? We have known each other for a whole year."

"A year," repeated the girl slowly. "How time flies! But I don't think I know you all the same, Kenneth; you appear and disappear at the gap in the fence as if you had the gift of becoming invisible. If it wasn't that I could see your house from my bedroom window I should fancy it was all an enchanted wood on the other side, and that you were a fairy prince disguised as a wandering musician."

The flute-player shook his head, frowning. "There is nothing to know," he rejoined, "except that I am Kenneth Haviland, an invalid, living alone with my nurses and tutor. I am ordered to make no friends, I wish to make none, I have none that I wish you to meet."

He broke off suddenly; she had raised her own head and he had seen her pale, tear-stained features.

"So they have been at you again," he commented gloomily. "What a shame—what a cruel shame!"

Dallas tried to smile. "Oh, it's not all that bad," she replied, "not this time. They really imagine they are trying to do me a service. What do you think—there's somebody wants to marry me!"

Kenneth Haviland had dropped his instrument. He bent and picked it up. When he spoke his voice was low and unsteady.

"Is there?" he said.

Dallas nodded, still inhaling the perfume of the rose.

"Yes," she answered, "there is someone rich, titled, not very old, and, they say, awfully in love with me. He has asked my guardian about it, and he's coming to-day, I suppose, to pop the question."

Dallas laughed a trifle extravagantly. The other was fingering the stops of his flute.

"What do you think I ought to do about it?" she continued; "you're the only friend I've got, Kenneth. You know how I'm situated. Ought I to stay and be a pauper on the Chaloners' bounty or marry a man I don't love?"

Kenneth Haviland stooped over his instrument, hiding his face. "I'd rather you didn't ask me, Dallas," he said.

Dallas sighed.

"You are my friend," she retorted, "and you ought to help me. I've got to make up my mind at once. Heaven knows I can't be much worse off than I am with Mrs. Chaloner always reminding me of my pauperism, and Mr. Chaloner scowling over the hotel-bills when we go away."

The flute-player looked up. "What—what is he like," she was asked, "this man they want you to marry?"

Dallas considered. "Oh," she said reflectively, "very nice, nicer than I have quite realised, I fancy. He's a member of Parliament, not young, but not old, to be as successful as he has been. He's dark and tall, clean-shaven, and rather legal-looking. His eyes are blue and kind, and he's very good-tempered and fond of fishing. That's all, I believe, except that he's very rich."

Kenneth Haviland screwed and unscrewed his instrument. He had long, white, delicate hands, like those of an actress.

"You—you don't love him?" he said, in a low tone.

"I don't love anyone," confessed Dallas simply. "I'd rather have a friend like you, Kenneth, than all the husbands under the sun."

A sort of shudder ran over Kenneth Haviland. "I wish you hadn't said that, Dallas," he exclaimed; "I'm not fit to be your friend. If you knew me as I am you would hate me."

"What nonsense!" cried Dallas; "I do know you. I don't know much about you, but that's a different thing. If I didn't trust you, would I ask you what I ought to do?"

The same singular species of shudder passed over the flute-player. "Do?" he said huskily. "Do whatever will make you happy."

He stopped—a harsh voice from the other side of the fence was calling him by his name. He held out his hand. Dallas took it—he had never shaken hands with her before.

"Good-bye," he added, "I shan't see you again. I'm going away—that was what I wanted to tell you."

Dallas cried out in dismay, but he motioned to her to be silent, and with a convulsive grasp of her soft fingers, sprang into the gap in the hedge.

"Good-bye," he said; "I'm glad you called me your friend. I hope you will be happy." And he vanished without a second backward glance into the depths of the plantation beyond.

Puzzled, Dallas retraced her steps through the garden of her own house. The mystery that had always hung about her next-door neighbour seemed suddenly to have acquired a darker, colder shadow—something more than the shadow of the abrupt farewell that had severed their youthful friendship.

The summer breeze dried a tear or two on Dallas' cheek, but she was very sad—sadder than when she had come out for the "good cry" that the sound of Kenneth Haviland's flute had interrupted.

She halted in her abstracted sauntering and looked up. Someone was walking beside her—someone with clear blue eyes, a kindly, "legal" countenance, and a mouth whose firm, quizzical lines were unwontedly nervous.

"Good—good evening, Sir Francis," she said, and paused. Her companion paused too, and drew a long breath.

"Dallas," he began hesitatingly, "Mrs. Chaloner has—has said something to you, hasn't she? I'm afraid it must have startled you. But I have seen for some time that you are not happy here. Forgive my putting it so bluntly."

"It's the truth," observed Dallas, wondering why she had never noticed how bright and kind his eyes really were and how caressing his grave, strong tones could sound.

"Yes," he said, "my poor, lonely little Dallas, it is the truth. Do you think that you could let me try to make you a little happier, Dallas? I am not so old as you may imagine me, dear, and I have a young heart in my breast, or I had, for you have stolen it from me. Dallas, won't you give me yours instead?"

Dallas felt a thrill of power that fluttered her waking womanhood. The man before her had grown pale and the hand extended towards her was trembling slightly. She knew suddenly what it was to be loved, and her lonely heart stabbed her with a bitter pang.

"I—I am very selfish," she said unsteadily, "I—I never

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thought about loving you, Sir Francis, but—but I do want someone to love me."

Francis Brunton put his arms about her.

"And you will let me be that someone?" he murmured; "you will let me try to make your life better worth living, you will let me try to win, perhaps, a little of your love?"

Dallas, mastered by his tenderness and her own solitariness, allowed her head to sink upon his breast. She was sobbing violently.

That night, when she was alone in her room, she opened the window and looked forth at the silent night and the peaceful river. There were no lights in the neighbouring house—an unusual thing, for Kenneth had pointed out to her once the window of his "den," and it, at all events, was seldom unilluminated after dusk.

The perfume of rose-leaves came to her nostrils. She turned and saw that the rose he had given her lay where she had placed it some hours earlier, on her toilet-table. She picked it up. A gem on her finger—a fine diamond in a man's ring—caught the light and glittered. It was Sir Francis Brunton's—he had put it on her finger till he could replace it with a more fitting sign of betrothal.

Slowly Dallas fingered the blossom in her hands—the petals broke loose from the stem, a scented heap in her hollowed palm. She scattered them into the darkness beyond her window and shut the casement.

Crossing the Second.

"Do you know, little woman, I'm afraid I neglect you shamefully. I promised you you should never be lonely after you were married—a pretty way I keep my promise."

Francis Brunton put down his coffee-cup and glanced at the figure on the other side of the dainty *tête-à-tête* table. The subdued talk and glitter and the rippling orchestral music of the dinner-room in the newest and smartest London hotel restaurant surrounded them, but a friendly pillar, incircled with palms, screened the small table and the two diners.

Dallas smiled—she had been watching her husband's thoughtful face. Francis Brunton was three years older than when, in a certain riverside garden, he had asked her a momentous question, but he looked three years younger.

When he laughed, by comparison with his former grave self, he seemed almost boyish. Dallas had become a woman—in her handsome dinner-gown and diamonds, a rarely beautiful and imperial woman.

"Was that what you were pondering?" she said. "How foolish! You know that I am very happy—very, very happy."

"Are you?" murmured her husband, and he leant to gaze into her bright face.

Dallas' eyes answered for her.

"Of course I am," she said. "I like to watch you climbing up—up—up, with people wondering at you and admiring you, and know all the time that only I have the key of your heart. I am a very insignificant person, I know, but it makes me feel proud. When they made you Home Secretary, I had to snub you every day for a week, to show you that I wasn't afraid of you—don't you remember?"

Francis Brunton clasped his wife's hand under cover of a loaded epergne; they were lost to the crowd of well-dressed diners about them. She patted his fingers caressingly, and looked at a jewelled watch set in the bracelet at her wrist.

"You mustn't stop flirting here with me," she said, "or something will go wrong at the House and the Opposition paper will write nasty little paragraphs about the absence of the Home Secretary. I am going to drop in at the Accringtons' and then on to the Damers' for supper. Another late sitting for you, I suppose—never mind, the session will soon be over and then——"

"Then for Nice once more," said Francis Brunton, rising. "Heigho, I wish I could turn the clock back and have our honeymoon over again."

"And have to re-live the last three years," observed Dallas saucily. "No, thank you, dear, we might miss the Home Office on the way."

Her husband frowned. "Just at the moment," he confessed, "I believe I shouldn't be sorry. I hate this recurring problem of 'to hang or not to hang?'"

Dallas sighed. "You mean that Glasgow murder," she said. "Yes, but, after all, dear, you are guided by what the judge and the Crown lawyers think."

The Home Secretary put her cloak about her shoulders.

"I know," he answered, "but the responsibility is mine. I am tempted to be merciful, but the judge is adverse and so are my other advisers. The fellow shot the policeman, it is true, but the wound was not in a necessarily vital part and only proved fatal by complications. And there was something heroic in the stand he made that his companions might escape. I should like to save him, but it is unquestionably a dangerous precedent, since the police must be protected in the exercise of their duties."

"I don't see," said Dallas, woman-like, "that it's any use being Home Secretary if you can't please yourself."

Francis Brunton smiled sadly. "One has only a sort of casting-vote," he replied. "Come along, little woman, don't let my worries afflict you."

He donned his crush-hat, and, her hand upon his arm, led her to her carriage. Ten minutes later he was alighting from a hansom in Palace Yard, and she was sweeping up the great staircase at Accrington House.

Lady Brunton had become socially one of the best-liked and one of the most unfeignedly respected of young matrons. Her frank good-nature, her shrewd common-sense, her quick personal pride, and, above all, the "grand passion" that existed between her and her popular husband, had opened for her many a door that stands closed to the merely rich and smart.

"See, there is another of my roses out." And he gave her the splendid scented flower.

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It was late when her carriage stopped at her own door in a quiet street off St. James'. As she descended from the luxurious brougham she looked up at the neighbouring clock tower and sighed—the light at its summit showed that the Commons were still sitting.

A footman opened to her, and she went on upstairs to her boudoir; most of her household were already asleep, for her rules were those of a considerate and intelligent mistress.

The door of the boudoir stood ajar and the apartment was lighted. Concluding that her maid had heard her arrival, and preceded her to the room, Dallas passed in.

The door closed behind her, swiftly, noiselessly, and she felt herself seized from behind. A gag was thrust into her mouth, a silk handkerchief bound over it, her wrists were fastened, and she was partially released. Her cloak had dropped from her shoulders, her fettered hands were still held by her assailants. They were two men—both vigorous, roughly-dressed, and masked—from upper lip to forehead.

She regarded them steadfastly—supposing them to be burglars. Then she noticed that nothing was disarranged in the room, no drawers or cases stood wide to suggest the rapid expert rifling of the modern cracksman. Her maid, too, a pleasant English girl, sat gagged and bound in a chair—pale and terrified.

One of her assailants—the taller—spoke to Dallas quietly.

"You are Lady Brunton," he said, "take it coolly—we hope not to have to do you any harm. But if, for our own purposes, we have to take that muffler off your mouth, remember that a cry or a call will mean your instant death." And he showed her a long, keen dagger.

Dallas shivered.

"Come," he added, loosing his own grasp upon her wrist and shoulder, and passing before her and his companion into the adjoining apartment. It was a small writing-room that Francis Brunton had had fitted up and comfortably furnished in order that, when working at night, as he had been often compelled to during the three years that had slipped away in arduous political labour, he might be near his wife. There was a wall-telephone in a corner, affording a means of communication between husband and wife during late sittings at the House.

The chief of the masked men approached the telephone and rang up. The number that he gave was a familiar one to Dallas—that of the members' telephone at the House of Commons.

"Will you ask Sir Francis Brunton to come to the telephone?" he said, when the connection had been made. "Lady Brunton wishes to speak to him."

There was a pause and the three waited.

"Yes?" said the man at the telephone suddenly; "is that Sir Francis Brunton?"

Another pause.

"Sir Francis Brunton," went on the masked stranger at the instrument, "I am speaking to you from the room adjoining your wife's boudoir. Her life depends upon your silence and self-control. Remain where you are and listen to me."

He stopped an instant—an instant only.

"Your wife is here," he said, "gagged and bound and in our power, but uninjured—as yet. You will give me your word of honour as an English gentleman that John Howland, now lying under sentence of death at Glasgow, for the murder of a policeman, will be reprieved. If you refuse, on your return here you will find your wife stabbed to the heart."

Dallas, overpowering her guardian, sprang forward. The realisation of her husband's agony had given her an irresistible strength. But it passed as quickly as it had come. The man at the telephone seized and held her.

"Let him hear your voice," he commanded, "and I swear to you, if you scream or cry, I will lay you dead at my feet."

He set the blade of his dagger to her bosom and his comrade took off the bandage and removed the gag. The other motioned to the telephone. Dallas put her lips to the mouthpiece; the other still had the receiver to his ear.

"Darling," she said, "don't think of me; do what—what is right."

She was dragged back and regagged, an oath echoing in her ear.

"Something's wrong," exclaimed the taller of her captors, snatching up the momentarily-relinquished ear-piece, "he screamed out."

The speaker listened intently and then started back. "Someone says he's fainted," his ally was told; "the chance has missed fire. We must carry her off and work it that way."

Dallas wrenched herself free and turned to bay. But her hands were bound behind her and she could not get at the gag in her mouth. She sprang to the bell, but the man with the knife intercepted her. His companion, who had remained mute throughout the whole singular episode, stepped between.

"No more of this," he said; "I'm sick of it, do you hear?"

His voice was strangely familiar—Dallas racked her brains to identify the stern, tremulous tones. But there was no time—the two men had grappled angrily. The younger man staggered back out of the fierce, silent struggle; he had wrenched the dagger from the elder, but his mask had been disarranged and it fell to the ground. Dallas gasped—the face revealed was that of her one-time friend and confidant, Kenneth Haviland!

He came towards her, his face white and his eyes drooping.

"Forgive me," he faltered, "I didn't recognise you at first; I did not know it was Brunton they—they wanted you to—to marry. I—I—it was only bluff—a—a mad idea, but we wouldn't have hurt you."

Dallas shrank away as he advanced.

He stopped, wincing.

"You can't understand," he said, "the man they are going to hang is my father. I hate him—he brought me up to be a thief and a forger, but I couldn't stand by and let them hang him. He—he held the police at bay that I might escape."

His companion flung himself upon the speaker. Far off there was the sound of wheels and hoofs—a wild, mad gallop such as seldom or never breaks the night quiet of the London streets.

"Away, you fool," Kenneth Haviland was told; "we're tracked—that's coming here."

He threw open a second door to the room and darted out. Kenneth Haviland stayed to loosen the cord about Dallas' wrists and to snatch the gag from her mouth.

"Forgive me," he said, and was gone.

A moment or two later, Francis Brunton, panting and dishevelled, sprang into his wife's boudoir, to find Dallas, half distracted with pity and anxiety, calling his name into the transmitter of the telephone. He caught her to him, and, strained to his breast, she contrived, between the suffocating sobs and shuddering sighs of a nervous collapse, to tell him what had happened.

"His son," he murmured slowly, "poor lad, poor lad!—my darling, what is the matter?"

A sudden sharp cry—half scream, half exclamation—had broken from his wife's lips. Francis Brunton's head—but a few hours before a mass of crisp, dark curls—was snow-white.

* * * * *

The Home Office reprieved John Howland, *alias* Haviland, and a window giving on a flat roof from an upper landing of the house in St. James' was closed with iron bars. Through it Kenneth and his companion had entered that night on their mad errand.

What he had told her was too true. The Haviland gang had been responsible for a brilliant series of international forgeries extending over years. Of those forgeries Kenneth had been the actual executor.

Trained from youth to the science and art of forgery, and kept in seclusion that he might practise it, his soft, woman-like hands had achieved some of the most marvellous imitations that ever harassed European and American commerce.

He and his more resolute companion—the practical chief and organiser of the gang—succeeded in effecting their escape beyond the reach of extradition laws. Nor was Dallas sorry. She will always pity him—except, perhaps, when she looks at her husband's handsome white head.

R. Norman Silver.

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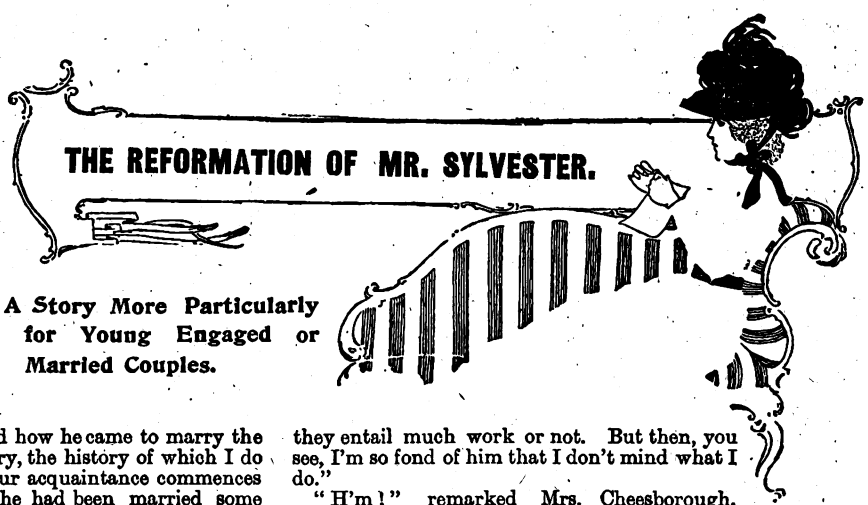

THE REFORMATION OF MR. SYLVESTER.

A Story More Particularly for Young Engaged or Married Couples.

By the way, this is not exactly a story, or a romance, or anything of that sort, but it is simply a history in which a large moral is to be found.

Hugh Sylvester was handsome; that fact was undeniable. And before he had married his pretty wife he had been quite indispensable at every *fête, soirée*, garden party, and dance. In fact, they made of Hugh Sylvester quite a little tin god, and as time went on he grew to regard himself in such a light. Now this was a great pity, for he was one of the best of fellows, if only his friends would not try to spoil him.

How he escaped the clutches of various matchmaking mothers and how he came to marry the girl he loved, is quite another story, the history of which I do not propose to set down here. Our acquaintance commences with Mr. Hugh Sylvester after he had been married some months.

The Sylvesters occupied a flat in the north of London. It contained one dining-room, one living room, one odd room, a scullery, and two bedrooms. In fact, it was one of the latest triumphs of the builder's desire to economically benefit young married couples. The locality, too, was a very nice one—on the verge of the countryside and yet within easy reach of town.

Mr. Sylvester's salary, whilst not large, was quite sufficient for comfort and the swelling of a bank account. In addition to all these advantages, Hugh and Madge Sylvester were very much in love with one another. Then, one naturally says, what more do they want?

There was, however, a flaw in the setting which did not appear until just about the time when we make the acquaintance of the Sylvesters.

The origin of the said flaw lay, of course, in that failing of Hugh Sylvester which I have just chronicled. He had set himself up on a pinnacle, or rather it was the doing of other people, and whilst deeply in love with his wife, he had grown to regard her as—well, just as someone belonging to him who would do all he required and worship him into the bargain.

I do not think he was actually very conceited, but the homage and attention he had received before he was married had given him a remarkably good opinion of himself.

Thus it became apparent to Mrs. Sylvester that Mr. Sylvester was not quite all he might be in the matter of his treatment towards her. He had everything he required, and would have been very surprised if his wife did not see that he was as comfortable as he could be, and perhaps at her expense. And there lies the secret of the flaw. Madge Sylvester was too fond of her husband to deny him anything and in consequence he developed a large bump of selfishness.

"My dear Madge," remarked Mrs. Cheesborough, as she sat at tea in the Sylvester's flat, "you pamper up that husband of yours too much. You feed him on the fat of the land until he regards his home as a restaurant and orders anything he fancies, no matter how much trouble it causes; you conform to every opinion of his, you wait on him hand and foot and do his every bidding.

"And what is the result, what do you get for it all? Why, simply that his lordship is graciously pleased to allow you to work for him, until extravagances become duties and ordinary duties are thankless tasks. Now, my dear, you can get cross if you like, but I've wanted to say it for some time and now I've said it."

Madge Sylvester remained mute, and sat with a thoughtful expression puckering up her pretty face. Presently she said:

"I'm afraid you're right. I have noticed that Hugh wants such a lot of things done and never troubles to inquire whether they entail much work or not. But then, you see, I'm so fond of him that I don't mind what I do."

"H'm!" remarked Mrs. Cheesborough. "And you're going just the way to lose his love by pampering him so."

Her only reply was a very astonished look from Madge.

"Now, listen to me, my dear," went on Mrs. Cheesborough, and for the next half hour she gave a considerable amount of advice of a wholesome nature to Madge Sylvester. And when she left at about six o'clock, these mysterious remarks might have been heard:—

"Now you'll do all I have suggested, won't you, Madge?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then His Imperial Majesty will become Prince Charming again. Good-bye, Madge."

"Good-bye, Maud."

And that was the Reformation Council.

On the following evening at about half-past six Mr. Sylvester arrived home and let himself in with the latchkey. He walked into the dining-room, but, to his surprise, found it empty. I say he was surprised, for Mrs. Sylvester made a rule of rushing to relieve him of his coat, hat, and stick, and then put them in their various resting places.

Mr. Sylvester stood waiting for some minutes, and then with an injured air exerted himself sufficiently to remove his outdoor garb. Then he gazed into a mirror, adjusted his tie, smoothed his hair, curled his moustache, and, with a self-satisfied smile, went to look for his wife. He found her in an easy chair in the bedroom reading a novel. He stood in the open door and waited for her to rush to him, but she neither rushed nor looked, simply turned over another page. In a much injured tone, he said:

"Madge!" And again waited for her to fly to him.

Then she did look, but did not fly.

"Hullo, Hugh!" she said. "Back again?"

He was too astonished to respond.

"Well, aren't you going to kiss me?" she went on.

Mechanically he went across and kissed her. There was something wrong here, he thought, whilst he thoughtfully tugged at his moustache.

"I suppose you want some dinner now?" was the next remark that fell on his astonished ears.

"Er—yes—of course," he stammered. Whereupon Mrs. Sylvester got up and sailed out of the room, gaily humming a lively tune.

Hugh Sylvester stood and gazed in wonderment at his wife's disappearing figure. Left to himself he collapsed into a chair, and thought until he was almost green in the face and his moustache loose with tugging.

"Dinner is ready, Hugh!"

"Dinner can wait!" Hugh savagely muttered to himself, and he still sat thinking. Presently his wife called him again.

"Your dinner is getting cold, Hugh."

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Then he jumped up and hurried to the dining-room, where he found his wife half way through her dinner.

"Well, you might have waited for me," he grumbled.

"My dear boy," replied Madge, "I told you ten minutes ago that your dinner was ready."

"But when I didn't come you could easily have waited. What is for dinner?"

"Veal, dear."

"Veal!" he cried.

"Yes, Hugh. A very nice cut indeed."

"But, Madge," he cried, in an excessively injured tone, "you know I don't care much for veal."

"But I like it better than any other joint, Hugh. And this is the first time we have had it since we have been married."

Mr. Sylvester ate his dinner in ungracious silence.

When the meal was over and all cleared away, Mr. Sylvester picked up a book and began to read. He filled his pipe and lit it, and was beginning to feel very comfortable when suddenly he heard his wife's voice.

"Hugh!"

"Hullo!" was that gentleman's not very gracious response.

"I want some coal brought in, will you come and do it for me, please?"

Had she asked him to get the moon I doubt if he would have been more astonished. Never since they had been married had he done anything of that sort. Surely that wasn't for him to do. But, however, he slowly and reluctantly closed his book, and with a much aggrieved air he managed to raise sufficient energy to fill the scuttle and carry it to the dining-room, but he did it with very bad grace. Then again he arrayed himself before the fire, with the self-conscious air of one who has done noble deeds.

"Hugh!"

It was his wife's voice again. Was he never to have any peace?

"Well?" he called.

"You might come here and reach this jar down for me."

"Great Scot!" he muttered, "is a man never to get any rest?" Then he departed to the kitchen.

"What is it you want?" he demanded.

"You see that jar of pickles on the top shelf, well, I want it got down."

"Jupiter! Well, couldn't you get at it without troubling me?"

"Oh, Hugh, it's not often I ask you to do anything. You see, you have to have the steps, and they are down in the basement; then if you'll get those we can get at the jar all right."

Slowly he departed down the stairs, and in about ten minutes' time came back again, puffing and grunting, with the pair of steps on his back.

"Now, then," he said, grumblingly, "I'll get the jar down."

"It's all right, Hugh. I got it down myself as you were such a long time gone, by pulling the table over to the wall and putting the chair on it. Will you carry the steps back again now, please?"

"Mr. Sylvester's thoughts would have rivalled Turner's painting of Venice for picturesque and lurid colouring. But with mighty self-control he restrained himself and started out of the kitchen on his journey back. No sooner had he gone than Mrs. Sylvester shook with silent laughter, whilst she softly murmured:

"Poor dear old boy. He doesn't take to it very well."

When Mr. Sylvester returned to the dining-room again his wife was very comfortably reclining in the armchair which he had vacated. Again he thought considerably.

Presently he had to go out into the scullery to fetch his slippers, a thing that his wife had always hitherto done. And when he retired to rest that night he was in a decidedly dissatisfied frame of mind.

Much the same sort of thing happened the next evening and the evening after that, though, Mrs. Sylvester has since said, it was as much as she could do to refrain from departing from the counsel of the Council and making Hugh sit down whilst she waited and fussed over him; but, luckily, she persevered. On the Thursday night, though, came the crowning stroke of all.

When Mr. Sylvester reached home he found a note stating that his wife had gone shopping with Mrs. Cheesborough, and would not be back until about eight o'clock.

The note went on to say that there was some steak in the larder, and the potatoes and greens were all ready for boiling on the gas stove. Mr. Sylvester was absolutely dumfounded, such a thing had never happened before. But still, there was only one thing to do, so he got to work.

"How to be happy though married," he groaned, as he hopped round the kitchen on one foot—the other having unfortunately got in the way of the frying pan which he had upset; he had also burnt his fingers in his attempt to save it.

But he eventually got the steak in the frying pan, and lit the gas under it. Then it occurred to him that he had seen his wife put grease into the frying pan when she was cooking. Whereupon he skirmished for grease.

After some trouble, he found a cup standing on a shelf in the larder which he pounced upon.

"Ha! The very thing!" he cried. "I'm sure lard is greasy."

Then he placed a large portion in with the steak, and turned the gas on full under the meat and vegetables.

The meat smelt very peculiar as it was cooking, and while Mr. Sylvester rushed to the door to answer a tradesman, the steak became a glorious black colour. However, he placed it on a hot plate in the oven to keep warm whilst the vegetables cooked.

Presently he came to the conclusion that they had cooked long enough, and removed both saucepans into the scullery. Here he attempted to pour the water off, with the result that half went up his sleeve, and, with an agonising yell, he dropped the whole affair.

Potatoes flew everywhere; Mr. Sylvester spoke fluently. However, he collected as many as he possibly could, and placed them with the steak and cabbage.

"Reckon the drains must be out of order," he muttered, as he carried his dinner into the dining-room.

He arrayed himself at the table and set to work on the food before him with much gusto. Suddenly he gave vent to an exclamation of disgust, then he groaned, and wanted to die.

Slowly he staggered to an armchair and fell into it, all the time moaning in an agonising manner.

In the midst his wife entered, and gazed at him in terrified surprise. Then she rushed across to him.

"Hugh!" she cried. "Whatever is the matter?"

Feebly he pointed to the dinner and groaned out:

"I've been poisoned, Madge. Oh, let me die in peace."

"What *do* you mean, Hugh?" she asked in concerned tones. Then she commenced to sniff, and cried:

"Whatever have you been doing with beeswax, Hugh?"

"Beeswax?" he moaned. "When?"

Then she suddenly glanced at his plate and saw that the gravy, now nearly cold, was fast setting in a white mass. Then she bent and smelt it.

"Why," she cried, "you've got beeswax here."

"That's lard!" he feebly remonstrated. "I got it out of the cupboard."

"What, from a cup?" questioned his wife

"Yes."

"Why, that *was* the beeswax," she cried.

"Oh!"

With a shriek of dismay he rushed from the room, and about half an hour afterwards returned, very pale and white but quite well again. His appearance so upset Madge that the Council's counsel was quite forgotten, but then, of course, he was an invalid that night.

However, I happened to call round there not long ago, and surprised Sylvester in the act of bringing up more coal, and he was whistling over it, too. And no longer is Madge simply Mr. Sylvester's wife, nor does Mr. Sylvester still imagine himself a little tin god, but they are one of the happiest couples I know.

E. Newton Bungey.

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A PLUCKY ESCAPE.

Proving that Honesty is the Best Policy.

"A TELEGRAM for you, miss!"

I took the yellow envelope from the porter of Inkermann Mansions somewhat reluctantly.

A telegram to a woman in the nursing profession generally means a fresh case, and I didn't want another case just then.

The fact is I was quite tired out and was returning to my modest flat in Inkermann Mansions with the full intention of taking a few weeks' absolute rest.

The telegram however was destined to upset all my plans. It ran as follows:

"*To Nurse Compton, Inkermann Mansions. Earl's Court.*

"*Can you undertake slight mental case at once. Wire decision direct to L. Duvernois, Esq., White House, Hadlow-on-the-Hill.* "SPENCER LEIGH."

The signature decided the matter. I had been on Sir Spencer Leigh's list of nurses for some months, but it was the first time the great nerve specialist had sent me a case.

I decided to accept it at once, and, making my way to the nearest post-office, wired my reply as directed.

An hour later, just as I had finished packing my modest trunk, the porter appeared with a second telegram.

"*Motor will meet train arriving Hadlow Junction* 8.5.

"L. DUVERNOIS."

I turned to the railway guide, and ascertained that the train in question left Victoria at 6.30. Then I glanced at my watch. It was six o'clock. That gave me just time to drive to the station, and left no margin for calling on Sir Spencer Leigh. Of course it was better to hear the details of a case direct, but no doubt he had provided ample written directions pending a personal interview.

It was not an inviting evening even for a short journey. The murky fog of London developed into a clinging damp mist as we got out into the open country, and when at length I stepped on to the platform at Hadlow Junction I shivered as I thought of the cold drive in a motor-car.

I had just given up my ticket, when a short, thick-set man, with a brown beard, stepped to my side.

"Nurse Compton, I presume?" he said, raising his motor cap, then as I bowed he added in a smooth, refined voice—"My name is Duvernois. I hope you don't mind rather a long drive. It is cold, but there are plenty of wraps, I think."

There were. In fact, when enveloped in the long fur coat, which Mr. Duvernois insisted on wrapping carefully round me, and with a huge rug over my knees, I felt thoroughly inclined to enjoy my first drive in a motor.

My companion seemed astonished that it should be a new experience for me. "But I forgot," he added courteously, "the automobile is not yet as popular in England as it is with us in France."

"Then you are not English?" said I bluntly.

"No, but I have lived here a good deal, and have at least, I think, mastered your terribly difficult language."

"You speak English wonderfully well," said I, "and my patient——"

"Can only just make herself understood. But no doubt you speak French, Mademoiselle?" he added quickly.

"I used to, and I understand——"

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but I must beg of you not to reveal to my mother that you understand French, or she will insist on talking, and the doctors have decided that the quieter she is kept the better."

"Please tell me all about your mother's case," said I eagerly. "I had no time to go to Harley Street before I left town, so until I see Sir Spencer Leigh——"

"That will be some time hence," said Mr. Duvernois, "because I understand he is starting for the Riviera to-night. He has, however, left full directions about my mother's treatment, and I can, of course, give you the outlines of her case myself.

"Briefly then, her present mental disturbance is due to shock. Three months ago, when on her way to London, she met with a railway accident. When she recovered consciousness it was discovered that the brain had sustained partial injury. She had completely lost her memory on some points, while on others she was as clearly intelligent as ever. For instance, she recognised her maid, Françoise, but not me, her son. Curious, was it not, Mademoiselle?"

"Very curious, and very sad for you, I should think," said I, glancing at my companion's pale, melancholy face.

"Ah, yes, sad indeed, for my poor mother was devoted to her son. But figure to yourself, Mademoiselle, that not only does she not recognise me, but at times she imagines that I am her son's valet and the husband of her maid, Françoise. It is lamentable, is it not? But I am not discouraged. The doctors all assure me that her recovery is a mere question of time, patience, and a quiet, secluded life.

"That is how I came to take a house in this out-of-the-way place. I hope Mademoiselle does not mind the solitude of the country?" he added courteously.

"Not in the least—in fact, just now I am very glad of it," said I.

"That is lucky, for we are three, nearly four miles from Hadlow Village, and ten from the railway station. Ah! there is the church," he added, as we turned into a straggling village street, where the lights from the cottage windows gleamed cheerily in the winter dusk.

We stopped for a moment at the post-office which was at the same time the village shop. Mr. Duvernois exchanged a cheery good evening with the buxom post-mistress as she handed him a bundle of letters and proceeded to inquire after his mother's health.

"She's going on very nicely indeed, thank you, Mrs. Reid," he said courteously, "and the doctors are hoping that your splendid moorland air will soon put her right."

"That's good news, sir," said the woman, and stood smiling in the doorway of the shop as the motor sped up the village street.

Perhaps it was the change from the cheery cottage lights, perhaps that I was beginning to get tired, but it seemed

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to me as though the narrow, ribbon-like road, winding upwards over the moor, would never come to an end. Then suddenly it curved round sharply to the right, and nestling in a cup-like hollow of the hill, stood a substantial white house.

It looked a very cheerful place from the outside, with its twinkling lights, and when I crossed the threshold and was ushered by a rosy-cheeked country girl into a cosy dining-room, where the preparations for a dainty meal were set out, and a huge fire roared up the wide chimney, I began to think I had found very comfortable quarters indeed.

It was not until I had made an excellent meal and enjoyed a cup of coffee, such as one seldom tastes out of France, that I was joined by Mr. Duvernois, who proposed, if I were sufficiently rested, to introduce me to my patient.

I rose at once and followed my host across the square hall to a well-furnished drawing-room, at the door of which he paused and knocked.

"May I come in, *ma mère?*" he said in French, and as there was no response he opened the door, and we passed into the room.

Coming out of the brilliantly-lighted hall, the room seemed to be in semi-darkness, being lighted solely by a small reading-lamp placed on a table beside a high-backed chair.

In this chair, her eyes resting on the book in her hand, and the lamplight falling on her piled-up masses of white hair, sat the handsomest elderly lady I have ever seen.

She took no notice of our presence, till Mr. Duvernois placed his hand on her high-backed chair and said smoothly:

"*Ma mère*, I have brought you a charming young lady as a companion." Then, turning to me, "Mademoiselle," he said, "allow me to introduce you to my mother, Madame Duvernois."

The old lady's book fell to the floor with a crash, as she rose to her feet.

"How dare you address me by that common name? How dare you introduce me as your mother?" she said in low tones of contempt.

Then she pointed to the door. "I wish to be alone. Go! And enjoy the society of your wife and fellow plotter!"

Mr. Duvernois bowed, and with a patient smile on his melancholy face left the room.

Then the old lady turned to me, and as I met the glance of her handsome dark eyes a sudden memory that had not been stirred for years darted across my brain.

I was an awkward schoolgirl, spending a summer afternoon with a little French school-friend, whose aunt was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

She had coal-black hair that rippled above arched brows, and eyes that were the exact counterpart of those turned so searchingly upon me.

"Surely you are Madame de Latour?" I was beginning, when I felt a hand laid across my lips.

"Hush!" she said, "you seem to know me, child, but you must not explain at present." Then she added in harsh, loud tones, "As Mr. Duvernois has been kind enough to provide me with a nurse, I shall be only too glad to avail myself of your services. I am tired of Françoise—as she is well aware," she added, turning to the sallow-faced Frenchwoman who had glided noiselessly into the room without my noticing her approach.

"Unfortunately Nurse Compton does not understand French," said Françoise, flashing a warning glance at me. "So that if Madame wishes to converse, it must be in English."

"How very tiresome," said the old lady, with a yawn. "I cannot hold a rational conversation in that barbarous language.

"Bed, Françoise?" she broke off. "Very well; but since Nurse Compton is here she can relieve you at anyrate for to-night."

"Pardon, madame, but Monsieur's orders are——"

"About as futile as his pretensions to be anything more or less than one of the biggest scoundrels unhung!" said the old lady coolly.

Françoise smiled a contemptuous smile as she turned to me.

"She's pretty bad to-night, nurse, don't be astonished if she insists on telling you her real name is Latour, and that Monsieur Duvernois is not her son but a valet, and my husband."

"I think I understand," said I.

It was a whole week before I found myself alone with Madame de Latour without being conscious of the espionage either of Monsieur Duvernois or Françoise.

The week had, however, not been wasted, for I had succeeded in convincing both Françoise and her husband of my complete gullibility as regards my patient.

I openly bewailed the fact that the poor lady should have such an unpleasant delusion with regard to her son. I pitied Monsieur. I sympathised with Françoise at being forced to live in such an out-of-the-way little place in this quiet Angleterre.

Of course, no doubt, it was the best thing for Madame's health—in fact, Monsieur must be the most devoted of sons to carry out the doctor's directions so minutely, but there was just one thing in which I thought Monsieur was mistaken. His mother did not have sufficient fresh air, I argued, and most doctors were agreed that in mental cases driving was most beneficial. True, Sir Spencer Leigh had not mentioned it, but if I were to write and ask whether a daily drive in the motor——"

"There is no necessity to do that, nurse," interrupted Mr. Duvernois hastily.

"We can try the experiment, and if my poor dear mother likes it, well and good. Unfortunately I shall not be able to drive her myself every day, but my chauffeur understands his business, so it will be all right. Only don't let mother chatter too much, I can't bear to think of the servants being aware of the extent of her infirmity, and if she insists on talking French——"

"You forget, I don't understand French, Monsieur!" said I, laughing.

"Oh, I forgot, nurse; but I am quite sure you understand your business, and if, with your assistance, we can only get my poor mother well enough to enjoy life a little and transact some simple family business, which is at present at a standstill for want of her signature, I shall take care that our gratitude to you takes a very substantial form indeed."

"Thank you," said I, in a tone that left no doubt I had grasped the inner meaning of his words. Mr. Duvernois had decided to try the effect of a bribe, and was obviously satisfied with the result.

So was I, for I had gained my point, and was to drive with Madame de Latour alone, for, curiously enough, Françoise, who had intended to accompany us, had a violent fit of sickness just as the motor drove up to the door—and this in spite of the fact that I had given her a specific of my own some little time before.

When we got into the high road I gave the chauffeur some directions in French.

"Sorry, mum, but I don't understand no foreign lingo," said the man with a good-tempered grin.

"I only asked you where you were going to drive us," said I.

"Wherever you wish, mum. Master didn't give no orders; he said Miss Françoise would know where it was best for

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Madame to go. I've to meet master at the London train at 7.15. There's plenty of time between this and then for a good long drive, mum. It's rather pretty towards Lewes, across the downs and along the Newhaven road."

"Newhaven!" I exclaimed, and caught my breath with excitement before I added quietly:

"How long would it take you to drive us to Newhaven, Armour?"

"Well, it might be done in about two hours and a half, mum, but then we'd have to get back, you see, and that might be too far for the mistress."

"It sounds rather fatiguing," said Madame, with a little yawn, "suppose we go as far as this place—what is it you call it? Louis—Yes? And, *cocher*."

"Yes, mum."

"Drive, *vite, vite*. I want to feel what it is like to go quickly. You understand?"

"Yes, mum," said Armour, and applied himself to the brake, for we were already going at an alarming pace down hill.

Madame de Latour drew me down beside her, and thrust a tiny local railway guide into my hand.

"It's a month old," she said in rapid French; "but let's hope the boat trains haven't altered.

"See you, my child, I have been studying that little book for a whole month, and if we can only get to Newhaven in time to catch the boat——"

"But Armour would perhaps suspect."

"Leave that to me," said the old lady, her handsome eyes flashing with determination.

"But tell me," I said eagerly, "how came this man Duvernois and his accomplice to shut you up in the White House and keep you a prisoner all these weeks? Of course their object must have been money, but how did they hope to obtain it?"

"Chiefly by means of a chapter of accidents, my dear nurse, all of which seemed to play into their hands.

"To begin with, my son Raoul and I made up our minds that we would go for a tour round the world. The idea was Raoul's, of course, and since he desired me to go with him, I was ready.

"We had no one to consult as to our movements, having no near relations except my little niece, your schoolfriend, who is now married and with her husband at Pondicherry.

"We intended to begin our travels by coming to London, and it was when we were half way between Dover and London that the accident happened. It was horrible, quite horrible! my child, and it was weeks before I could get the shrieks and groans of the wounded people out of my head. Raoul was killed," continued the old lady, in a quiet voice.

"I remember kissing his dead face, and then something seemed to snap in my brain, and when I came to my senses, weeks later, it was to find myself in this out-of-the-way place, well-cared for, as I thought, by Françoise and her husband. It was not for some time that the full extent of their rascality dawned upon me.

"I made several efforts to escape or at least communicate with the outside world, but without success. My letters were never sent, my telegrams were intercepted, I was watched like a prisoner in the Bastille, I saw no one except the servants, who had previously been informed of my mental derangement."

"But surely Sir Spencer Leigh——" I interrupted.

"My dear child, I never saw him, he knew nothing about my case."

"But his telegram to me?"

"A myth, dear child, to induce you to come."

"But why?"

"Françoise was beginning to get ill, she couldn't stand the anxiety of watching me night and day, whereas a nurse, responsible to a great physician—with her reputation at stake——"

"Go and enjoy the society of your wife and fellow-plotter."

"The wretches! But what was their object in all this?"

"Just to get my signature to a transfer of shares valued at something like £10,000, which Grosjean intended, I fancy, to turn at once into cash, before disappearing with his wife."

"But how did they get the money for current expenses?"

"We had taken out letters of credit for several hundred pounds so as not to be hampered on our travels. Raoul's signature was easy to copy."

"But if he was dead," I interrupted gently.

"Yes, Raoul was killed, but they buried Antoine Grosjean, his valet, in the little Surrey churchyard, Françoise even had the audacity to show me a photograph of the grave," said the old lady, in a quiet, even voice.

There was silence for a few moments, as we slid rapidly down the slope of the downs and went whirling along a smooth, straight road.

"That is Lewes, over yonder, mum," said Armour, as we came in sight of a sleepy looking country town.

"Tell him to stop at the nearest inn and order some tea for us and some refreshment for himself," said Madame de Latour with a slight yawn.

"But do you think we have time?" I whispered anxiously.

"Oh, yes, plenty of time," said the old lady carelessly, as Armour pulled up at the door of an old-fashioned country inn.

"This will be all right for your beer, coachman, but I don't think it looks clean enough for tea. Just drive us to that nice little baker's shop further down the street, then you can leave us for half-an-hour while we enjoy our tea in peace," she said quietly.

Armour grinned delighted acquiesence, and having brought the motor to a standstill in front of the baker's shop, hurried back to the White Hart. No sooner had he disappeared within its hospitable precincts than Madame de Latour quietly took her seat by the driving wheel.

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"What are you going to do?" I exclaimed, aghast with astonishment.

"Do?" echoed the old lady, her great eyes flashing. "Why, what I've done scores of times before with Raoul. What I've done in imagination ever since I caught sight of this thrice-blessed motor. I'm going to drive at full speed into Newhaven and catch the boat for France!"

I shall never forget that drive, if I live to be a hundred! It seemed to me that the county of Sussex slid by like a panorama, as we tore along the roads, stopping every now and then to study the sign-posts or make an inquiry from a villager as to the nearest route.

But when at last we jerked over the cobble-stones down to the quay at Newhaven, and saw that preparations were being made for starting the boat, for the first time that day I saw the glitter of tears in the handsome dark eyes of my companion.

She hailed one of the porters and asked if she had time to send a wire before the boat started.

"Yes, mum, she starts in seven minutes. There's plenty of time to send a wire, post-office is just at the end of the quay."

Madame de Latour intrusted me with the telegrams which she had already written out.

One was to her lawyer in Paris, and the second to the superintendent of the French police.

Then we went on board, and a couple of minutes later were steaming out into the channel.

Madame de Latour gripped my arm as we stood watching the white cliffs of England grow fainter and fainter in the distance.

"So that little comedy is ended," she said, drawing a deep breath.

"Comedy?" I echoed incredulously.

"Yes, my child, what else? To be kept a prisoner for three months by a maid and a valet savours more of comedy than tragedy, I take it. Of course it depends a little on the point of view."

"I should think so, indeed," I interrupted vehemently, "I only hope those two wretches will have no chance of seeing anything but the tragic side of this business!"

Thanks to the intelligence and energy of the French police, my wishes in this respect were fulfilled even sooner than I expected.

The precious pair received the heaviest possible sentence for their crime which it was in the power of the judge to pronounce.

In spite of the fatigue of the trial Madame de Latour's splendid pluck never deserted her, nor, I may add, did her sense of humour.

"My child," she said a month later, as we drove to the station *en route* for the Riviera, "what do you suppose is the moral of all this unpleasant business?"

"Why, that honesty is the best policy, I suppose!" said I, smiling.

"Yes, of course, but there is an up-to-date one as well, and it is that in these days every woman should know how to drive a motor."

"It certainly proved a useful accomplishment in your case, Madame," I smilingly admitted. **Morris Coleborn.**

Maude: "You wouldn't know my *fiancé* now if you met him." Nell: "Why, has he changed so much as that?" Maude: "That isn't it exactly. I've changed him."

Mother: "Who has eaten the cake in the pantry?" Undaunted Infant: "I did." "And what did you do that for?" "I heard you tell Jane always to keep the cupboard shut. Yesterday she forgot, so I thought I would punish her by eating all the cakes."

"Come, old man," said the kind friend, "cheer up; there are others." "I don't mind her breaking the engagement so very much," said the despondent young man, "but to think that I have got to go on paying the instalments on the ring for a year to come yet! That's what's annoying me."

Your Editor Chats.

I hope to be able to announce the result of the Buried Stations Competition at an early date. Readers may rest assured that everything possible will be done to insure its publication at the earliest possible moment.

The order of popularity of the stories in *Short Stories* for July 11th was as follows: "Won Without Wooing," "The Wrong Miss Smith," "The Course of True Love," "The End of a Feud," "Toby's Rival," "Which Shall It Be?" "Violet Caryll's Quest," "Only a Model," "A Story in Letters." A gold-plated pencil-case has been awarded to Mr. A. Cartwright, 53, Newington Street, Belgrave, Leicester, whose list gave the order most correctly.

I take this opportunity of thanking "M. R.," of Iona, for her very kind gift of some flowers from that island, together with a picture post-card showing some of its beauties. I can assure her that they were much appreciated, and I am glad to know that *Short Stories* is just as popular in that far-away island as it is everywhere else.

Owing to the advent of Bank Holiday next week's *Short Stories* will be published on Friday, July 31st, instead of on Tuesday, August 4th, so you will be able to have it to take away to read during the holiday. The price will be the same as usual.

In this issue two new features will start. One of them is a splendid serial story by Henry T. Johnson, entitled "The Snare of Gold." The plot is a novel one, and the long instalment which will appear next week will give you a good idea as to what developments will take place.

The other feature is a series of stories called "The 'Bridge' of Ruin." These are the confessions of a girl gambler. The writer of the stories was left a small competence by an aunt, and shortly after the death of this relation was invited to stay with a school-friend in her country house. There she was initiated into the mysteries of Bridge, at which game she lost more than she could ever hope to pay. The instalment published next week tells you how she was led to continue to play, not understanding what she was doing, and other difficulties into which she got will be related in succeeding instalments.

Once again I make my appeal for the Fresh Air Fund. Contributions have been coming in most satisfactorily up to the present, but in the rush of getting away for their own holidays, people are apt to forget that there are little children in the big cities who are absolutely dependent on the help of friends for the one day's country holiday which they get in the whole year.

Before *you* go away to enjoy *yourself*, don't forget to send something along to ease these little lives. Ninepence pays for a whole day's outing for one child, allowing for plenty to eat and drink. That isn't a great sum, is it? If you can't afford to send ninepence, send what you can afford. Any amount, either more or less, or the exact sum, will be gladly received and acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Address the envelope containing your contribution to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The sooner you send it the better, as the summer is advancing, and of course the outings can only take place in the summer and early autumn.

Your Editor.

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A Binding Contract.

The Story of a Curious Betrothal.

THERE was a very satisfied look on the face of Johnnie Owen as he slowly made his way down a certain street in a central part of London. It was dark, and the street was one of those which, at night, are visited only by waifs and policemen; the former go there in order to find shelter for the night in the big doorways, while the guardians of the peace walk through it in twos and in the middle of the road.

Johnnie Owen was about ten years old, and his story was a common one. He was not at all sure that Mrs. Owen was his mother, but, however that might be, she had beaten him so unmercifully of late that he had made up his mind to leave the wretched place which he had called "home" and endeavour to get along by himself.

He was tall for his age, with an expression of countenance that indicated ability to shift for himself; he had earned some sort of existence in various ways for the past month, and had selected Parker Street as a sleeping-place for want of money to find a bed.

"Ninepence in one day!" Johnnie exclaimed, in a tone of mingled joy and amazement. He could scarcely credit his good luck, despite the comfortable sensation which made itself felt in the region where his waistcoat ought to have been. "Thruppence on fish, bread and pudden, and sixpence left! That'll start me in somethin' for to-morrer, and then p'raps I can go on decent! I might ha' had a bed to-night, but that would spoil the look o' that piece of silver. No! I must sleep in the doorway a bit longer!"

By this time he had reached the particular warehouse the porch of which formed his sleeping apartment. There was a nook in it that kept him out of the wind, as well as out of sight of the policemen who walked in the middle of the road and seldom ventured on the pavement to flash their bull's-eyes into the nooks and corners.

"I feel a bit tired to-night!" yawned Johnnie, walking up the three steps and feeling his way to the nook. "I can do—— Hallo! Bobby!"

He had touched someone or something, and he had at once concluded that it was his natural enemy, the man in blue. He was out in the road getting up speed for flight before he realised that he had heard a timid cry when he had placed his hand on that something under the porch.

"Sounded like a gal's voice!" muttered Johnnie reflectively, pulling himself up short. It occurred to him that the intruder was some waif, like himself, who was more afraid of his approach than Johnnie was of the policeman. "I'll see!" he added.

Cautiously he went back to the steps.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

He remained on the alert, ready to "bolt" if a policeman shot out from the secluded corner in answer to his question; but the sound of the voice reassured him completely.

"Oh, please don't hurt me! I've runned away!"

Johnnie penetrated the depths of the porch, took out a box containing a dozen wax vestas, dropped by some reveller, and ignited one. Holding it so that the light fell upon the object before him, he saw a girl somewhat younger than himself.

She was very poorly clad, but her clothes were not quite so ragged as his; her face was rather pretty notwithstanding the marks of tears and the signs of hunger. The child—she was little more — was crouching in a corner and gazing at him with appealing eyes.

"You won't send me back? You won't hurt me?" she queried piteously. "I'm dreffful hungry, but I'd sooner be hungry than go back!"

A fellow-feeling sprang up within the heart of Johnnie Owen.

"You needn't fret yourself about *that*!" he rejoined decisively. "I know what it is to be whacked, and I'd sooner be hungry! Look here! We can be pals, you know, me and you! I think I'll like you better'n a boy to chum up with, straight! What's your name?"

"Mary Bates; they call me Polly!" answered the waif simply.

"Don't know as I like Polly," returned the lad critically. "I'll call you Mary. So you're hungry, eh? Well, you wait there while I get somothin' to eat!"

He vanished, returning very quickly with a supply of fried fish, bread and pudding that had transformed the silver coin into three bronze ones, and lessened his capital by one-half.

"There you are!" he cried. "Now, go it for all you're worth!"

Mary Bates did ample justice to the repast, and when she had finished Johnnie proceeded to make her as comfortable as he could.

These two young persons were among the inhabitants of the great city who may be classed under the head of "Not wanted." Each was in the way, and in each case the flight was hailed with satisfaction by the unwilling guardian. They chatted together till they fell asleep, and in that curious conversation they settled their plans for the future.

In the morning Johnnie gave her twopence, keeping the odd penny for himself; that was to buy food with during the day, and they were to meet again at night under the same porch. Johnnie was to do as he had been doing for a month, picking up a livelihood somehow. Mary was also to busy herself about the market and the surrounding streets, in the hope of picking up a trifle in the way of food or money.

Johnnie was impressed by the fact that he had two persons to look after now, but he shouldered the added responsibility with quiet determination.

During the next few days a strong attachment was formed by the one for the other of this strange pair. Johnnie assumed the position of protector and bread-winner towards his little mate, and Mary accepted the position and grew very fond of him. Their affection was tried and cemented by an incident which occurred at the end of five days; this was a narrow escape from the clutches of a constable.

Johnnie had earned a few pence, and Mary had picked up a trifle also; they had purchased a cheap supper and had eaten it with all the relish of hunger. Then they had wended their steps towards the familiar porch in the corner of which it was their custom to sleep side by side.

They were talking in an animated fashion about what they intended to do when they were "growed up" and this caused them to neglect their ordinary precautions. They had

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ascended the three steps and were nearly in the arms of a man in uniform before they realised their danger.

"Scoot!" cried Johnnie, dragging Mary forcibly down the steps, just in time to evade the policeman's grasp. "Look out! He'll have us!"

They were off with the fleetness of young deer, and they did not stop till they were well out of that street. The policeman's mate must have been searching some other doorway; if the two had been together, Johnnie and his charge would have been caught, in all probability, and hauled off to the station and the workhouse afterwards.

"But why must we run?" asked Mary, when they felt secure.

"'Cos they'd have us up and they'd send us to some school, where we'd be treated awful strict!" answered Johnnie promptly.

"And whacked?" inquired Mary tearfully.

"Certain!" pronounced Johnnie confidently, although he felt some doubt rising within him as soon as he had given the answer.

"I wouldn't mind bein' sent to a school if they didn't whack you," observed Mary thoughtfully. "We could have jolly games together. I've heerd of boys and girls having games at school, and you and me could have fine fun, couldn't we?"

"Does yer think we'd be together?" asked Johnnie, with a mixture of pity and contempt for her ignorance. "'Corse we shouldn't! We'd be sent to different places!"

"What!" gasped Mary in dismay. "They mustn't part us! I couldn't bear it, could you?"

"No, I don't fink I could!" replied Johnnie mournfully. "But if the bobbies get us, that's what they'll do! I'm afeard they *will* get us one night. They, and the people from all sorts o' Homes, is always on the look-out! Some of my pals 'as been cotched!"

"I b'lieve I'd die if you was taken from me!" Mary began to sob. "Let's do something so as they can't take you from me, so as we must be together!"

"How?" asked Johnnie dubiously.

"If we was married," remarked little Mary thoughtfully, "they could do nuthin'. I've heerd Mrs. Potts scream out to Mr. Potts as no one could part her and him! How is that?"

"Oh, it's easy 'nough if you've got the money!" returned Johnnie confidently. "I've seed 'em go into the church! They stand and kneel aforo some railin's, and a man says somethin' out of a book, and it's all over."

"We ain't got no money, I s'pose?" asked Mary disconsolately. "But wouldn't it be all the same," she demanded eagerly, as an idea struck her, "if we stood aforo some railin's and took hold of hands and said as we wouldn't part?"

Johnnie didn't know; he said he would have to inquire, but they could make a bargain with each other not to part and to marry when they got enough money. Mary readily accepted the proposition, and the two children clasped hands and vowed to carry out the arrangement.

In making and ratifying a bargain in this way the waifs were doing exactly as many grown-up people do in certain localities all over the country, and to them this solemn shaking of hands was as binding as any vows ever exchanged between the contracting parties of a matrimonial alliance.

"That settles it!" declared Johnnie in a tone that admitted of no doubt concerning his sincerity. "We belong to one another, and we can't go and marry nobody else when we grows up!"

"And they can't take us away from one another now, can they?" asked Mary. She dreaded the idea of being separated from Johnnie and she was trying to persuade herself that separation was an impossibility.

"Not altogether," replied Johnnie dubiously. "You know that they keep the men and women apart in the workhouse, unless they're old, and we ain't old, you see!"

"I wish we was!" sighed Mary.

"The best way is not to let 'em get us!" declared Johnnie. "We must keep both eyes open for the copper at night!"

Although he was not certain about the question of separation, he was confident and jubilant concerning the impossibility of either getting married to another than to his or her present partner, and Mary held the same belief. That belief made them happy.

Their happiness, however, was of short duration. It was nearly a week later when Johnnie, arriving at the improvised lodging, found it occupied by a policeman. And as he (Johnnie) was a little earlier than the appointed time, he concluded that Mary had not arrived, so he had no hesitation in dashing away in order to escape his enemy.

He kept a watch for Mary, for the purpose of intercepting her, but he saw no sign of her although he waited till midnight. Then the truth came to him and made him sick at heart. Mary had been taken and would in due course be sent to a Home! He had lost his little wife!

Johnnie hung about the police court and workhouse, to his own imminent danger, in the hope of gleaning some tidings of Mary. If he could find out where they had taken her, he would contrive to effect her release! But his own fate was sealed; he was caught sleeping in a doorway two nights later and was sent to an industrial school.

The years rolled by. The two small persons wept bitterly over their separation at first, but in time their grief subsided and they benefited greatly by the care and training which they received. Those few days which they had passed together seemed something like a dream to them, and yet a dream with some reality about it.

Each cherished a loving memory of the other, and the childish vows exchanged between them appeared to retain all their force. Many a time, as the years passed by, each one had the same thought, even when they were old enough to fully understand the meaning of marriage.

"I'll never marry another girl if I live to be a hundred!" was the solemn declaration of Johnnie Owen, as he toiled away at the trade to which he had been apprenticed. And Mary Bates, old enough to act as maid to a young lady, ignored the eager glances cast at her pretty face by the young men of the neighbourhood and thought only of Johnnie Owen. "It may have been very foolish, and I may be very silly to still think of him," she would murmur, "but he was good to me and I shall always love him! I wonder where he is and what he is doing?"

Many a time, too, Mary Bates would catch herself glancing at the stalwart form of some young fellow and asking herself if Johnnie had grown into a man resembling that one. She would compare the visionary Johnnie with the substantial form on which her eyes had rested, and would speculate on the points of difference between them.

Then she would sigh and shake her head mournfully while she murmured, "I wonder if I shall ever see him again?" It did not occur to her for one instant that Johnnie had developed into a man whom she could not admire; that was an utter impossibility!

Eleven years had passed; she was twenty and she was in London again, her mistress having come to town for a brief stay. The return to the Metropolis had the effect of increasing her longing to learn something about Johnnie, to see him if possible. She tried to suppress the wild notions that flitted across her brain, but the more she tried, the more persistent did they become.

"How can I find out?" she asked herself. "It is so long ago! Perhaps he has earned enough to start in business on his own account; he was sharp-witted and strong, and therefore just the one to get on. Where could I inquire?"

She dared not intrust her secret to anyone, so she could not make much progress; she made a few tentative inquiries, but they were unsuccessful. Then an idea entered her mind which almost startled her.

"If I cannot see Johnnie, I can at least see the place where we sheltered during those few nights! Is the street still in existence? Dare I venture?"

She found that the street was still untouched by modern improvements, and that its reputation had not improved. It would be a risky thing for her to venture there at night, and, moreover, what was the good of doing so? Was it worth

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while, just to gratify a fancy? She dismissed the idea, but it came back with greater energy, and finally she yielded.

She obtained permission to remain out later than usual that night, and towards ten o'clock she found herself at the entrance of the familiar street. She was muffled in a cloak and in the darkness she might have been mistaken for a man.

Her heart beat more rapidly as she crept stealthily along the street, passing doorways in which, she was certain, homeless creatures were sleeping. A shiver of fear shook her frame when she realised that she was fairly within the boundaries of this dreaded locality, but the recollection of Johnnie Owen filled her with another sentiment and she forgot all danger.

"This is the spot!" she murmured as she stopped before a porch. "Is anyone there?"

Timidly she approached and ascended the three steps. How familiar it was, even after this long interval! The place was vacant, and she heaved a sigh of relief; yet she experienced a sentiment of disappointment which she could scarcely explain. Did she really expect to find Johnnie Owen sleeping there? And would she have been glad had it proved so?

She half knelt in the corner where they had lain, huddled together, and, drawing a box of wax matches from her pocket, she gently struck one and peered at some marks on the wall. Her eyes filled with tears as she saw them again, still readable after the lapse of years. No paint had covered them. "Johnnie. Mary."—Yes, there they were, a symbol of union! Would Johnnie and Mary ever be united?

"Never, I fear!" she breathed, rising to her feet and passing to the steps.

"Are you in need of help, my good woman?" asked a strong, manly voice with a touch of sympathy in it. "Can I help you?"

Mary shrank back. She wished to avoid the good Samaritans who go about in this way in order to help others.

"Thank you!" she faltered. "I was myself seeking to—to——"

"Who is it?" demanded the new-comer in quick, agitated tones.

In an instant a match was lighted by the stranger, who held it aloft in a manner that allowed its fitful gleam to fall for a minute on both faces.

"Mary Bates!" gasped the man. "*Is* it Mary or am I mistaken? I am Johnnie Owen! I came to see this place. I have been here often and often at night, wondering if I should ever get any news of Mary. You *are* Mary! Yes, I know!"

He dropped the match as he saw the expression on her face and was about to fold her in his arms when a thought arrested him.

"I had forgotten," he said tremulously. He took her hand. "We can shake hands, as old friends, but—but I was hoping, hoping, that each of us still held to the childish vows of eleven years ago! Perhaps it is not so? Mary, tell me and let me know my fate!"

"Why else should I be here?" she managed to stammer out, thankful that it was too dark for him to see how furiously she was blushing.

He folded her in his arms, happy in the reunion after so many years.

"Our names are still there, as we scratched them one night," he remarked, as they went away. "The next time we write our names in company, it will be in a church register!"

G. Hubert.

A MAN'S MISTAKE.

A Pathetic Little Love Story.

"Gwen, old girl, I'm in love."

A faint, pink flush crept into the girl's thin cheeks and made the pale, somewhat worn-looking face, seem almost pretty.

"You—in love?" she asked softly.

Her companion laughed, an awkward, half-apologetic sort of laugh.

"You never suspected it of me, did you?" he said.

"No," replied the girl, and her dark eyes grew strangely tender.

"I have told no one but you," he went on. "*She* wishes it to be a secret for the present."

All the colour went from her face. She looked haggard even in the dim firelight.

"A secret," she said. "Why a secret?"

"We've known each other such a short time, she is afraid people will laugh at us. They wouldn't understand, she says."

"I suppose not."

"But *you* understand, Gwen, don't you? I begged to be allowed to tell you. I wanted you to be the first to wish me joy."

"And I do, Tom. I do, with all my heart."

She spoke without a tremor in the low, clear voice

"It seems to me I have known her all my life, and she feels the same about me, Gwen."

"That is because you love each other."

"I knew you would understand!" he cried eagerly. "I told her so, Gwen. I told her all about you, about our friendship, and all I owe you."

"Was that necessary, Tom?"

"Necessary!" He laughed joyously "Why, Gwen, I have no secrets from her."

"No," said Gwen, "of course not."

"I know what you are thinking—she may possibly be jealous."

The girl started, as though she had been struck.

"Jealous of *me?*" she cried. "Who could be that?"

"To tell you the truth, Gwen, she was—just a little—at first. Then I explained to her what a good, true friend you had always been to me, and how I had learnt to love you as a sister, who was so much better, and wiser, and——"

"And older than you, Tom. I hope you told her that."

"I've never given it a thought, Gwen."

"I shall be twenty-nine next birthday. I daresay I might be forty-nine for all you cared. Tom, tell her that. It will satisfy her."

"She *is* satisfied. Do you remember, Gwen, what I've said to you so often? Men are your friends, not your lovers."

"I remember. There was something about me, you said, something you couldn't quite explain, which made me different from other women."

"Yes—and which separates you from their common fate. You're strong, and self-reliant, Gwen. You know how to make your way in the world, and you want no man's help. I sometimes think it's that that keeps us at arm's length. We know that you can do without us, that you don't need our protection, and so we shrink from offering it. You're too brave for us, Gwen."

The girl smiled strangely

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"Perhaps you're right," she said, "but you didn't come here to talk about me. What is she like, Tom?"

His face kindled.

"Other people call her charming and pretty," he said, "but to me she is the most beautiful woman in the world. And yet she is hardly a woman, but a lovely, innocent child, Gwen, and as helpless as a child."

"And that you love most of all," said the girl. "You love to take care of her."

He began to laugh, from sheer happiness.

"She is so young—barely eighteen—and so ignorant of the world. Life, for her, is full of dangers. Oh, I must guard her well. Gwen, if you only knew the joy a man has in the helplessness of the woman he loves!"

"I think I understand," she said. "Let me see her picture."

"How did you know?" he asked, with a shamefaced smile, and drew from his pocket a tiny leather case.

She stirred the glowing coals into flame, and knelt on the hearthrug to examine the portrait.

It was a pretty, commonplace little face, with a somewhat affected expression—possibly due to the photographer, Gwen reflected.

"It's not a good likeness," said Tom, looking over her shoulder, "and, of course, all the colouring is lost. She has lovely hair—bright gold when the sun is on it—and a *real* complexion, Gwen, like a young child's."

"She must be very pretty."

"I wish you could see her, but you will soon, I hope. She's coming to town, with her people, next month."

"Mayn't I know her name?"

"Of course. I'd quite forgotten you didn't know. It's Lucy Mannering."

She noticed how fondly his voice lingered on the name.

"Lucy," she said. "I think it suits her, and I remember now that you mentioned her in your letter. She has been staying with the Harwoods, too, hasn't she? I know now," she added, with a light little laugh, "why you wrote to me so seldom, Tom."

"I was a selfish beggar and I've never asked you, Gwen, how you've been getting on. Splendidly, as usual, of course?"

She smiled a little bitterly.

"If you choose to call it that," she said. "I can always get plenty of work."

"And you deserve it."

"Such as it is."

"Oh, come now, Gwen, you, a successful journalist, oughtn't to talk like this. Why, thousands of women would give anything for your position."

"I daresay."

"But not many of them have got your brains or your enterprise."

"Don't you think so?"

"I always said you were bound to succeed, Gwen, when I watched how you stood up against all odds, how you smiled at rebuffs that would have made other women weep, how you bearded the editors in their dens and calmly told them that your stuff was what they wanted, and how, when they declined your manuscripts time after time, you only laughed and declared that your hour would come some day—do you remember, Gwen?"

"Yes, I remember," she said wearily.

"And your hour has come!"

"Yes, I got what I wanted, Tom."

"I knew you would. You are so cool and plucky and unmoved, Gwen. Sometimes I feel almost afraid of you."

"Afraid—of me?"

She stared at him, with wide eyes full of pain.

"*Almost* afraid," he said. "You are so different from other women. Sometimes, Gwen, you are almost unnatural, you seem so proud and strong and independent."

"If he only knew," she whispered to herself, and in that moment she realised the vast gulf that stretched between her and this man who understood her so little.

"Forgive me if I send you away now," she said presently. "I have a story to finish for *The Epoch* to-night, and it's weighing on my mind."

"Weighing on your mind!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you allow anything to weigh on your mind, Gwen."

"Don't you?" she asked listlessly. How little he understood!

The Editor of the *The Epoch* had rejected her last contribution, with a curt note to the effect that the story was scarcely up to her usual mark.

No one but Gwen herself knew how she winced beneath that criticism, as beneath every rebuff of the same sort. They were plentiful in her profession, but somehow that did not make them easier to bear.

To her editors and colleagues, Gwen seemed a case-hardened journalist who pocketed snubs cheerfully, as a matter of course, and showed a commendable appreciation of her own ability.

They little guessed what agonies of doubt and self-distrust the girl endured at every business interview, at every post that brought back a rejected manuscript; what bitter tears she shed in secret; how, at times, she would cry out in her loneliness and feel afraid—desperately, hopelessly afraid of the struggle that lay before her, the sordid, miserable struggle for mere bread-and-cheese that had been her lot almost ever since she could remember.

The success that had fallen to her share had cheered her, but it did not suffice to set at rest the terrible doubt of herself and her powers that tormented her so persistently.

Sometimes, at the end of a more than usually hard spell of work, her over-taxed brain would suddenly refuse to respond further to her call upon it, and then an awful fear would seize her—the fear that she had come to the end of her resources, that her stock-in-trade of ideas had been exhausted, that she had, in fact, "written herself out."

At such times she would sit at her desk for hours, wild-eyed and white-faced, unable to pen a single line, wondering desperately what the end of it all would be.

And then, all at once, in the midst of her misery, a thought would come to her, bringing a light to her tired eyes, and a flush to her cheeks, that seemed to transfigure the anxious face and make it strangely beautiful.

She was not altogether friendless. *He* had told her, again and again, in his boyish, impulsive fashion, that he admired her more than any other woman in the world; and though she smiled at his extravagance, it was infinitely soothing to her.

He had never pretended to be in love with her. Indeed, he had hurt her often enough by his thoughtless, outspoken comments upon his own and other men's attitudes towards her.

But—there had been no other woman.

Perhaps, some day—who could tell?—he might—he might—Gwen never got beyond this point. She was proud; she tried to be proud, even to herself.

It was pride that made her smile her calmest smile when she was most discouraged and depressed; pride that made her silent in her suffering, even before *him*, and when he understood her least made it the more impossible for her to undeceive him.

There had been no other woman.

Well, that was over now.

"My love to Lucy," she said, as Tom bade her good-bye that night.

"My love to Lucy," she whispered to herself, when the door had closed behind him.

Then she began to laugh.

She was too proud to cry.

Grete Hahn.

Mrs. Sequel: "I understand your husband can't meet his creditors." Mrs. Equal: "I don't believe he wants to, especially."

Nodd: "I think that doctor of mine will give us something to stop baby's crying now." Todd: "Why?" Nodd: "I'm going to move next door to him."

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES,** *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of $25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of $10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Three more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

NINTH LIST.

97. AADEFLRSU	103. AEEKLMSS .....
98. ABCEGHLOSWY	104. ABBCEELORSTTU .....
99. AACEGINRRST	105. ADEEGLNNY .....
100. AABLLMOR	106. ACHHIKLLPUW .....
101. BCENOORSY	107. DEEFIMNORRSU .....
102. CEGHHNOOST	108. ACEEFILSWYY .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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MR. HOLT'S COUSIN.

The Romance of a Wounded Man and His Amanuensis.

"I'm very sorry for you, Leigh!"

"Thanks. You've said that before, though."

"Well, you need not be so disagreeable; I really am sorry for you, and would help you if I could."

The speaker was an elderly man, with an intellectual face and a head of tangled grey hair, who stood by a couch, on which lay a young man with his head bandaged and his arm in a sling—the victim of an accidental collision with a 'bus in Fleet Street.

"You had better try and put it all out of your mind for a month," he went on compassionately. "You can't work, so what's the good of worrying?"

"The fact that I can't work is the reason why I worry," said Leigh. "If I had only finished my book before this accident happened I shouldn't care. But publishers are like time and tide—they wait for no man, as you might know, one would think!"

"I thought the doctor did not want you to use your head at all," said the elder man.

"Oh! He doesn't mind now. I'm all right again really; only he says he must keep my eyes bandaged for another fortnight, 'just as a precautionary measure.' Precautionary humbug, I call it!"

"Well then, employ an amanuensis," said Morris Holt, taking no notice of the last remark.

"So I would, if I could find one worth having; but how can I find one while I'm stuck here on this sofa? And, somehow, when a fellow is ill, people seem such a bother."

"I have a young cousin whom I think might do," said Holt. "I never thought of it till this minute; I always forget everything! A college graduate. Has written some creditable articles for the *Dispatch*, and the Editor says is destined to achieve distinction. Comparatively unknown, and too poor to ask high terms; very accurate, a good scholar, and would be glad to accept the position of amanuensis."

"Well, that praise means something from you," said Leigh, rather grudgingly. "We might have an interview to-morrow afternoon, anyway, if you'll arrange it for me."

"All right; I must be off now. I only meant to stay two minutes, but I had no idea you had been so ill."

He shook the uninjured hand, and made his way towards the door, tripping against a stool as he peered short-sightedly for the handle.

A shout from Leigh made him pause as he was closing the door.

"Stop a minute! What name did you say?"

"Holt. Sydney Holt," he said, opening the door an inch or two and shutting it again.

"Poor chap!" he muttered, as he made his way down the stairs of the flat. "But it's just the thing for Sydney. I'll go round there now."

Morris Holt was one of the most oblivious and absent-minded men in the world, but he had a fund of kindness within him when he remembered to use it, and on this cold, wet November evening he went nearly a mile out of his way that he might convey the news of employment to his young relative at once.

It was a dingy street into which he turned, and the house at which he stopped was one of the dingiest of the row An untidy servant-girl admitted him, and stood aside to let him go up to the first floor.

Mr. Holt stumbled up the dark staircase and knocked at the first door he came to.

"Come in!" cried a voice from the inside, and he turned the handle and entered. The room was like hundreds of others in cheap lodging-houses. The furniture was worn and shabby, the ceiling discoloured, and the window-panes not very clean; but there were a few touches here and there which showed that the occupant was a person of refinement.

A girl, whose curly hair was cut short over her head, and whose pale face showed the marks of overwork, threw down her pen and rose to greet him with a smile.

"Why, Cousin Morris!" she said; "I have not seen you for weeks!"

"No, my dear," said Mr. Holt, sitting down in the chair she pushed forward for him. "I have been out of town. Called at Grant's office yesterday, expecting to see you, but learnt that you had completed your work there a week ago. What have you been doing since, Sydney?"

"Nothing; that is, nothing certainly remunerative. I have just been engaged on a sketch that I hope to dispose of to one of the literary papers."

"I am sorry I have not been able to help you more," said Mr. Holt, with a little remorse in his tones. "But it is next door to impossible; everything is so crowded. However, I am forgetting what I came to tell you, and I must make haste, because I am going out of town again to-morrow, and I am very busy. A friend of mine who is writing a book has had an accident, and can't use his eyes for a time. He is worrying himself to death about it, and wants to get someone to help him. It must be someone up in the classics, because there are a lot of French quotations, so I suggested you, and he would like you to go round to-morrow afternoon. There's the address."

He threw a card on the table as he spoke, and got up to go.

"But shall I be able to do what he wants?" said Sydney doubtfully.

"Oh, yes; I told him all about you, you know, and he thought you would do."

There were many other things that Sydney wanted to ask, but her cousin was in a hurry to be off, and she could not detain him. She stood for a long time with the card in her hand after he had gone, as though it could tell her all the things that he had left unsaid.

OLIVER LEIGH,
18, Bloomsbury Square.

That was all. She had never heard the name before, and it conveyed nothing to her mind. But she had no doubt about going, for her funds were so low that it seemed to her sometimes as though starvation were not far off.

Her hopes had been very high when she had completed her

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education, and tried to obtain a position as teacher in a school; but as she learnt more and more of the over-stocked condition of the teaching world, they had sunk lower and lower. Her cousin had no influence with anyone of importance in London, but he had procured her a few pieces of literary hack-work from time to time, which just kept her head above water.

She set out about three o'clock the next afternoon, and made her way to Bloomsbury Square, and to the number designated, which proved to be a flat-house. She pressed the electric button of the door, and a bright little boy admitted her.

"Mr. Leigh?" he said, in answer to her inquiry. "Yes, he's in. Second floor," and so saying, he disappeared down a passage, leaving Sydney to make her way up.

The door at the head of the second staircase stood open, and her timid knock was answered by a voice, in obedience to which she entered.

The room formed a strong contrast to her own. A bright fire burnt in a grate, throwing its leaping lights and shadows over the picture-covered walls and the soft hues of carpet and curtains. But Sydney's eyes were not attracted by the room; they were fixed in mute surprise upon its owner.

She had expected to see an elderly, grey-headed man, like her cousin; but the hair that appeared over the bandages was thick and dark, and the figure in the armchair was that of a man in the prime of youth. She was so taken aback that she hesitated on the threshold, uncertain what to do; but in the meantime he could not see her and she was obliged to speak.

"My cousin, Mr. Morris Holt, asked me to call on you to-day about some work," she said.

"Oh, yes; come in," said Leigh. "Excuse my getting up; I'm rather lame. Holt was here yesterday, and said he thought you could do what I want; but I shoud think you're very young by your voice!"

Sydney thought that his manners were decidedly peculiar, but she knew that she must not mind such things as these.

"Yes, I am young," she said, "but I am fairly well educated, and have had some experience in literary work, too."

"Oh, well, I daresay you'll do all right," said Leigh. "I'll try you, anyhow. My doctor says I mustn't do more than three hours' work a day at present. He's a chum of mine, who comes in every morning to bandage me up for the day, and all that kind of thing; so we had better work from two till five, if that will suit you."

"Very well, indeed," said Sydney.

"All right, then. We ought to finish the work in a fortnight; I hope you can write a clear hand. Oh, and about terms; will two pounds a week do for you?"

"Certainly," said Sydney, who had not dared to expect so much.

"We may as well begin at once, then. You'll find the papers on the writing-table. Tell me when you are ready, and I'll fire away."

Sydney arranged the papers and began to write. The book was one dealing with certain aspects of the French drama, showing that many of the so-called new Society plays of the day were really founded on dramas well-known in France from thirty to a hundred years ago. The quotations made the work difficult; but the subject was one which thoroughly interested her, and the time sped rapidly away.

Five o'clock chimed out at last from the little clock on the mantelpiece, and Leigh gave a satisfied sigh.

"I suppose we must stop," he said, "or I shall get into a row with my doctor. However, we've got on capitally, so I won't complain. Be sure you come punctually to-morrow."

"I will be certain to be here," said Sydney, opening the door as she spoke.

"All right, and if you see your cousin, you can tell him I think you'll do very well. You really are very clever, though I should think you're not much more than a boy!"

Sydney gave a startled little gasp as he muttered the last words, and escaped before he could add anything more. So this was the meaning of his cursory remarks and his off-hand way! Morris had evidently spoken of her as his "cousin," without mentioning her name; or, even if he had mentioned it, it would have told him nothing unless he added an explanation. Why had she not been called Ada or Caroline instead of Sydney?

During her journey home she was debating what she could do. Should she ask her cousin to explain? But he had gone out of town, and she did not even know his address. Should she explain the mistake herself? But the idea was too formidable! And after all, it was only an hour or two in the day for a fortnight; it would soon be over.

She hardly noticed the discomforts of her room that evening; her mind was too much occupied with the events of the day, and instead of worrying over her money troubles when she went to bed, she fell asleep wondering what the morrow would bring.

Leigh was waiting for her when she arrived the next afternoon.

"Here you are!" he said, cheerfully. "The doctor says

"I say, young man, you ought not to leave your love tokens lying about."

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I'm none the worse for the work yesterday, so that's all right. We'll soon finish, at this rate."

Sydney soon became as interested in the book as the author himself. It showed a depth of research and a broad way of dealing with facts that gave her a very high opinion of his mind. She admired him also for his patience under the trials that had befallen him, and day by day she found herself looking forward more eagerly to their hours of work.

Leigh, on his part, felt a growing admiration for his secretary.

"You never bother me, somehow," he said, one day. "Some fellows are so clumsy, knocking things over and making all sorts of mistakes. But you are uncommonly quiet, I must say, and yet you are sharp enough, too! That suggestion you made yesterday was really very good; I thought about it a great deal in the night."

"I am glad you think I can do the work," said Sydney.

"You do it remarkably well," said Leigh. "You really ought to turn out something or other very creditable one of these days. I don't know why I always imagine you are so young; I suppose it's your voice."

"Can I do anything more for you before I go?" said Sydney, passing over the difficult question.

"Yes. I wish you would just give me a rug. I get so cold sitting here, and the doctor won't let me try my ankle yet."

Sydney felt a rush of sympathy go through her, but she dared not express it. So she put the rug softly over him and went back to the writing-table.

"Recently I have felt in a poetic mood," said Leigh, in a dreamy tone. "I don't know why, but I seemed to think of stars and music, and the sweet South on a bank of violets, all in a breath just now."

"Good afternoon," said Sydney, opening the door and taking a sudden departure.

"I shall have to tell him," she said to herself desperately, as she hastened down the stairs. "And yet—there are only three days more!"

"I say, young man," began Leigh, in a playful tone, when his amanuensis arrived on the next afternoon, "you ought not to leave your love tokens about on other people's tables! The doctor told me I might take a walk around my room this morning; the housekeeper was to have helped me, but she never appeared, so I had to clutch on to the things as best I could, and as I caught hold of the writing-table, I found this!"

He held up a ribbon as he spoke, which Sydney recognised directly as one that she had missed when she reached home.

"Well, are you not going to ask for it back?" said Leigh, finding that he got no answer. "I shall tell your cousin the little tale when I see him next!"

"Please give it to me," said Sydney, in a low voice.

Leigh thought that he had given offence, and relinquished the ribbon at once. It seemed to him rather foolish to be upset by such a trivial thing, but he was too kind-hearted not to try to make amends.

"I shall be quite sorry when our work comes to an end!" he said pleasantly, when five o'clock sounded the hour of Sydney's departure.

"So shall I!" thought Sydney, but she did not say so.

"In fact," went on Leigh, "I have something to propose to you. The doctor says the bandage may come off my eyes in a day or two, but I am not to use them much at first. Will you stay on and help me, if you have nothing better to do? No one has ever suited me so admirably as you have done, and I do not feel inclined to let you go."

Sydney's heart beat almost to suffocation. How could she answer him? In a day or two at most he must discover the deception she had practised on him.

"You don't seem to like the idea much!" said Leigh, in a disappointed tone. "Perhaps you have something else in view; but I gathered from what your cousin told me that you have not been getting on very encouragingly. Has your father other plans for you?"

"I have no father," said Sydney, glad of a question that she could reply to. "I have been an orphan for some years, and I never had any brothers or sisters."

"Then why will you not agree to my proposal?" said Leigh. "It would be only a temporary thing, and I would not stand in the way of your taking anything else that turned up."

"It is not that," said Sydney, in a low voice.

"What is it then?" asked Leigh, rather peremptorily.

Sydney could not reply, her heart was too full. She felt her eyes filling with tears, and in the effort to choke down her feelings a sob escaped her lips.

Leigh gave a sudden start, and half rose from his seat, but sank back again as his injured foot gave way under him. Sydney watched him anxiously; she dared not speak, but in another moment she saw him raise his hand as though to tear the bandage from his eyes.

"No! no!" she cried, fear for him overcoming every other feeling; "you must not do it; you will ruin your sight for ever." She darted forward as she spoke and seized his hand.

Instead of snatching away his hand, Leigh took hers between both his own, and held it firmly. It quivered like a frightened bird in the captor's grasp, but he would not let it go. It was small, and soft, and warm, and he stroked it lightly with his fingers.

"This is not a man's hand!" he said.

"Oh, I will tell you the truth!" cried Sydney despairingly. "My cousin told me about your work, and I wanted the money so much, and he said that he had told you all about me. And then when I came I found you did not know, and he was away, and I could not make up my mind to tell you, and I hoped you would never find it out! But now I will go away, and I shall never come back."

She drew her hand away from him, but as he released it, he pulled the bandage from his eyes before she knew what he was doing!

The sight that met his eyes he will never forget till his dying day. The small, slight figure before him was clad in a dress of some dark woollen material, that any woman would have told him at once was old-fashioned and cheap. But Leigh saw nothing of that; he only knew that the curls that lay tossed all over the little head glittered like gold in the firelight, that the pale cheeks were tinged with delicate colour, and that her eyes shone like stars through the tears that hung on their lashes!

But the vision only lasted for a moment. Turning passionately from him, she caught up her things and flew from the room.

How Sydney found her way home that evening she never knew. A tumult of feelings surged through her heart, but in the midst of it all one resolve was fixed within her—nothing should ever take her back! What though her work was unfinished; what though she had not as yet received the much-needed money? She would rather starve than ever see him again!

Leigh, meanwhile, was passing through an equal tumult, but his thoughts were much pleasanter than Sydney's. His principal fear was that she would fulfil her threat of not returning; and as the next afternoon came and went, dragging out its weary hours in dull loneliness, he became gradually convinced that she had really meant what she said.

"Never mind, I'll go and see her to-morrow," he thought. "I can get downstairs and into a cab well enough now."

But when the next day came a sudden thought flashed upon him that filled him with dismay. He had not the vaguest notion of her address; and, more than this, rave and storm as he might, there was no chance of his finding it out unless her cousin had come back to town!

He had been allowed to exchange his bandage for a shade, and reaching pen and paper he wrote off a hasty note, with no explanations, merely asking for the address.

But Morris Holt was still out of town, and the note lay unopened amid a pile of letters on his writing-table for several days, during which Leigh went through an agony of suspense. Perhaps his note had been lost, and had never reached its destination; perhaps she had guessed what he would do, and had forbidden her cousin to send the address.

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Then a new agony began. She had told him herself how much she wanted the money; perhaps she was starving, and there was no one to help her. He worried and distressed himself till the doctor shook his head and ordered him to take a trip south.

Leigh took no notice of his advice. Everything seemed to go by him in a dream, until one day a postcard was brought up to him, with two lines written upon it, that ran like an electric stream through his frame. The words were these:

"Only just back in town. No. 24, Watts Street."

Sydney was sitting alone that afternoon in her cheerless room. She could not afford a fire, and the clinging damp made everything chilly and uncomfortable. She had at last heard of a chance to teach a private school, but the salary was small.

A week ago at this time a very different scene had surrounded her, but that thought was too painful to be borne as yet! A ring at the bell and a heavy step on the stairs roused no expectations in Sydney's mind; no one ever came to see her but her cousin, and she thought that he was still away. But to her surprise, the steps paused at her door, and the servant-girl threw it open without any attempt at announcement, and in another moment Oliver Leigh stood before her.

He was breathless with his ascent, and leant heavily upon his stick; but he had left off his bandages, and his eyes rested eagerly upon her.

"I should have been here days ago," he exclaimed, "but I had no clue to your address, and I was obliged to wait until I could get it from your cousin. The days have seemed like an eternity!"

He pulled the bandage from his eyes before she knew what he was doing.

He paused; but Sydney could find no words in which to answer.

"Are you angry with me for coming?" he asked. "You would not be, if you knew how terribly I have missed you."

"I am not angry," said Sydney, in a scarcely audible voice, while she raised her eyes for a moment to his.

Leigh's face brightened.

"I cannot part from you again!" he exclaimed. "I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

"But we have known each other such a little time," said Sydney, trying to repress the joy that trembled through her at his words. She knew that she should never love any other man as she loved him, but she feared that he might be yielding to a sudden impulse which he would afterwards repent.

"Do you call it a little while?" he said. "It seems to me that I have known you for years. You must remember that a fortnight of work together like ours is worth a year of ordinary acquaintance. No, I cannot take that as an answer. The only thing that will send me away is for you to tell me that you do not love me. Can you tell me that?"

There was an intreating accent in his voice against which Sydney was not proof.

"No," she said, softly, and the brief negative conveyed a whole world of assent.

The dreary room, with all its chill dulness disappeared as if by magic, transfigured and glorified by a haze of golden light.

Cold, weariness, poverty, all were forgotten, blotted out from Sydney's memory, by the sudden rush of happiness; while Leigh felt that this was the moment for which he had been waiting all his life.

"You must not forget that you owe me two days' work," he said, at last, looking at her with a smile.

"I don't owe them!" said Sydney playfully. "You have never paid me anything yet at all!"

Leigh's smile faded, and he bowed his head on hers.

"I can't bear to think of what you have suffered, my little one!" he said. "But that is all over now. There is nothing to wait for; let us be married at once, and we will arrange for a wedding trip. I believe the doctor told me I ought to go down south for a little while—say to Bournemouth; so we will forget all these dark days in love and sunshine! I shall never be thankful enough that your cousin sent you to me."

"Do you think we need tell him all the story?" said Sydney anxiously.

"No, dear, no!" said Leigh. "It is too sweet a story to be spoilt by telling; we will keep it all to ourselves."

And thus it came to pass that when Morris Holt read the letter that told him of Sydney's engagement he said to himself with his usual abstracted smile:

"Ah, yes, I saw Leigh was interested directly I told him about her; Sydney may thank me, after all, for having settled her in life."

M. Milner.

Mrs. Bacon: "Is this young salad?" Bridget: "Yes, ma'am, so young that I had to wash and dress it."

Excited Wife: "Wake up, Henry! The house is on fire!" Sleepy Husband: "Great Heavens! Now we'll have to move again!"

Pretty School Teacher: "Thomas, state some of the beauties of education." Thomas (oldest boy in the class): "Schoolmistresses."

Agony Column Notice: "Teddy, come back. All is forgiven. Pa kicked the wrong man. He did not know it was you.—Stella."

"What was the trouble between you and young Mr. Softy?" "Why, he said his brain was on fire, and I broke a hand grenade over his head."

Husband: "You're not economical." Wife: "Well, if you don't call a woman economical who saves her wedding-dress for a possible second marriage, I'd like to know what you think economy is!"

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A Fraudulent Bankrupt.

Telling of a Good Intention and Broken Engagement.

With a meditative kind of sigh, Mr. Richard Granville laid the newspaper on his writing-table by the side of a letter to which was attached a cheque for £150. The newspaper and letter had reached him by the same post; the newspaper was a daily journal published in the town in which Granville had lived till five years previously.

"So this is what may be called the end of "The Fraudulent Bankruptcy Case," murmured Granville. "The *Express* tells me that Laxton has completed the payment of his creditors, interest and all, and the letter comes from Laxton with the balance of the money lent to him in order to give him a fresh start. And what about Winnie? I wonder if she ever deigns to give a thought to me?"

Business in the solicitor's office was not brisk that morning; so, when Granville fell into a day-dream and lived that incident over again, there was nothing to interrupt the course of his meditation.

Richard Granville was, at the time of that incident, a man of forty-five. He had never been married; he had devoted himself to the law, and after a great deal of hard work, he had acquired a very comfortable business in his native town. And then, like so many other men before and since, his thoughts had turned to matrimony and he had fallen violently in love with Miss Winnie Saunders, the daughter of a large manufacturer in the same town.

There was not the slightest doubt that it was purely a heart affair with Granville; the appearance of Winnie had worked a transformation in his inmost being.

He was amazed at the thought that he had lived so long without passing through the experience of love; it was almost incredible that he could have been so dulled by the desire to get on that he should have entirely escaped the arrows of Cupid.

Yet it was so; this was no case of a disappointment in earlier life. He realised for the first time what was meant by being in love! And, as is usually the case, he was in love with a vengeance!

There was some disparity between the ages of the two lovers; for Winnie was not yet thirty, and still looked very charming, whereas Granville, as already stated, was fifteen years older. However, a difference of that kind is not a serious obstacle, and the couple became engaged.

Looking back, Granville was inclined to query the affection of Winnie for himself; something within him said that she accepted him because she wanted a husband not engaged in manufacture, but a member of a profession.

Was it love or ambition that made her reply in the affirmative to his impassioned declaration and question? When such questions arose in his mind, Granville brushed them aside and loyally adhered to the belief that Winnie did love him and that it was all his fault or the fault of circumstances—he could not decide which.

It had all come about through the Laxton bankruptcy.

About a month after the announcement of the engagement of Granville and Miss Saunders, the town was surprised by the statement that Laxton had fled, after having collected most of the money owing to him, and leaving some heavy debts of his own unsettled.

Little by little the details became known, and then it was found that Laxton had obtained large supplies of goods from Saunders and others, and had immediately disposed of these goods for cash. With this money he had decamped, leaving Saunders and others in a towering rage at having been sold in that manner. Laxton's credit had been good, and the defrauded merchants had only done what they had done many times before.

Mr. Saunders was furious; his own people could scarcely approach him, and Granville dare not go near him for a day or two. Saunders was not much in favour of having Granville for a son-in-law; the solicitor was not rich enough. Winnie was in tears.

"I wish something could be done to get the money back, Richard!" she moaned. "Papa is not hard up, so far as I know, but bad debts have been rather plentiful of late, and he is always as cross as two sticks if he loses only a few pounds. But, to make things worse, people are saying that it serves papa right, because he accepted bills from Laxton and charged him a heavy rate of interest for the accommodation. I think that means that Laxton did not pay on a monthly account, but got four or six months' credit.

"And then"—here Winnie hesitated—"papa says that if you—if you—I don't like to say it!"

"Tell me what he said, my love!" requested Granville, feeling uncomfortable.

"He said that if you were a smart lawyer, you ought to be able to get his money back for him! Papa says that if Laxton's affairs are simply wound up and a warrant issued for his arrest, *that* won't bring the money back! If Laxton is put in prison even, *that* won't make the loss less to papa! Do you think you could see any way to get papa's money out of Laxton, Richard? It would be such a feather in your cap, and papa would think such a lot of you ever afterwards!"

That was rather a big task, but Granville's anxiety to please Winnie and to get into the good graces of her father, made him daring.

"It is not an impossibility!" he said reflectively. "It might be done. I'll think it over, Winnie, and try!"

"Oh, I should be *so* glad, Richard! Thank you so much!"

Granville was not satisfied with verbal expressions of gratitude from his loved one, and the kisses which he demanded intoxicated him and caused him to become more sanguine of success. By the time he left Winnie he had as good as promised that he would get the money back.

On the following morning he looked somewhat blankly at his own reflection in the mirror. Nevertheless, he had promised to undertake the case, and he must do his best.

"I must find out where he is, that's the first move!" said Granville disconsolately. "Then I suppose I must go to him and threaten that I will haul him up before the police unless he gives me what he owes to Saunders. Rather shady conduct for me, yet——"

He slowly shook his head and turned from the mirror.

Granville felt tolerably certain that Laxton would not attempt to leave the country; he sat down to think where the missing man would most likely take refuge, and he suddenly remembered a remark dropped by the bankrupt three or four

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months before—a remark overheard and not intended for the ears of others. Granville saw its meaning in the light of later events, and he jumped up with an exclamation.

"I'll wager that he's in London, in the East End!" he cried. "He might start such a business there, or buy up one, and nobody would suspect that he was there! I'll set Mallett at work!"

Mallett was a private inquiry agent. He received full particulars of Laxton's appearance and some other details, and two days afterwards he replied that he had located the individual mentioned. Granville gave it out that urgent business called him to London and he was off by the next train.

"It isn't an elegant locality where the fellow has settled!" remarked Mallett drily, when his friend Granville called on him. "You might have placed a little more confidence in me, by telling me what he has done!"

Granville reddened.

"I am prepared to swear that he is no ordinary criminal!" said Mallett quietly. "I'll tell you what *I* think of him before you say a word. He is an honest-minded man who has had a run of ill-luck which has made him forget himself and deviate from the right path!"

"You've about hit the nail on the head!" cried Granville in surprise. "How did you deduce that? But, to show that I wish to keep nothing from you, I will tell you all I know!"

He related the story of the bankruptcy, and Mallett began to ask questions.

"Well," said Granville slowly in reply, "I have found out that this Laxton has had a lot of trouble. Fate seems to have been against him lately. His wife was ailing for years, and that took money out of his pocket. His two children died, trade went wrong, competition was keen, men like Saunders charged a high rate of interest for taking his bills of acceptance, and finally his wife died.

"It appeared as though misfortune would pour down upon him till he went under, and at last he did go under. Now, what is the best course to pursue? You are a good judge of human nature, I should say, or you wouldn't get on so well in your special line!"

"I should call upon him," said Mallett with a quiet smile, "and have a friendly chat with him. I know that my advice will surprise you, but I'll undertake to say that you will get nearer to the attainment of your object than if you adopt any other method!

"Exactly what course he will adopt in order to make restitution I cannot say, but I prophesy that he doesn't like his present occupation and that he would be glad to find himself free to go about and make a fresh start in his own line elsewhere! With a fair show, that man ought to succeed moderately; he has a good amount of business acumen!"

Granville didn't like the idea; he became reflective and shuffled his feet nervously.

"It's your best course!" said Mallett. "I see that you understand that you must go alone, and you don't like it! Well, if you take half a dozen policemen or detectives with you, you'll do nothing!"

"You're right!" admitted Granville regretfully. "Which is the best time?"

"Near midnight!" replied Mallett promptly. "This is Saturday," he went on, ignoring Granville's shudder, "and he will be tired of work, sick of this new and distasteful business. He will be closing up, so you will get him at just the best time to work on his feelings. It will be what people are fond of calling the psychological moment!"

The idea put forward by Mallett was a novel one; it interested Granville, although he would have preferred not to be compelled to carry it out alone. Nevertheless, he summoned up courage and went to the street named by his friend. He had no difficulty in finding it, for it had earned a notoriety of a disagreeable character!

Granville was attired in a manner suitable to his position, but certainly not suited to the locality. Two or three suspicious-looking individuals eyed him furtively, making him feel uneasy, but he went *boldly* on his way.

"It is for Winnie's sake!" muttered Granville. "I wouldn't do it for Saunders himself; but the dear girl thinks it would be good, and so—Oh, this is No. 7, I suppose!"

It was a low-class eating and lodging-house, frequented chiefly by sailors. It was not a thieves' den, where sailors are fleeced, but its former proprietor had endeavoured to establish a place where the tars might feel safe and get fair value for their money. Honesty paid him well, for Jack is generous, and he usually got well paid for looking after the sailors ashore.

Laxton, then, had taken this house! It was a strange haven of refuge, but Granville conceded that he was probably safer there than elsewhere from the chance of discovery and arrest!

The solicitor entered while a man was putting up the shutters; that man was the fraudulent bankrupt; the lawyer recognised him. Laxton had not noticed him enter the shop, so, when his task was finished, he locked the front door and turned to walk back to his little parlour. As he turned, with uplifted hand, to extinguish the gas jets as he went along, he saw Granville and stood still in surprise.

"What are you here for?" he demanded at length. He spoke fiercely, his fists clenched, as one prepared to fight for liberty. "Speak! What do you mean by coming here? How did you track me?"

He stepped forward with a threatening gesture. Granville wished himself at home, but he presented a brave front, and spoke in a conciliatory style.

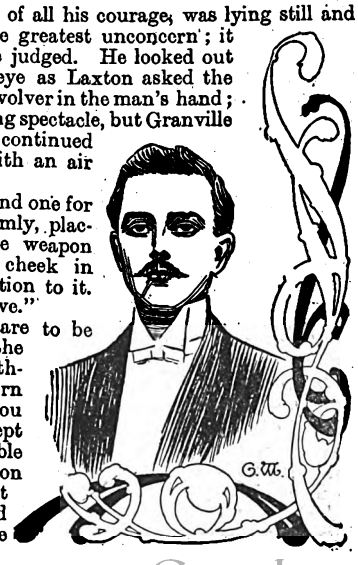
"I have come to have a chat with you about your bankruptcy, Mr. Laxton! Don't be alarmed! I wish you no harm, but I think it will be possible to——"

He was unable to proceed, for Laxton had sprung upon him with a hiss like that of a serpent, and had him by the throat. Granville had been pretty good at wrestling in his young days, but many years had gone by without practice and his art was lost. He made as good a struggle as he could, not raising the least cry, because he wished to keep the shop to Laxton and himself, if possible. He anathematised Mallett and Saunders, but he was in the mess now and must go through with it.

He essayed to make Laxton understand that he bore him no ill-will, but Laxton would hear nothing. In three minutes Granville lay helpless on the floor, Laxton still holding him, though not so tightly, by the throat.

"I thought I was safe here!" panted the fugitive. "But you have got your detectives to track me! I don't know what your game is, but I'll never allow you and your men to take me! See this?"

Granville, by the aid of all his courage, was lying still and assuming a look of the greatest unconcern; it was the best policy, he judged. He looked out of the corner of his eye as Laxton asked the question, and saw a revolver in the man's hand; it was not a tranquillising spectacle, but Granville nerved himself and continued gazing at the ceiling with an air of indifference.



"One ball for you and one for me!" said Laxton grimly, placing the muzzle of the weapon against the solicitor's cheek in order to call his attention to it. "I'll never be taken alive."

"Nobody says you are to be taken," remarked the solicitor easily, and without attempting to turn his head. "When you think that you have kept me in this uncomfortable and undignified position long enough, you might permit me to rise and have that chat I spoke

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about. I must say that you don't treat your visitors very courteously!"

Laxton was puzzled. He gazed curiously at his prisoner for a few seconds, then released him and rose slowly to his feet.

"You can get up!" he said, and his tone was that of a mystified man. "I'm done—I can't understand! What are you getting at?"

"I hope you have a clothes-brush!" said Granville, rising and dusting his things with his hands. "Well, shall we go into the parlour?"

"You haven't anyone outside, ready to pounce on me?"

"How can they, with the door locked?" asked Granville.

"No! I forgot that, although they could get in by the private door. Well, come in, I have another way out if anyone is really trying to trap me. But I am inclined to think you're acting square!"

They sat down at the little wooden table and Granville began the conversation. He spoke kindly to Laxton, endeavouring to show him how foolish he had been to forfeit a good name and make himself an outlaw, liable to arrest and imprisonment; he told the fugitive that it would have been better to act like a man, to face the situation and appeal for time and assistance to make a fresh start.

"I am sure that you would have obtained what you wanted," concluded Granville. "And it is not too late now. What have you done with the money?"

"I paid some of it away for this business; it's a paying affair, and, although I am unfitted for the life, it will enable me to hide and to save money!"

"And then?" asked Granville. He was entering into the spirit of the thing; here was a chance of redeeming a fellow-creature, and he wished to do it. Bother Saunders' money! That was not the only consideration to bear in mind!

"It is my intention to pay all I owe!" responded Laxton slowly. "I could not do it up there on the lines I was working. I had no chance! I don't have to give bills with high interest now, because I have the money!"

"But you are always liable to discovery and arrest!" urged Granville. "No, I won't split. Let me persuade you to return and make amends."

"But I shall be run in all the same!" objected Laxton hesitatingly.

He was wavering, so Granville pressed the matter harder. It was a strange *rôle* for the solicitor to play! Saunders was the chief loser by the bankruptcy, about three-quarters of the money belonged to him, so if Laxton were to refund all he had decamped with, Saunders ought to be ready to consent to the withdrawal of the warrant, and to making things smooth for Laxton.

"I shall really be scoring on his account!" thought the future son-in-law. "I'll undertake to say that he will do as I wish!"

"Will you sell this business, return to the old place and refund the money if I undertake to assure you of your freedom and a chance of a fresh start?" asked Granville. "Come now, think of your good name, and ask yourself what the dear ones would think of you!"

The last appeal was effective. The man's eyes filled with tears and he wept like a child.

"I'll do it!" he declared finally. "It will take about a month to realise this business, but I'll sell it and go back as soon as possible!"

"Will you put that promise on paper?" demanded Granville.

"No!" cried Laxton firmly. "I give you my word. Have I asked you to put your promise on paper?"

Granville could make no reply to this. A few minutes later he left the shop and, escorted by Laxton, walked to the nearest better-class locality, where he secured a cab to convey him to his hotel.

The following Monday afternoon saw Granville back in his office again. The last scene of the bankruptcy case was enacted in a small hall about five weeks later, when the fugitive appeared for examination.

An arrangement had been arrived at whereby the warrant had been withdrawn, and it was expected that the final proceedings would not last long.

Laxton had paid back all the money with which he had decamped, and the creditors were unanimous in the decision to accept the debtor's proposal to pay them the remainder if they would allow him to start again.

Saunders, in his spite, would have pressed the matter against Laxton, had not Granville forced him to consent by pointing out that all would be lost if his undertaking were not backed up. Granville refused to tell anything about Laxton's hiding place till Saunders consented.

The examination did not last many minutes. Granville was one of the persons called; it was considered advisable, in order to create sympathy and favour for the unfortunate man, that the solicitor should narrate his visit to Laxton, and how Laxton had been induced to see his error and make restitution.

Granville was the hero of the hour; a man who could bring about such a change was worthy of all honour! Granville related what had taken place, but he studiously suppressed all reference to the struggle.

There was a murmur of applause as Granville concluded his evidence and turned to retire to his seat. The solicitor received a shock, however, when he heard himself recalled by the barrister who was watching the case for the Board of Trade. As Granville faced about, he could not help noticing that certain persons or groups of persons looked very knowing.

"Is it a fact, Mr. Granville, that the bankrupt, when you entered his shop, tried first to throttle, and then to shoot you?"

Granville turned ghastly pale. His eyes involuntarily sought those of Laxton, and he read in them an expression of such utter contempt that he felt annihilated. Both knew that if this were proved against Laxton he would be charged with attempted murder; he might get off lightly, but it would ruin his prospects. Moreover, it was a breach of his (Granville's) undertaking.

Further, it would be a blemish on his own reputation. How had it become known? Like a flash he remembered that he had told Winnie in the excitement of success; he had asked her to keep it a secret on the next day, but she had by that time most probably told her father, and he had told others. Laxton's contempt was to be interpreted as scorn for a man who tries to make himself a hero to his friends in spite of all his promises and professed good intentions!

"Surely, Mr. Granville, that is a very simple question! Either it is true or it is false!"

These words restored Granville's self-possession; prompt reply was necessary. He stood erect once more, calm and collected. He must keep his promise to Laxton at all costs.

"It is absolutely false!" he said firmly.

There were several cries of "Oh!" but Granville was so firm that his reply was accepted. Miss Winnie Saunders and her father hurried home, and the language of the latter towards his future son-in-law was decidedly uncomplimentary, to say the least of it!

"What a boaster!" raved Saunders. "He tells a pack of lies to make himself a hero. A hero indeed! He's as big a rascal as Laxton! And I've been telling people what a man of nerve my son-in-law is! Why, we shall be the laughing-stock of the place! It's abominable that a man should lower himself to tell such untruths!"

Poor Granville! He received a curt note from Winnie, breaking off the engagement; he could not protest, for he had done wrong. She believed that he had told a deliberate lie; so he had, although the circumstances were just the reverse of what she believed! Yet, what could he do? He had given his word to Laxton, whose salvation probably rested on his assurance being kept.

Granville lent Laxton a sum of money to help him to begin life anew in another town. He himself found it necessary to make a change a short time later.

"I did not tell her for the sake of boasting, far from it!" murmured Granville, as he gathered up the newspaper and letter. "It was an unfortunate circumstance. Who was to blame?"

Which question he found it impossible to answer. Can we answer it?

George Dayford.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.
NURSE BEAUMONT, who knew Lady Maitland previous to her second marriage.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Nurse Beaumont Writes a Letter.

"Nurse! Nurse! what month is it? And how long have I been lying here?"

"It's the first week in February, and you have been ill for nearly six weeks, Mr. Maitland," replied the low voice of Nurse Beaumont, as she moved the boy's pillows, and put a cooling drink to his lips.

"Nearly six weeks!" he echoed wearily. "I don't understand; it seems a year to me. Somehow I find a difficulty in remembering how I came to be here. Tell me what happened?" and he looked her calmly in the face, noting her perturbed manner and nervous hesitancy.

"Your head was hurt, sir!" she murmured softly; "but you're getting better now."

"My head!" he repeated wonderingly; "I don't remember it. How did it happen?"

The woman cast an anxious glance at him, afraid he should, by talking, learn too much, and so throw himself into a relapse. Nurse Beaumont had guessed much from the boy's ravings while in delirium, and she had dreaded his first hour of convalescence.

"Tell me," he reiterated impatiently, "when was I first taken ill?"

"On the night of the fancy dress ball, sir," she said soothingly. "There now, the doctor said as you were to keep quiet and not excite yourself!" she went on quickly. "Let me give you a little beef-tea, sir."

The invalid pushed her hand away. "Don't give me that stuff, now! I want to talk. Tell me, nurse, how was my head hurt? Did I fall?"

"No, sir; you were found shot in the wood on the night of the ball!" she repeated. "Do not talk so much, sir," she pleaded, "or you will undo all the good that has been done."

But her patient did not hear her. He was looking with a puzzled frown through the window, where the tops of the trees swayed and bowed under the breeze.

It was difficult to collect his thoughts; somehow they seemed to hang back and refuse to come at his bidding, when once they had trooped too rapidly into his brain. But now his sole sensation was one of extreme languor, he only wanted to lie and count the sunbeams that danced into the room on a fine day, or the raindrops that splashed against the panes.

Counting, always counting, until he fell asleep, and then to wake and begin once more. Surely there was something beyond it all! A world where people did more than count; where, perhaps, they laughed and sang, and loved——!

Loved! A thought sprang into his mind and drifted into a question that sparkled in his eyes and quivered on his mouth.

Loved! Why, there was someone he loved! He remembered now! Someone with violet eyes and hair bright like the sunbeams he had wearied of counting!

He sat up and beckoned the nurse to him. His eyes were shining and his face was flushed.

"Nurse! I want her!" he laughed softly. "She must have come often to see me when I was ill and could not speak to her; but now that I am better she stays away! Send for her, nurse, at once. I want her—my living sunbeam!"

"Who am I to send for, sir?" she said, with trembling lips.

The boy laughed. "Why, Ivy Strange, my sweetheart, nurse. Go quickly, and say I want her. I shall wait impatiently till you return with her. Go! Go!"

The woman hesitated. To refuse to do his bidding would throw him into a state of excitement that would be dangerous in his present condition; and, on the other hand, when she returned without Ivy Strange—as she must do—what explanation could she give? How stave off the tornado of questions that would follow?

She moved to the door slowly, the eyes of the boy in the bed following her eagerly.

"I will send someone to look for her, Mr. Maitland," she said. "I cannot leave the sick-room alone; but one of the maids is sure to be about."

"Don't be long, nurse," he replied. "I must see her. It will be better than all the tonics in the world to look at her face again!"

With a sigh Nurse Beaumont went into the corridor and cast a hasty glance round. There was no one in sight, and she softly made her way downstairs and knocked at the door of Lady Maitland's boudoir.

"Come in!" said the low, even tones of Sir Trevor's wife; and entering, the nurse stood in the presence of the beautiful woman whom she feared and wondered at each hour she spent under the roof of Maitland Manor.

"Your ladyship," she murmured, "Mr. Maitland is asking for—for her—Miss Ivy. What am I to do?"

Lady Maitland drew her brows thoughtfully together. She was looking especially lovely that afternoon, robed in a gown of white cloth that clung to her exquisite figure in lines of classic beauty, and her cheeks had lost none of their soft, dimpled curves in spite of the trying time of her stepson's illness.

"Have you said anything to him," she asked coldly, "that he should have mentioned the subject?"

"No, your ladyship," the woman replied. "He burst out with it quite sudden-like, and sent me to fetch her to him; and, oh, your ladyship," she went on hurriedly, "what *can* I tell him that will satisfy him without giving him a relapse?"

Lady Maitland rose slowly from the couch, and eyed the trembling woman before her with a tolerant smile.

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"You need tell him nothing, nurse," she said quietly. "I will follow you, and satisfy Mr. Maitland without exciting him. Of course, I am afraid that Miss Strange is lost now so far as he is concerned. She is either dead or worse—in the hands of the police!"

Nurse Beaumont looked at her with a strange expression.

"Then, your ladyship, you still believe that the mark I pointed out to you was nothing more than what you called a 'coincidence'?" she asked in a low voice. "Even then, your ladyship, I am certain I am right!"

"You may go now, nurse," said Lady Maitland, coldly ignoring the woman's speech completely, "and tell Mr. Maitland that I shall be with him in a few minutes."

With a last wondering look the woman turned and left the room, a curious expression on her mouth.

When she had gone Lady Maitland went to the escritoire in the window, and, unlocking it, took out a dried, yellow-looking paper she had not glanced at for some time.

"Child Dolores died, aged one year!"

She had received that brief statement when staying at Nice as Mrs. Vernon, nearly seventeen years ago, and it had given her much satisfaction, as the final cutting away of all the old moorings, leaving her safe and happy on the verge of a new life.

Now this nurse-woman, with her babbling tongue, had persisted in clinging to the idea that she had originally mooted, an idea that set the delicate teeth of her ladyship on edge, and sent a bitter gleam of hatred into her eyes. The woman was mad, and as soon as the boy upstairs could do without her services, she would see that Nurse Beaumont left the Manor.

"How I hope that wretched foundling girl has vanished for ever from our lives!" she murmured, relocking the desk. "She got away successfully, and even the efforts of the police have failed in tracing her. I wonder whether the river hides her secret?"

She left the room and presently stood by the side of the bed where Sir Trevor's son and heir lay.

He looked at her impatiently; a shade of disappointment crossing his face as he saw that his stepmother was alone.

"Where is Ivy?" he said, moving his head impatiently.

Lady Maitland turned to the nurse, who stood obedient in the room. "Nurse, will you please leave us?" she said softly. "I will not excite your patient too much, nor stay too long!"

The woman turned to do her bidding, and as her ladyship bent over the boy to kiss him she slipped swiftly behind a screen that was used to keep away the draught when people entered or left the room.

"Well, mater, you have something to tell me, I suppose?" said Jack, a weary inflection in his voice. "Is it anything concerning Ivy?"

Lady Maitland looked at him thoughtfully. He had evidently forgotten the incidents of the night of the *bal masqué* and the breaking of his engagement with the girl from the lodge. She would jog his memory just a trifle; not too much—that might bring about awkward consequences.

"Yes, dear," she said, placing one white hand upon the boy's brow, "it is concerning Ivy that I have come to see you; but you must promise not to excite yourself."

"Tell me," he interrupted quickly. "Don't keep me in suspense! What is it?"

She leant forward, her eyes searching the boy's white face that lay upturned on the pillow. "Ivy did not confide in me, as you know, Jack," she began. "She kept me outside her thoughts, and resented being asked any questions. But one thing she did tell me was that on the night of the ball she was engaged to Digby Scarlett!"

With an exclamation, the boy started up in bed and clutched his stepmother's white hand excitedly. His face had flushed, and the old fever-light shone in his eyes.

"Digby Scarlett! Can that be true, then?" he cried. "I fancied that I must have had some nightmare that confused those names together! Don't tell me that while I have been ill she has forgotten me!" and his eyes flashed piteously into the tender violet ones looking down upon him.

"I am afraid, dear," she murmured gently, "that there is yet something worse to tell you—something that may hurt your pride, yet at the same time show you where your love was misplaced."

She paused to watch the effect of her carefully-chosen words.

He moved his head restlessly, whilst his mouth quivered. "Nothing you can ever say will make me think that!" he said at last. "Whatever has happened, she once returned my love, and still possesses it. But tell me what you were going to say."

"Only this," his stepmother repeated softly, "the girl upon whom you have lavished so much affection left the Manor three weeks ago, leaving no address behind her."

"Well," said the boy impatiently, a warm moisture breaking out on his brow and on his smooth upper lip. "Why did she go? Who drove her—an innocent, country-bred girl, from her home? Tell me!"

He raised himself upon his pillows, and gazed steadily into the face of his father's wife.

Lady Maitland sighed softly, and murmured:

"It was a mystery, until I received this letter from Digby Scarlett this morning. He went to London some days ago—after Ivy Strange had left. I thought it odd at the time that he should neglect the pretty place he has taken so recently, to wander about London in this fearful weather, but his letter explains a great deal that puzzled me."

Jack put out his hand; it was shaking as though an icy blast had chilled the blood in his veins.

"Let me see!" he said hoarsely, his blue eyes blazing with passion. "I must know the worst!"

Silently she took the letter from the little jewelled bag at her waist and gave it to him, watching keenly the expressions that flitted across the boy's fair face.

The letter was short and crisp, containing but few lines, but they were lines that made the breath of Jack Maitland come from between his lips in quick-drawn gasps.

"Dear Lady Maitland," it began. "You will be pleased to hear that I have met Ivy in London, and we made arrangements to be married quietly, then leave for the south of France. She looks very happy.—Sincerely yours,

"Digby Scarlett."

He crushed it tightly in his hand, as he might have held the throat of the writer had they met.

"Married!" he murmured. "I can't believe that she would be so heartless. Oh, God, why did I wake to consciousness to hear this? I would rather have died believing in her!"

Suddenly he started up, and seizing his stepmother in a feverish grasp, he cried wildly: "You were right, after all, mater. She did not love me. It was—it was that man Scarlett! He won her from me while I lay a helpless log!"

He fell back upon the pillow with a laugh—a desolate echo of mirth that made the woman behind the screen shiver with fear for his reason.

Lady Maitland rose from the chair by the bed and looked at the boy who lay quite still, with the laugh lingering on his mouth.

"So he is convinced now!" she murmured. "Then he will trouble me no longer, and that—other has got the prize for which he worked! I have done my share of the compact! Now I am free—free—free!"

She glided from the room with a smile on her lips, and came face to face with Nurse Beaumont, who was entering to look after her charge.

"Ah, nurse," she said softly, "I have had my little chat with your patient. I was very quiet with him, but I am afraid he is just a trifle upset by the news I told him!"

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The nurse looked after her mistress thoughtfully. "Yes," she muttered, "and I don't wonder at the poor boy being upset in his weak condition at the news I heard you tell him! It was not right, and in spite of my holding my tongue about the past, I don't mean to let that poor young fellow's life be spoilt if I can help it!"

She bent over the boy and touched him lightly on the hand. It was clenched tightly round the letter which her ladyship had left with him and forgotten to take back. Nurse Beaumont looked at it curiously. She wondered what news it contained that had helped to upset him.

"Poor boy!" she said softly, "so she has told you about your little sweetheart having gone! I don't think though," she added under her breath, "that you were told what I know, and what her laydship *refuses* to know!"

Jack moved his head, then his eyes opened, and met those of the nurse close to his own.

"What's the use of trying to drag me back to life?" he said bitterly. "The incentive to live has gone now!"

She bent nearer to him, and whispered cautiously: "No, no, sir! The incentive to live has not gone! You owe it to the—young lady you love to get well and fight for her. She needs it, poor child—she needs it badly!"

He turned sharply to her, an eager, questioning look in his eyes: "What do you mean? Why do you speak in that way? What do you know, nurse?"

She cast a nervous glance at the door, then said softly: "Your sweetheart is in sore danger, sir, and you are the only one that can protect her. I have only been here since the day after the ball, but I have kept my eyes open and seen more than most people reckon. And I tell you that you are doing a sore wrong to that sweet child if you let her fall into the hands of those that wish her ill!

"Get well, sir; eat and drink what will put strength into you, for each drop of new life you gain will be a step towards her! And," she continued, "her life is in worse straits than yours, sir!"

Fired by her strange words and secret manner, the boy stretched out his long, white hand to the woman who had warned him.

"Nurse!" he exclaimed excitedly, "I was a weak, cowardly fool to have put my own feelings first, before those of the girl I love! But I will get better!" he cried. "Feed me up, and I will take everything and anything you like, so that I can be once more a man, to fight and to hold!"

As he fell back upon his pillows, exhausted by the unusual excitement, Nurse Beaumont placed her hand on his burning brow.

"Then go to sleep," she said authoritatively, "that is what you are to do; don't dare to speak another word, Mr. Maitland, because I shall not answer you!"

As he turned obediently on his side, the past that had eluded and puzzled his brain, came back in a flash of luminous light across the darkness that had fallen over his mental vision, and he remembered everything—the scene between himself and Ivy when she had said she loved him alone, but would marry Digby Scarlett.

Then the appointment between himself and his rival, to fight out their claims to the girl; after that his memory faltered, and he could only recollect the stroll through the woods to meet his enemy; then a cloud descended once more, blotting out everything save his love for his tender-eyed sweetheart, who wanted him to save her from some fearful trouble.

After a while Nurse Beaumont bent over the patient and saw that he had fallen into a quiet sleep. Then she softly took from between his fingers the letter he still possessed, and quickly read the brief message it contained, afterwards placing it back in his hand.

"There is something behind all this!" she murmured thoughtfully. "He knows, like everyone else, that a warrant was out for that poor young lady's arrest. Though I'm certain she's as innocent as the babe unborn! Then, if he knows it, why does he want to marry a girl the police are after?"

She shook her head, then sat down to write a letter to a friend whom she had left in London, on the eve of taking a new situation as housekeeper. Her note was brief, saying she expected to be back in London as soon as her patient was better; then she added: "I am inclosing a shilling for you to do me a favour, dear Eliza. Will you, when you are down the Strand way, call at Somerset House and ask to see the death certificate of Dolores Grant, died July 30th, about seventeen years ago? I will tell you all when we meet."

Then she sealed and addressed the letter to:

Mrs. Riley,
C/o Vernon Vivyan, Esq.,
The Retreat,
Surbiton,
London, S. W.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The Long Arm of Coincidence.

"Hallo, Chase! What are you doing in London? It's ages since I had the pleasure of gazing at your extremely expressive countenance, my respected colleague."

Gilbert Chase shook hands with the man who accosted him, the ghost of a smile relaxing his mouth.

"Yes, it is rather an age, George!" he said thoughtfully, turning to walk beside his companion. "I am in town investigating one or two points dealing with my present job!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the man who had stopped him—a big, red-haired individual, with a humorous face and a peculiarly soft voice. "I heard you had the Melton murder in hand. Making much headway with it?"

His fellow-colleague smiled. "I fancy I am getting together one or two links. It is not an ordinary case."

The two went into the "Marble Halls" in the Strand, and sat down to drink their respective healths.

"Talking of out-of-the-way cases," said Frank George thoughtfully, "guess who I met the other day?"

Gilbert Chase shook his head.

"Can't imagine."

"Why, that old gentleman 'lag' who got fifteen 'stretch' for forging his pal's name, and was released on his ticket some few years ago. You remember him, because you were the junior who helped to arrest him—Vernon Grant was his name."

"Ah," said his friend slowly, "I remember, of course. What was he doing? Anything shady?"

The other shook his head. "No; he was looking quite the gentleman, spruce and well-to-do, and not in a suspicious way either, like most of the old hands when they get on a new 'lay,' but in an open sort of style. I had my doubts at the time," he went on musingly, "that there was a little foul play over that case, but it never came out, so I suppose it was the ordinary thing."

Gilbert Chase laughed cynically.

"Why, George! you're getting softening of the brain, aren't you, to go out of your way praising an old lag?"

"P'raps I am!" his friend said, with a slight flush. "Anyway," he added, rising from the table, "you've got your work cut out, old chap, to get hold of that missing girl. She seems to have vanished, so far as all trace of her can be found."

"Yes," answered Chase slowly, "the earth swallows some people up in a most mysterious way. But I don't despair—yet. It's early days for that."

As the two men parted, the thoughts of the man who was still hopeful of finding Ivy Strange drifted back to the old case which his colleague had re-opened—the forgery case in which Digby Scarlett had been the prosecutor, eighteen years ago.

Suddenly he quickened his steps. "It may lead to nothing," he muttered, "and, on the other hand, it may help me to form some idea of the character of the man who prosecuted. I've got a

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

feeling that the master of the 'Rest' needs careful knowing, and any insight I can get into his personality will satisfy my professional curiosity, and throw some light on his present attitude. I have not forgotten that the missing girl was the bone of contention between him and poor Mr. Maitland!"

He hurried to the British Museum and hunted up all the old files of the *Monograph* of eighteen years ago, with dogged perseverance, until he found what he wanted. Then carefully, and with an absorbing interest, he read all that was printed regarding what had been a criminal *cause célèbre* at the time.

"Well," he muttered, closing the files thoughtfully, "in reading that over in the cold light of reason with the picture of the man before me as he is to-day, I'm almost inclined to agree with old George, and say that the poor wretch Grant was a cruelly-wronged man; and yet, there must have been some motive for the other to have plotted so diabolically—if he did, that is."

Seized with a sudden idea, he turned over the files of a Sunday paper of the same date, containing the usual sketches of the prosecutor, defendant, and other people closely concerned in the case.

As he glanced at the distorted faces in the paper that bore but slight resemblance to the originals, he started violently, as he came across one of a girl; underneath the sketch were the words: "Prisoner's bride, Margaret Grant."

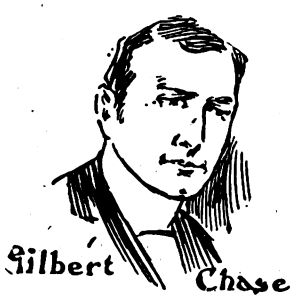
"Great Jupiter!" he muttered, a thrill of excitement making him breathe quickly; "I must be off my 'nut,' or else I have come across a regular find that fairly takes me by surprise!"

He bent intently over the face in the paper that fascinated and baffled him at the same time. It was that of a girl with a strangely imperious beauty; but it was not so much the beauty that startled the detective as the fact that he had but recently seen a similar face that might almost have been the twin to that in the Sunday paper.

"Let me think!" he muttered; "this will take careful handling; it's a delicate subject. I must not miss one single point as I trace it, for I have to unravel two mysteries with one clue!"

He turned over the pages, again reading minutely the description of the couple on their honeymoon when the prisoner was arrested. They had been married, so the paper said, just one month; then that would make the wedding take place about the end of October, as the man, Vernon Grant, was arrested about the end of November, at the address of a Mrs. Phillpot, in Ennismore Gardens, West Kensington, whose first-floor he and his bride had taken.

"Mrs. Phillpot, 14 Ennismore Gardens, West Kensington," he murmured, scribbling the address in a note-book. "I will see if she can help me, since there is no other address in the paper, and she won't remember my face by this time as one of the men who took him away. But I can't understand, all the same," he mused, "why this sketch should be the living image of that other woman—unless—unless——" and he chuckled grimly as he closed the heavy files, "unless I am on the trail of a very interesting discovery!"



Half an hour later he was in the sitting-room on the first-floor of No. 14 Ennismore Gardens, speaking to the same plump, motherly-looking woman who only a few weeks before had been questioned by Digby Scarlett.

"I can only tell you, sir," she said, "that poor Mrs. Grant left me about a year after her husband was put away. She and her little baby girl went with the nurse; the only address I knew being Southampton. After that I heard no more about them until the poor young thing's brother came to see me last December."

Gilbert Chase opened his eyes. "Let me see," he said thoughtfully, "was he a fair, bald-headed man, with a red beard?"

"Gracious, no, sir!" Mrs. Phillpot replied. "He was from America, he told me, and asked just the same questions as you are asking now. And as for being fair, he was tall and very dark, with black eyes, and a long moustache, and very beautiful teeth that any lady might envy—quite a gentleman, he was."

"Ah! you don't remember this brother's name, do you?" he asked carelessly.

She puckered her brows thoughtfully. "I can't say as I can, sir," she said apologetically; "I only know as it was a name like 'Rigby,' then another like some colour. But what it was, I can't for the life of me remember; I was always a bad one for names,"

"I wonder," he said, pressing a sovereign into her hand, as he prepared to depart, "whether Mrs. Grant left a photo of herself with you? It will be most useful if you have one, on account of the uncertainty I have in tracing the lady."

"Now I come to think of it, sir," Mrs. Phillpot murmured, "I fancy there was a picture left in a book Mrs. Grant had given to me when she was packing. I put it in a frame, and in the different spring-cleanings it has got mislaid by now, but I will go and see if it is in the box that I keep my old pictures in."

She left the room, and Gilbert Chase smiled grimly.

"Although I am not searching for Ivy Strange I am getting at the root of a much more subtle mystery! So it was a gentleman whose first name was 'Rigby,' and whose second sounded like some 'colour'! I fancy I could very easily guess those two names correctly!"

He glanced round the room thoughtfully. On the book-shelf were several volumes that looked like the reference-books that abound in the apartments of landladies. He took one down—the oldest and most shabby, and turned over the pages quickly. They were faded and yellow, almost dropping out of their binding, but as he quickly scanned them he saw one that made him hold his breath.

It was the usual stereotyped recommendation:

"*Mrs. Phillpot has been more kind to me during my stay with her than can ever be repaid with money. 'Speech is silver, but silence is indeed gold.*" (Then followed the signature of the writer of the flattering words.)—"Margaret Grant."

With a quick glance towards the door Gilbert Chase tore this page out of the book and slipped it into his pocket. Then he replaced the volume on the shelf, as Mrs. Phillpot entered the room with a triumphant smile upon her face.

"At last, sir!" she gasped. "Just when I was afraid it was lost! It had slipped behind some books in the box."

He snatched it eagerly, and for a moment could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

The face of the girl-bride of the convicted ex-convict of eighteen years ago was the image of the girl now wanted by the police on a charge of murder, or complicity of murder!

He looked again, keenly, and with an almost painful intensity. The face in the faded photo. was colder and prouder in expression than that of the girl Ivy Strange; yet, at first sight, the similarity was startling, and set a train of thoughts running in the detective's mind, suggesting weird possibilities of a great mystery of which he alone appeared to hold the key.

He thanked Mrs. Phillpot for assisting him, and promising to return the photo. when he had had it copied, he ran quickly down the steps and hailed the first hansom he saw.

His blood was boiling with suppressed excitement, and in the usually vacant blue eyes a gleam flickered that would have startled some people had they seen it. He put the photograph in his pocket-book, then took out the piece of paper that had lain forgotten among the musty books on the shelf so many years, until spotted by his professional eye.

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He read the brief commendation thoughtfully three times, conning each word, and even letter, with microscopic attention. Then he again turned to another division of his pocket-book and drew out three tiny scraps of paper which he had puzzled over for some weeks, and compared two of the pieces with two words written on the sheet of paper.

They were, strangely enough, the same in either case; "silence" and "money," and as he glanced at them, Gilbert Chase drew a long, satisfied sigh.

"It's very odd," he muttered, "they are so much alike that they might even have been written by the same hand. Yes, in spite of the lapse of time, there is the sign of similar formation in the letters! It's another proof of the long arm of coincidence.

"I am glad I did not leave those important bits of paper at the 'New Age'; they were trifling evidence before, but now"—and he closed his eyes thoughtfully—"now they have become a clue of double importance. I am glad I met George. I owe him a debt of gratitude he will never know for sending my thoughts back to that old case. Now to return to Melton, and interview one or two of my old friends!"

As he stood on the platform at St. Pancras, waiting for the train to fill up, a man brushed against him roughly and passed on without troubling to apologise. With a frown Gilbert Chase glanced at him, then raised his eyebrows in momentary recognition. The man hurrying towards the first-class carriages of the train, and looking with an ugly scowl upon everyone in his path, was Digby Scarlett.

"He looks as though he had had bad news," said the detective grimly. "He would look worse if he knew where I had been!"

At that moment a telegraph boy came running quickly alongside the train, a telegram in his hand.

"Are you Mr. Digby Scarlett, sir?" panted the boy.

Quick as lightning came the detective's reply. "Yes," he said coolly, throwing a shilling to the youth, "I am expecting a telegram."

Then, with gentle finger, he opened the orange-tinted envelope. It was dated from Rotherhithe and contained the brief message:

"*Plant successful. 'V.' drowned accidentally. Send money.*—LAMPITT."

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Like Sweet Bells Jangled.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND'S beautiful wife gazed thoughtfully from her boudoir window out where the bare trees stood sentinel on either side of the drive, and the fresh presence of Spring in the air was as balm after the cutting winds of January.

Pearl Maitland was happy, with a proud sense of victory in her happiness, for she had overridden obstacles before which other women would have stood aghast.

Her inimitable audacity had steered her through a storm of suspicion that would have caused even a stouter heart than hers to quail before such terrible odds. But she had come through all with flying colours.

In each encounter she had outwitted the enemy, and now it was with a sense of relief and joy that she sat thinking about the future.

Nurse Beaumont had left, and Lady Maitland smiled slightly as she remembered how she had intercepted a letter that estimable woman had left on the table to go with the post-bag.

She had distrusted her somehow, in spite of her silence concerning their past connection, and seeing this letter, had confiscated it, made herself acquainted with the contents; then, smiling grimly, had flung it in the fire. "So much for Nurse Beaumont!" she had said.

Now that Digby Scarlett had gained his wish she was free to pick up the threads of her life where she had laid them down in order to fight a silent, strenuous battle for the sake of her boy.

Her secret was doubly a secret now, since she had drawn the claws of her enemies—except those of Agnes!

Then she laughed softly. After all, what could Agnes do? It was some time since she had mentioned the man whom she had met at the house of her friend, and probably, seeing that her shaft had fallen flat, had forgotten the incident.

"Yes; now I will forget the past three months of horror!" she murmured, picking up the book she had held loosely on her knee.

It was by a new author, and attracted her both on account of the strong, human note it revealed, and the fact that the writer had the same name as that on the envelope Nurse Beaumont had written to her friend in London.

Suddenly the door opened, then closed softly.

"Is that you, Trevor?" she said lazily, without turning her head.

"No, Lady Maitland," answered the intruder. "It is I—Heriot North."

Something—a note of aloofness in the voice of the man who shared with her part knowledge of a midnight rendezvous—sent a thrill of fear through her. Had she miscalculated her security after all?

"I am glad you have come to see me!" she said brightly. 'I was wondering if you had gone to town."

"I did not go to town," he said coldly. "I stayed away because I could not come!"

"Could not come?" she repeated, her breath quickening; "what do you mean?"

He came nearer to her, yet she noticed that he avoided touching her. "I mean," he said, in a low, intense voice, "that I was tricked and deceived by you that other afternoon, when you told me your version of what happened in the wood. I believed you implicitly! Oh, Heaven!" he cried passionately, "I forged my soul to yours in a bond of silence that I *must* keep now! And you let me—you let me vow fidelity to a lie—to knit myself to a——"

She raised her hand with a sudden imperious gesture.

"Hush, you madman! Not so loud! Explain yourself!"

He drew his hand across his mouth; it was wet, and quivered like a child's.

"There *was* a woman in the wood that night," he said slowly, "a woman with black hair! You knew it, and you lied to me with a smile on your lips!"

She looked at him curiously. In spite of anything he said to her she felt that he would not betray her! He would rather die first!

She pushed back a stray wisp of hair; it was damp with sudden moisture.

"How did you learn—that?" she said softly.

"How?" he returned bitterly. "Can a man close his ears to what is a common subject wherever he goes? It was scarcely a whisper at first, then it grew into a positive statement. I heard how the detective had caught the wrist of a woman, upon whose arm he had left a bruise. Then—then I remembered the band of black velvet you had worn round your wrist for some days since the night of the *bal masqué*. And my eyes were opened!"

She went up to him swiftly, and in the firelight her face looked strangely lovely.

"And because of that—Heriot," she murmured softly, "you hurl your condemnation on my head! Is it fair to listen to such reports, and then—because you had my entire confidence—to jump to such hasty conclusions? I thought you would be true to your vow for ever."

He shuddered. "Yes; to my vow of silence I must be true; but the ideal to which I clung has crumbled! You admit that the story you told me was false, then?" and he unconsciously gripped the back of a chair in his eagerness to learn that there was some particular he could still believe.

"The story I told you about that man possessing a secret of my dead husband, was true!" she began slowly. "I have told you the truth, so far as you were entitled to it! Now,"

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

and she drew herself up haughtily, "what more is there that you wish cleared up? You have heard both accounts—which do you believe, mine or the other?

"I repeat," she continued, after seeing that he was still silent, "that I saw no one else in the wood that night. What reason would I have for an unnecessary lie? Come! who has been trying to poison your mind against me, when I have learnt so nearly to rely upon your strength, to trust to your—your regard!" The last word she breathed so softly that it barely reached him.

He flushed guiltily. The subtle influence her beauty exercised over him was once more beginning to draw his strength from him, like the fumes of a noxious flower.

"No one has poisoned my mind," he said quickly. "As I said, I heard reports about a woman in the wood. Men talk among themselves idly, and in view of the bond between us—knowing what I did—perhaps I may have jumped to a hasty conclusion."

"Men?" she murmured thoughtfully. "What men?"

"Oh, I heard Digby Scarlett discussing the affair some days ago," he replied, "but now that you have convinced me that you were not the woman about whom is all this wonder and suspicion, I do not care who she was. I fear I am impulsive," he went on, feeling he had made an exhibition of himself "but ever since I burnt those things for you I have been haunted by the fear of discovery—for your sake!"

She put out her hand. "Let me impress one thing upon you—avoid Digby Scarlett; he is a bad man, a false friend, and—I hate him!"

"Hate him!" he said, in surprise. "Why? Although I fancied I had met him somewhere before, I did not notice him much. Have you known him long?"

A curious expression crossed her face. "No; we met some few months ago—quite recently; but I have known him long enough to hate him!" she said, in a low, bitter tone.

"It is unfortunately true that listeners hear no good of themselves," said a suave, well-bred voice behind them—a voice that sent a cold shiver through Sir Trevor's wife, and chased the colour from her cheeks, as, sending a startled glance at the door, she and her companion saw in the flickering firelight the tall figure of Digby Scarlett, with a sinister, smiling expression on his mouth, looking from one to the other. He came forward slowly.

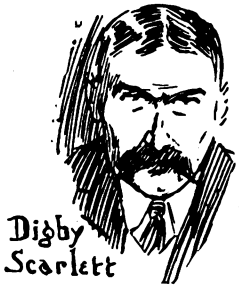
"I am afraid," he began, turning to Heriot North, who was gazing at him in an embarrassed silence, "that her ladyship made a slight error in saying she had known me for a few months only!" Then, addressing the cold, beautiful woman who faced him defiantly, he said: "Shall I say *how* long it is since we parted, Lady Maitland?"

Heriot North made a movement towards the man who had spoken such insolent words to the woman whose secret he shared.

"I wish to hear nothing that you can say," he replied curtly. "The length of Lady Maitland's acquaintance with you has no interest for me."

Digby Scarlett laughed.

"Not," he went on, "if I can tell you that it is eighteen years since this lady and myself parted! The occasion was tragic; the scene—a criminal court!"



He stopped abruptly, as Heriot North sprang forward and struck him across the mouth.

"You lie!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You contemptible cur! Take back your words!"

Livid with rage, the other wiped his mouth, and when he withdrew his hand it was red.

"Lie!" he gasped; "you quixotic fool—look at that woman's face! Ask her if it is not true that she is a bigamist, with no right to the title of 'Lady Maitland!' Look at her trembling lips, and frightened eyes, then ask her 'ladyship' to relate about her marriage with a convicted felon still living!"

There was a pause, broken neither by the cornered woman, in her beauty, nor by the two passion-gripped men, but by a low, inarticulate sound that came from the door.

Instinctively they turned, and, tottering into the room, with a distorted face and foolish, babbling mouth, came Sir Trevor Maitland, the squire of Melton!

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Employer: "You put that note where it will be sure to attract Mr. Smith's attention when he comes in, didn't you?" Office Boy: "Yes, sir, I stuck a pin through it, and put it on his chair."

"Yes," said the teacher, "the egg represents all that is gentlest in creation—the cooing doves, the tuneful song-birds, and the stately swan. Johnny, what other gentle things are hatched from eggs?" "Snakes, ostriches, alligators, sparrow-hawks, and eagles," said Johnny.

Bertie: "What! Only married a year, and yet you are so downcast!" Wally: "Ah, my dear fellow, I never imagined that a wife would prove such a costly article." Bertie: "Yes, a wife is a costly article, that's true; but then you must remember that she lasts a man a precious long time."

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No Danger!

She: "If you attempt to kiss me, I'll call mamma." He: "And what will happen then?" She: "Oh, nothing, for mamma isn't at home."

Different Kinds of Love.

Tom: "Women don't love men for what they really are, but for what they have done!" Kitty: "And men love women for what their fathers have done!"

Passing Away Time.

"What are you doing in here?" asked the other fellow who had just come in. "Just passing away the time," was the answer, as he handed his watch to the pawnbroker.

Not at all Strange.

Hicks: "Isn't it strange that while my hair is getting grey my moustache is not?" Mrs. Hicks: "Oh, I don't think so; your moustache is about twenty years younger, you know."

Qualities to be Inherited.

"I hope you appreciate the fact, sir, that in marrying my daughter you marry a large-hearted, generous girl." "I do, sir" (with emotion), "and I hope she inherits those qualities from her father."

Flattery Won the Day.

Ardent Suitor: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I did not know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much; but it takes very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

Not a Nice Mind.

She: "It can hardly be questioned that every woman is more or less of a mind reader." He: "Do you think you could read mine?" She: "I'd rather not. Mamma is a little particular as to the character of my reading."

Cheaper to Part.

Miranda (sobbing): "It is better in every way that we should part, dear Orlando." Orlando (in a choked voice): "Only in one way, dearest." Miranda: "Yes, beloved?" Orlando (overcome with emotion): "It is cheaper, darling."

Matters they Overlooked.

Syms: "Ah, my boy, you are to be envied. An artist's life is an ideal one. The affairs of everyday life do not engross you." Daubers (whose pictures do not sell): "Not a bit. Why, we sometimes entirely overlook such prosaic matters as breakfast and dinner."

Better Thus.

Miss Saged (to veterinary surgeon): "Oh, dear, Mr. Simpkins, I am so afraid dear little Fido is going to have rabies." Mr. Simpkins (after careful examination): "Indeed, miss, I don't see any signs of it." Miss Saged (caressing him—Fido): "But his poor dear little tongue is always hanging out of his mouth." Mr. Simpkins: "That, my dear madam, is in accordance with a merciful dispensation of Providence. You see if it hung out of his ear, he might experience some little difficulty in drinking."

A Religion Worth Embracing.

Kate: "No, Hattie does not attend any church; she says she is her own religion." Harry: "That is a religion I would like to embrace."

Impossible to Do it.

Doctor: "I would advise you to take a walk every morning before breakfast." Sappy: "But, doctor, I—ah—never get up until after bweakfast, y'know."

It was a Strong Fish.

Wife: "Are you sure you caught this fish?" Mr. Gayfello: "Of course." Wife: "It smells very strong." Mr. Gayfello: "Strong? I should say it was. It nearly pulled me overboard."

Both were Pretending.

Mrs. Smythe: "Before we were married you used to pretend that you liked to have me sit on your lap for an entire evening." Smythe: "Yes, and you used to pretend that you preferred to sit in a chair."

Moonlight was Cheaper.

"I'll woo thee in the moonlight," sang the lover to his girl, who was gazing fondly on him from the casement; "It's much cheaper than the gaslight," sang her father, the old churl, who was taking observations from the basement.

He was Absent-Minded.

He is a very absent-minded man, and was thinking earnestly when a light shower came on. "Jack," said the young woman with him, "why don't you put up your umbrella?" "I have tried to," he answered, "but I couldn't get a penny on it."

Too Much of a Good Thing.

"I believe in trying to put as good a face as possible on everything in times like these, Maria," said Mr. Billus, looking again at the bill that had just been brought in; "but it does seem to me that seventeen shillings for complexion wash in one month is putting it on a little too thick!"

He Ought to Know.

A clergyman, having performed the marriage ceremony for a couple, undertook to write out the usual marriage certificate, but, being in doubt as to the day of the month, he asked: "This is the ninth, is it not?" "Why, parson," said the blushing bride, "you do all my marrying, and you ought to remember that this is only the fourth."

No Tinge of Bitterness.

"Does it not throw a shade of bitterness into your heart in the autumn," she said, "to see the trees all leafless, and to hear the wind sighing for ever in mournful monotony? Does it not make you feel that there is too much that is bleak in the world?" "No," he answered, "it weally does not." "Why?" "Because my papa is in the coal business."

Couldn't Have Forgotten Anything.

When the train made its first stop after leaving home, Mr. Simkins, who had been in a brown study for several minutes, raised his eyes, which had a troubled look in them, and remarked: "My dear, are you sure we haven't forgotten anything?" "Of course we haven't," responded the good lady cheerfully. "I would have thought of it the minute the train started."

Too Willing.

"Dear me," he whispered, "do you think if I married you, your father would forgive us?" "I'm sure he would, dear," she asserted, softly. "And would he give us a house of our own?" "I know he would, dearest." "And would he give us enough to live beautifully on?" "I'm sure of it, Harry." "And would he take me into the firm?" "Certainly he would." "And let me run the business to suit myself?" "Of course he would, darling." She snuggled closely to his bosom, but he put her aside coldly. "I can never marry you," he said, hoarsely. "Your father is too willing to get you off his hands."

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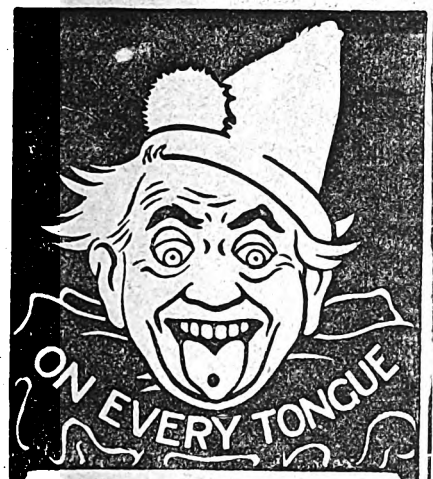

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Going to South Africa.

You are in love with a young man in South Africa, "QUEENIE," who wishes you to go out and join him there. Your parents object to your going so far away. You are very fond of him, and would like to go.

* * * * *

If he is in a good position in Africa, and could make you a good home, and has proved that he is fond of you, I should certainly accept his proposal. It would be better, though, if he could return for a little time, to be married at home, and to personally convince your parents as to his fitness to be your husband. Naturally they do not like the idea of your going so far away without being satisfied that all is as it should be.

❦❦❦

What to Do with the First Wedding Ring.

"A LADY who has become widowed at twenty-five," writes "ONE IN DOUBT," "has become engaged again two years after her husband's death. On her lover's next visit he wishes to give her a ring. She wants to know what should be done with her wedding ring under the circumstances. Should she cease wearing it?"

* * * * *

There is no known rule on this point. Opinions differ as to the disposal of the late wedding ring. However, I believe it is usual to continue wearing it until the day of the second marriage ceremony. Many women who have married in widowhood continue their first wedding ring for the rest of their lives, sometimes, however, transferring it to the other hand. However, it is usual to discontinue the first wedding ring on having the second placed on the hand.

❦❦❦

Troubles of a Careless Man.

"W. E. R." accepted an invitation to a party recently, but forgot the date and mislaid the invitation card. What could he do to get out of his dilemma?

* * * * *

I should find out from a mutual friend the date of the party. If, however, you do not know any other guest, there is nothing for it but to write a polite note to your hostess asking her to let you know the day, as you have mislaid the card. She will think it very careless of you, but that would be better than going on the wrong day or not appearing at all.

* * * * *

If you do not like to risk offending your hostess by writing to inquire the date, I should get out of it altogether by writing again saying that important business or something prevents your coming to the party. I am afraid the careless man is compelled to descend to many such fibs to make up for his faults.

The Introduction Question.

"ANXIOUS."—You see a girl about constantly, yet have not the courage to address her. You sit behind her at church, and her sister lives with her husband at your seaside town. How can you get the necessary introduction?

* * * * *

It should not be difficult to get acquainted with her sister's husband. I suppose he belongs to some club, or takes part in some local work, which ought to bring you easily into touch with him. That would lead to an introduction to his wife, and after that to the girl by whom you are so attracted

❦❦❦

And Again.

"A. E. W." wishes to get acquainted with a young lady, who lives near him. Would it be the proper thing for him to walk to the station with her in the mornings, if he bids her "Good-morning?" He finds it difficult to get to know her in any other way.

* * * * *

If the young lady shows an inclination to acknowledge your "good morning," there would be nothing against your speaking to her at greater length as time went on. That is for her to decide. Do not thrust your acquaintance on her, if she has not shown any desire herself to know you.

❦❦❦

Should Men Wear Rings?

"TROUBLED" is engaged to a girl, but is in doubt whether or not he should wear an engagement ring himself. What is the usual thing under the circumstances?

* * * * *

It is purely a matter of taste. Some men indulge in such fancies as rings and jewellery generally. These would certainly wear one on the occasion of their engagement, and his sweetheart, observing her lover's taste for rings, would probably present him with it.

* * * * *

On the other hand, many men dislike the idea of rings altogether, thinking them not only a trifle effeminate, but apt to interfere with any manual work or sport. These would be unlikely to wear an engagement ring. Personally, I have no opinion on the matter, as it is entirely a matter of taste and temperament. One thing, however, I might add, and that is that a display of many rings on a man's finger is not only vain, but vulgar.

❦❦❦

Finding One's Counterpart.

"MACFIE" writes: "How should I go about getting my counterpart in the female community? There must be a means, and I should think, from the way you write in 'In Confidence' that you are the one to answer it."

* * * * *

Thank you for your appreciation, "MACFIE." One's counterpart, of course, does not grow on wayside bushes, to be gathered by the seeking. The idea that every man has his "counterpart" is rather too much believed. The happiest marriages are between those who are by no means counterparts.

* * * * *

No doubt, looking on marriage as a sort of convenient arrangement, the counterpart is what is sought, but the question of love drives all such considerations out of the case. Do not go about speculating on which woman is your counterpart, because you will probably make the usual mistakes. Wives are rarely found by calculation. Wait till you meet a woman who inspires some deeper feeling, and then go into the question as to whether she has the qualities you look for.

Cynthia

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(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Man with the Strange Eyes." See inside.)

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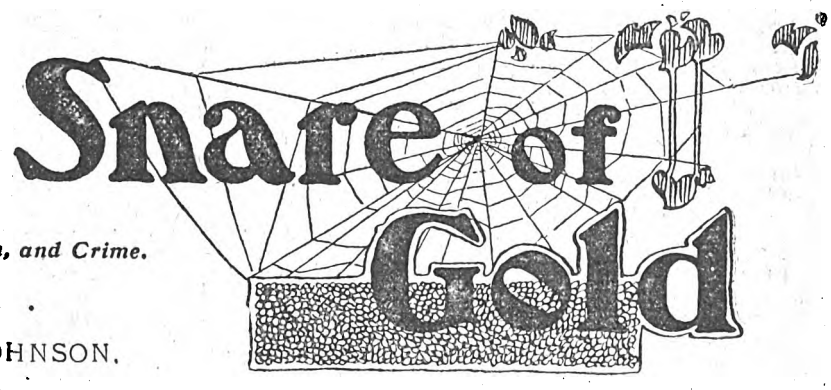
The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By
Henry T. Johnson.

FIRST CHAPTER.

The Chamber of Death.

Tick! Tick!

No other sound but that, the tick-tick of the death watch, broke, nay, intensified the silence of the death chamber. Presently the door opened, and with hushed tread four men, sombre of mien and garb, entered, furnished with implements of trade.

Methodically, impassively, they advanced to where It was lying in Its resting house upon the trestles. Casually they glanced at It, with no want of reverence, but with the stolidity born of long and constant usage.

And yet one of them remarked, involuntarily: "Looks like life, might be sleeping."

"Yes," said another, "wonder what it was?"

"Stiffikit says heart failure," said a third.

"Half a tick," remarked a fourth, who had moved to the door, responsive to a subdued tapping, "a genelman says if we'd like a little something before or after we've finished we'll find it in the room there on the right."

"He's very kind," said Number One, "let's get it over quick, mates."

"What's the 'urry?" asked Number Two, "the chap inside there ain't impatient."

"Not now," said Number Three; "it's hurry as brings on his complaint."

"Well, come along," said Number Four, "a little stimulant won't do any of us any harm."

And together they trooped through another door down the short winding stair to where, upon a table, stood a spirit tantalus, a tray of glasses and some sandwiches.

Once again only the tick-tick of the death watch sounded in the death chamber, except that from below there came at times a hum of subdued talk, a clatter and a chink, for the sandwiches were good, the spirits excellent.

George Geldart murmured: "So tired!" Then he dozed again. Presently he moved uneasily, stretched out his arms and yawned, dropped them; they hit on something hard, like the side of a chest or box.

"What a thundering long time I've been asleep," he said, with another yawn. "Hardly like a sleep, more like a torpor, anyway, must get up. Wonder what's the time? Blinds down, but it's daylight, and this is December, too. What are these boards? Why—what's it mean? These partitions—what's the matter?"

All of a sudden he gazed into a mirror on the opposite wall. Then a great gasp of horror convulsed his frame, and his cheeks blenched white as the weird, strange folds over his brow, his face and form. With a whimpering shudder he sank back again, then sprang up in the haste of terror. Not there—not there—he mustn't lie down there!

No, no; out and free he clambered. Then awhile stood still clasping his bandaged forehead with his hands. With dilated eyes again he glanced at the strange, weird sexagon still yawning there upon the trestles, then, with instinctive terror, he slid back the lid, closing the yawning interior, crept backwards away from it lest he might again fall into that rigid sleep—lest once again they might lay him there.

Voices! A man's and—a woman's. Still moved by instinct he flung aside the wardrobe door, drew himself within, closed it, stood there trembling like an aspen, cold as ice, and with the beads oozing from every pore as though the eyes were thawing.

"Would you like to look at him?" It was Eric asking.

And it was Clare who whispered: "No, no! I should read reproach in that face now."

"Why should he reproach?"

"Because, perhaps now things are clear to him; perhaps the dead know things the living keep from one another."

"What then?"

"Well, Ronnie was his favourite, till——"

"Till he robbed him."

"Till he *thought* he robbed him. But now perhaps he knows the truth, and that's why, Eric, I daren't look at him—daren't stay near him. Come, come away!"

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"Come along then. I, too, feel a trifle creepy here. There's one thing to be regretted."

"That he was cut off so soon?"

"No, no, not that."

"That we deceived him and wronged your brother?"

"No, no! I'm thinking what a pity, or, rather, what a shame it was that to the last he cherished that idiotic prejudice of his against Life Assurance."

"Eric, how hard you are! I wonder sometimes if you are conscious of any other emotion save the lust of gold."

"Oh, yes, yes! You don't know me yet. There is something else I yearn for."

The man there in his hiding-place could not see the sparkle in the girl's eyes as she raised them quickly to the speaker's face, but he noted the eager, yearning tone.

"Oh, yes, yes, I know. I think I know—anyway, I can guess, there is something else you crave."

"Yes," he answered. "Power!"

"Oh!" Her voice died in almost a wail, and Geldart heard her companion whisper in her ear, "Oh, yes, yes; there is one other thing I prize—your love."

"It is well you prize it," she said, "for it has made sacrifices enough for you."

"I know—I know."

There came a tap at the chamber door. Geldart could hear the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she slid from the room and presently he heard another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, the friend he had so often befriended, and a suave, unctuous voice that Geldart knew to belong to a suave, unctuous, swat-bellied, double-chinned, blue-cheeked, bald man whispered: "We're quite safe now, Eric."

"Oh, yes," the other answered, "dead men tell no tales."

"It saves a lot of trouble, he'd have made an awful row when he learnt what we'd been doing with the firm's money, almost as much as when he found my promissory notes were missing."

"Yes, you can reckon that it was that excitement that brought on the fit that killed him."

"Don't say that."

"Why not? Because it's true; you know it is."

"Yes, yes," the other whispered in a lowered tone, "it was a frightful ordeal for me to go through—to tell him he was dreaming, that he never lent me the money, and that I never gave him any promissory notes. And, oh, his face when he went to his private safe to produce them, and pulling out the drawer within rummaged it over to find them, and failing to find them, shouted: 'They are stolen—stolen; my Ronald who has robbed me in other ways has robbed me of these, and I can see that you are in league with him.'

"Oh, I shall never get it out of my eyes, his face that had grown so pale turning from white to grey and from grey to purple, never shall drive from my ears the sound of his groan as he fell face forward full length on the floor."

"I wish you wouldn't keep on talking about that," said the other. "I wish, instead of talking, you'd pay up."

"Pay up what, Eric?"

"The price you promised me—the price I had to pay somebody else for getting your notes of hand."

"Why, why, Eric, we were both in the swim; the money was to make up your losses as well as mine."

"I don't care; you promised, remember, honour amongst ——"

"Don't—don't use such language, Eric. Don't say such uncomfortable things. You'll have to split on yourself as well as on me, and then you have no proofs." The voice was now more unctuous than ever, and then—Geldart could imagine, though he could not see, the stride the other made across the room, his fists clenched, his eyes dilated, and he could hear his words.

"So, you traitor, double-dyed, you'd betray even your fellow traitor; you'd play the same trick on me! No evidence now? That's where you're wrong. I've the evidence of one who at my bidding would tell the truth to her own eternal ruin. I'd tell the truth, too, if you came your tricks with me; I'd send you to Portland, if I had to go there with you, and toil there shackled limb to limb with you in chains."

"Oh, Eric, Eric, you mistake me!" the other answered in a trembling voice. "I know—I know; yes. You did the work—anyway, you got it done, and you shall have your price."

"You'll have a bad time if I don't," the other growled, and Geldart, listening, felt his heart turned to ice.

But he was to hear more yet.

"It's a dreadful business, Eric," said the other, drawing near the coffin, "on second thoughts I don't think I'd like to see him. I feel as if—as if—but then that's all imagination; he died a natural death."

"Yes," said the other, "and he died very conveniently."

"Well, it saved a lot of trouble. With all his eccentricities there'd have been some hard swearing to have got him safe away."

"Well, then, we should have sworn hard; Mac would have given the certificate. Anyway, he died and saved us the trouble—and the expense."

"Yes, yes, and it's better for him to be in there—and where he's going, than to be shut up in padded rooms and things, because he'd have been very violent, and he was always so very restless—superabundant energy they called it—but his abundance has all vanished now. Come along, Eric, I don't feel comfortable here."

The door clicked behind them. And, with icy beads trickling from his brow, silently, stealthily, George Geldart, emerging from that wardrobe, crept towards that other door ajar, listened to the clink and the clatter, heard a voice, "Now then, mates, back to business!" and another, "All right, only let's finish up, it ain't likely the cove in there will grumble at being left waiting!" Back from that door he crept, back to the wardrobe, wrapped bodily in grave clothes, mentally in thought. Softly he smote the left palm of his right fist, registering the stroke of an idea.

From within he drew a pair of Indian clubs, a set of golf clubs, a well-filled cricket-bag, a gun-case, and, swiftly crossing towards the trestles, pushed back the lid, then, with these things and the linen folds that swathed him, filled the emptiness that he had left. Then he withdrew within the wardrobe.

A moment later Number One, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, said: "Buck up, chaps! I fancy some of 'em have been in to see what's keeping us so long, I heard somebody movin'."

"Righto!" said Number Two, fixing and commencing to drive the screw, to make up for lost time. "Now we shan't be long!"

"Fancy a chap like him inside having to leave the good things of a house like this to go where he's a-going," said Number Three, in whom Hollands induced melancholy tendencies. And Number Four chimed in with—

"Just what I was thinkin', Alf, he won't do the feastin' where he's goin', though in one way he'll furnish the banquet."

And as they talked they went on screwing.

At last their footfalls receded down the stair—and then were gone.

Once again the man thrust back that wardrobe door, once again closed himself in darkness. For he heard another voice coming nearer—nearer.

"You might have waited just a little while—you might have let me look upon his face again. I've left the house, I'm leaving England, you've driven me not only from my home but from my native land, but you might have let me see him once. No, no! If you don't mind, I want to go in there alone."

And from within that wardrobe George Geldart heard the door close with a click, heard the sound of footsteps crossing the floor, then of knees sinking heavily upon it.

Heard yet another sound, a sad and cruel sound to hear; a strong man sobbing, clenched his own teeth and lips to keep down a something swelling in his own throat, listened with all his ears, with all his heart, and this is what he heard:

"Dad, dad! Oh, God, it was a bit too cruel! They might have let me see him once again—might have let me look on

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him, though never more he'll look on me. And now—Oh, father, father, you can't hear me—you wouldn't believe me when you could, but, oh, perhaps you might have done—in time! And now you'll never know. Oh, dad—dad! You're gone from me—gone believing wrong of me, who would sooner have died than wronged you. Oh, I loved you so!"

Then there was again a deathly silence for a while.

"Dad—perhaps it's best—for you'll meet mother, where you're gone—and she will know—and tell you!"

Click! Once again the door was closed.

Ronald was gone! Ronald, whom he had wronged—on whom the shadow of a wicked lie had lain, whose brother had been even crueller to him than was Abel's.

And then George Geldart left his hiding-place again, locked both doors, donned a suit of tweeds and a hat, an overcoat, a pair of boots, and, waiting and watching his opportunity crept down the silent stairs, across the lofty hall, silent as the grave to which he had so nearly gone. Softly closing the door behind him he went out of the house that he had lived in, out of the life that he had lived.

SECOND CHAPTER.

A Fortunate Encounter.

George Geldart traversed the thronged and busy streets like one in a dream.

An eerie, weird feeling possessed him; in this living world, bustling, and hustling, and thronging to and fro all round him he felt somewhat of an intruder. To that world he was now George Geldart, deceased; his life story a tale that was told, and the world had closed the book of it and placed it on the shelf of the books of the dead and done with.

Then he became conscious of a terrible hunger, not the keen, healthy hunger he had been used to feeling after a day with the hounds, or over the fields of his place at Penshurst, a healthy yearning that one enjoyed in the very anticipation of satisfying it, but a faint, sinking feeling. He was thirsty, too.

Hullo, a restaurant, the very thing! Striding in, he approached the counter, called for a glass of claret, and scanned a menu lying on the counter.

"Sixpence, please sir," said the brisk waitress, placing the glass of claret before him.

He smiled involuntarily at the idea of George Geldart, the connoisseur, calling for and awaiting with impatience a claret at sixpence a glass.

He dived his hands into his pockets. Empty! He tried the waistcoat, that cover, too, was drawn blank. The jacket—he hadn't a sixpence about him. On his declaring this the waitress promptly withdrew the glass of wine, while he could only fix on her a stare as blank as his pockets.

Only half conscious of the subdued titter running along the counter, he was about to transfer that stare to the menu when the proprietor, a fat man with black and oily curly hair, took it away, remarking contemptuously, "We have no trade on tick in dis here house, guv'nor," and in his anger and confusion, forgetting awhile hunger, thirst, and the physical weakness they were inducing, he strode out of the shop amid murmurs of "What cheek!" "Poor chap!" "Didn't work it this journey!" and so on.

He would find Ronald and would put things right. Aided by his second son, who would stand by him to the death, he would denounce the elder, who had lied and cheated so foully, "blighting his wholesome brother."

He sought the hotel where the lad, turned from his father's door, had put up. He had left that very day, taking all his traps, the waiter believed he was going abroad, but as to his destination they were ignorant.

Yes, yes, he remembered the boy's words, it was to be his last day in England. And the result of George Geldart's inquiry at the hotel shaped the strange course of his life from then.

Why didn't he go back to his own house, where abundance was his own? Because the purpose which was on him when he so strangely left it restrained him; the determination to test, even in the furnace of his own agony, the true and the false, the gold and the dross, this and a strong sense of fear lest those who had planned, having robbed him, to immure him all his days, should, now that Ronald was gone, none knew whither, succeed.

Ah, a street fountain! He dashed across the road, despite warning shouts, at the imminent risk of being knocked down by a railway van, filled and emptied the metal cup chained to the marble again and again.

Still he felt faint for want of food, the faintness was increasing and he wanted to hold out.

He began to wonder how long he had fasted, how long he had lain in the chamber where the death watch ticked. Then all at once his heart gave a leap. Here along the street came at a brisk walk old Donaldson, his friend and neighbour, he'd ask him for a sovereign for an hour or two.

Then he hesitated. Would it mar his plan? They were within a few yards of each other ere he had decided, and all at once Donaldson looked up full in Geldart's face. He turned from florid to mottled white and purple, clapped his hand to his left side with a gasping ejaculation, "God! how like!" then went hastily on.

Geldart walked on a bit farther, and then came to a standstill. A sight that one does not often care to see met his gaze, and caused him to turn his eyes in the direction from which it was approaching.

What was that? Why were cabs and 'buses slowing down? Why were people in the street ahead there staring into the road, some raising their hats? What was this advancing?

"By Jove, it's Geldart. Don't you remember me—Stanyer?"

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A cortège, headed by two men in black with white ties and flowing hat-bands, things they called "weepers."

Why, the men were mutes, yes, there behind them at a walk came a team of stately steeds, all raven black, with flowing manes, and big black plumes were nodding above their heads.

Geldart liked the old-fashioned plumes, had always said he'd like them for himself. How splendid they were, those coal-black steeds, with their black velvet trappings! And it was an open car they drew, his own idea again, and within it there was something that could not be seen for the mass of flowers, wreaths, hearts, harps, and anchors heaped over it, and each side of that car another man in black with a white tie was walking, carrying a wand.

Then came a carriage, and there, within the sombre framework of its windows, was seated his son Eric. How hard Eric's face was looking. Ronald would not have sat so hard of face and dry of eyes, but Ronald was not there—not there. Ronald was leaving England, the knowledge of this intensified George Geldart's sense of loneliness and fear.

Then came another carriage of mourners. His cousin Ferdinand, who had been such a distant cousin since he had made such strides in politics and public life, folding his arms and looking conscious as ever of his importance. And beside him his cousin Jack, whom he had been obliged to slightly cold shoulder, because Jack had really slipped so far down the ladder; even his black suit looked rusty and seedy—and—poor Jack, his eyes were quite red and his cheeks looked moist and shiny.

Opposite to him sat—well, what impudence! old Blagdon—his traitor partner, the thief and villain who to screen his theft, would have sworn away the liberty of the man whom he had wronged. Then other private carriages of friends—and enemies!

The doctor's brougham—there within it sat the scoundrel who, for a price, would have sent him, a trusting friend and patient, into durance. For a price—a price! Oh, the Snare of Gold! What meshes it made about the souls of men; and in the last carriage came the servants.

"Who was that old toff?" one bystander asked another, and, despite his vulgarity the inquiry gratified the subject of it. Not so the rejoinder.

"Oh! only old Geldart, something in the City, pot of money, but no class, pig-headed as they make 'em!"

It was gone, and presently came jingling along the street, a gaudy turn-out got up to advertise a new comic paper. Then a motor-car coughed and snorted past, and next there came a prancing pair of greys, driven by a coachman with a bouquet for a button-hole. And within the carriage sat a girl in a white veil beside a man with a red face and a mauve tie.

How strangely the web of life was woven!

It was a queer feeling that possessed him; it was like beginning life again, opening a new story, a sequel to one to which Finis had been written. Certainly with the exception of what he stood in, he was as penniless as when first he came into the world.

Then the thought flashed across him. If it were not so, if he had only the means to keep himself afloat, if he could only lay his hands upon one of the many thousands standin in his name in the books of various banks and corporations—why then, free and unfettered, he could devote his life to the great scheme that had evolved and shaped itself within his brain, the Secret he possessed, or rather that possessed him, the secret process of working the markets.

He had never developed it to anyone, had hinted at it, pledged his faith in it, just as he had when, upon his broaching the idea without revealing it, his son and Blagdon—that thief Blagdon—had laughed him into angry silence.

And he remembered with anger swelling in his heart, how they had looked at each other significantly. Why, yes, they would have made these very words of his, wise words though they were, links in the chain of cruel evidence that should deprive him of liberty, of management of his affairs, even of self-control, of all that makes life worth living.

Then he reflected. To-morrow, or perhaps to-day they'd read his will, the will which in a burst of anger he ten days ago had made, revoking his other will, leaving Ronald penniless, his bright, breezy Ronald; Ronald, who, thank God! he had learnt, and not too late, was no rogue and thief; Ronald, far more sinned against than sinning. Ah! when again they met it would be the father who would have to ask for pardon.

And then George Geldart reflected, he would have to set to work to get things right, to undo the tangle Fate had fashioned, and he had complicated.

"By Jove, it is!"

A hand descended on his shoulder. He turned and stood confronting a man wearing a long, flapping overcoat, a Colonial hat, and a pair of riding boots. A man, iron-grey bearded, predisposed to run to flesh, with the air of one who has won success and meant neither to forget it nor let the world do so. A man who seemed to expect you to stand still while he looked you up and down and right through, and delivered his verdict upon you; a matter of paramount importance to you.

"You don't know me, Geldart?"

"Not from Adam," answered the other.

"Of course not," the stranger went on, "I don't suppose a dozen people on this side even know that I'm alive."

It was almost on Geldart's lips to answer, "I can say the same," but he checked himself, and the other continued:

"I wonder if you remember Stanyer?" Then, after a pause, he added, "and the Mincing Lane days?"

"Stanyer? Stanyer?"

Geldart's Mincing Lane days went a long way back—back to the time when he left the Charterhouse—long before Charterhouse left "Smiffel"—and went to learn business routine in the counting-house of Berridge and Smilax.

All in a flash he located his man, though it was not easy to identify the big, sleek, assertive, elderly man before him with the lank, loutish, hungry-looking lad, the Stanyer of those days.

"Why, surely you're not Seedy Stanyer?"

The other man's lips and eyebrows for a moment angrily twitched, then he broke into a rather forced laugh.

"You've got it," he said, "you chaps nicknamed me 'Seedy' because—I was—well, I was seedy, I was very hard up in those days, and you were mostly young swells, sons of rich fathers, some of you paying premiums—I remember!" Then, just as Geldart with a nod was about to pass on, Stanyer exclaimed:

"Come and have a glass of wine."

Geldart, whose very soul seemed craving for the wine that had slipped almost from his lips, said eagerly: "Thanks." Then, after a moment's hesitation, "But, no thanks, I—I——"

"Come along," said the other, taking his arm. "I'd like to have a chat about old times." And Geldart, physically and morally too weak to resist, suffered himself to be led back into that very restaurant he had walked out of so crestfallen.

"What's yours?" asked Stanyer. "Claret? Here, miss, glass of your best claret, and a whisky-and-soda. Fancy,

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Geldart, my meeting you this very day, I've just returned to England."

"Then you've been abroad?"

"For twenty years! By Jove, old man, I should think you wanted a glass of wine!" for Geldart had drained his glass and placed it on the counter with a contented sigh, and with action so emphatic, that with a click the fragile stem was broken.

"Confound it! I'm so sorry!" he exclaimed, hastily diving his hand into his pocket. "What's the damage?"

"One shilling, dat vos cut glass," said the fat man with the oily locks.

And Geldart hadn't a shilling on him. With a look of blank dismay he explained as much to his newly-found acquaintance, who, with a chuckle of supercilious good humour, threw a shilling on to the counter.

"That's all right, old chap! Here, have another, come along! It'll do you good. You won't? I know, you're afraid of it—between meals—and perhaps there's been a big stretch."

"Four days!" was upon his lips, then, reflecting that so much of the truth would not be credited unless more of it than he cared to tell were told, he said with a forced smile:

"Yes, a very long time."

"Sorry it's so bad as that," said Stanyer. "Here, let's squat at that table in the corner. Come along."

A novel sensation this, for George Geldart, of Mincing Lane and Bryanston Square, to be patronisingly given a dinner in a second-class restaurant—and to be glad of it. Somehow he found it amusing; anyway it relieved the intolerable strain of hunger and thirst which so nearly imperilled his plan.

It was by no means an elaborate repast, just a fried sole and a bit of chicken, but never in City hall or West End mansion had George Geldart ever eaten with such appetite. His companion watched him curiously.

"What changes are brought about by Time! And how differently things work out to what we anticipate. When I last met you I was—well, I was 'Seedy Stanyer,' with a vengeance, with nothing but my little screw to live on and never sure of that for much more than a week. And you? Why, you were a smart-looking swell and all the world seemed at your feet.

"I remember you and other chaps 'Tommy-dodding' for your screws at the end of the month—and now I'm worth——" He laid down his knife and fork and hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat—"five and twenty thousand pounds!" and he uttered the last words in a tone intended to take Geldart's breath away.

"And you," he added with a sigh that was as satisfied as it was deprecatory. "Ah, well—I'm sorry—I really—am sorry!"—this in a tone of insistence, as though Geldart might be under the impression that he was extremely glad to find the acquaintance of his youth hungry and penniless.

Geldart's impulse was to blurt out, as under ordinary circumstances he would have done: "Confound you, sir, and your five and twenty thousand pounds—I'm worth five times five and twenty thousand pounds!" but the circumstances were very far from ordinary, and he held his tongue.

And Stanyer went on:

"But I've not done yet. For aught I know I'm only just beginning instead of stopping here to knock down the little pile I've raised. I'm going to pile it higher, higher."

"What brought you back then?"

"I came back to make a search, to try and find those who years ago I lost, lost of my own free will, thinking it better for their sakes, not for my own, mark you, for their sakes that they should lose one who seemed, as I did, under a spell that turned all my work, all my hopes, like Dead Sea fruit to ashes."

"Have you found them?"

"No, I've found no trace of them, and perhaps it's just as well, who knows what trouble I might bring by finding them? Anyway, I've given up the quest—let's talk of something else."

"And what may you be doing now?" Stanyer continued, not having heard of George Geldart, wealthy merchant, patron of the Arts and philanthropist, whose supposed death had caused such general and widespread regret. "I mean, what line of business are you in?"

"As a matter of fact," said Geldart hesitatingly, "just now I'm out of business altogether."

"That's very bad!" said the other man, "how long has that been?"

"Well, I haven't done any work to speak of for the last few years."

"Oh!"—severely. "But, though you don't look strong, you don't look exactly feeble, your looks have improved within the last five and twenty minutes"—and he glanced significantly at the empty plate and the wine decanter—"and you are by no means old, not so old as I am," as though that constituted juvenility. Then, in a severer tone. "I remember, even as a youngster, you weren't over partial to work."

"That's true!" said Geldart humbly.

"You weren't a plodder. Now I was a plodder. People used to call you brilliant, full of ideas and all that sort of thing, nobody ever thought me brilliant."

"That's also true," said Geldart.

"Well, I plodded and plodded, and now—see where the plodder is—and where you are!"

"True again," said Geldart in the tone of a remorseful Tom Idler interviewed by an Alderman Frank Goodchild.

"And I supposed you squandered a good deal of money?" Stanyer went on.

"Thousands," the other answered.

"Ah, well! You can't eat your cake and have it, and I suppose now you'd find it difficult to get a job, at your time of life, with so many young men crowding the market."

"I'm afraid so," said Geldart, "I suppose you couldn't put me in the way of one?"

"Well, I don't know," said Stanyer; "it just happens that possibly I might. I suppose there's nothing against you, except extravagance and indolence? You haven't disgraced yourself in any way?"

"Not that I'm aware of," answered Geldart.

"No, you never seemed likely to do that. Well, now, I'll just tell you how the matter stands. I'm not over here to stay, I came across for two reasons, the doctor suggested a voyage, and I had a quest to make, and thirdly I had an idea of establishing a kind of little agency over here in London.

"I export a lot of stuff to the United Kingdom, hides and wool mostly, and I want somebody over here to watch the markets and cable me regularly by code the fluctuations so that I can regulate my output; somebody who can make purchases or execute little commissions for me."

Geldart listening, pondered, moved almost to anger by the other's bumptiousness, almost to laughter by his assumption of Geldart's own decline and fall. Only, all at once an idea flitted across his brain, not quite across it, because it perched there and began to sing. The Scheme—the Scheme! The opportunity was come, yes! Stanyer might be made the means!

"Now," Stanyer went on, "here's a chance to climb back, to undo mistakes, to put your house in order. It's late in the day, it's a long way on in the race, but—you understand?"

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"Perfectly," said Geldart, "and I'm just the man you want!"

* * * * *

A few hours later Fenner, the butler at Geldart's house in Bryanston Square, went down into the servants' hall, took off his hat and overcoat and, seating himself in the chair before the fire, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and Batt, the odd man, remarked:

"Bless my soul, Mr. Fenner, how you are perspiring! Is it mild outside?"

"No, rather cold, Batt."

"Been walking fast, sir?"

"No," answered the portly old servant, somewhat absently. Then, after a pause, he said:

"Batt, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Lor', Mr. Fenner, why?"

"Because," the butler answered slowly and impressively, "I've seen one."

The other man looked at him curiously. No, the old man was sober and stolid as ever. Then, after a pause, he asked in a low voice:

"Mr. Fenner, whose ghost was it that you saw?"

And Mr. Fenner answered: "The ghost of him who was carried from this house to-day—the ghost of our dear master."

Then came the audible thrill of an electric bell and presently Mrs. Mason, the housekeeper, entered in a tremorous fluster.

"Mr. Fenner, we've got to go upstairs into the library, Mr. Eric says the lawyer's there and they're going to read the will."

THIRD CHAPTER.

The Reading of the Will.

And so the retainers of the household trooped up to the library, a sorrowful group. They guessed what was coming; more than once they had looked forward to that moment.

They were scarcely surprised at being summoned, George Geldart had been so kind and considerate a master in his lifetime that his servants were quite prepared to learn that they were not forgotten in his will, perhaps at times had wondered as to what extent they had been remembered.

Yet, now that the crucial moment had arrived, every one of them, man, woman, boy, girl, felt a pang; the donation, perhaps at last was coming, but the generous and courteous donor was gone. Respectfully they entered the library and grouped themselves in one corner in deference to a wave of Eric Geldart's hand.

Around the room were seated a number of friends and connections of the family. In the centre the solicitor was seated before a table with, at his right hand a shiny black japanned box inscribed in brand new gold letters:

The Executors and Trustees of the Will of
George Geldart, Esq., deceased.

Clare Armitage sat there, the pallor of her features intensified by her costume of unbroken black; mostly her eyes rested on the carpet, only every now and then they were raised in the direction of Eric Geldart, though whenever he chanced to meet her gaze they dropped again.

Ferdinand Geldart, M.P., sat there, his portentous air intensified, possibly in consequence of the fact that Jack Widdicombe, the failure of the family, was again at his elbow, full of his tiresome reminiscences of "Auld Lang Syne," "When we were Boys Together," and all that sentimental nonsense, so cherished by the people who don't succeed and so distasteful to those who do.

And there was Blagdon, churchwarden and pillar of his parish, type and model of solid, stolid respectability, with a character as spotless as his shiny, white shirtfront and his shiny black broadcloth coat—to all appearance.

And there was Richard Farningham, merchant, Director of the Bank of England, D.L. for the City of London, and several other things, the very type and personification of financial solidity, looking immensely bored and regretful that one more burden of trusteeship was cast upon him.

All glanced at the opening door, and Ronald Geldart entered. Crossing the room instinctively, he held out his hand towards the Member of Parliament, who, folding his own arms more tightly, turned his head away.

He was a tall, well-set lad, with dark, wavy hair and dark eyes, but lines about his face betokening a somewhat pensive cast of thought.

Unlike his brother in nature as in form and feature, studious, imaginative, it was a subject of comment in the circle of the family's acquaintance that the second son of old Geldart, commercial from his patent leather boots to the crown of his bull head, should possess a temperament so utterly opposed to his father's and brother's.

Dreamy, distrait, sensitive, Mincing Lane had for him no delights, the produce markets and the fluctuations no interest. his heart was set on things foreign to his environment; sculpture, painting, music, books, and all the time at his command in wandering through the galleries of Florence, Rome, Paris, and elsewhere, wanderings through mediæval cities, Nuremberg, Heidelberg, where he had studied, lazy jaunts and journeys to the beauty spots of Europe and beyond, while his father and brother were wrinkling their brows over the current prices of peppercorns, jute, and saffron.

He looked for a glance of recognition from Blagdon, who had professed such friendship for his father. Boanerges Blagdon dropped his eyelids and raised his fat, white, flabby hand in a gesture of deprecation. Ronald's face hardened, then softened again—he felt his hand clasped.

Cousin Jack, at all events, wasn't going to cut him. Then he crossed the room to where Clare Armitage was sitting—Clare, who once had seemed to him almost a sister, who perhaps was to be a sister yet, though Eric and she knew more than he could guess.

"Clare!" he said, almost appealingly, holding out his hand.

For a moment her eyes shifted unsteadily, then she dropped her folded hands into her lap.

"You won't shake hands, and let bygones be bygones, Clare? You won't have faith in me? You still believe all the evil, and won't credit me with any good?"

She answered coldly: "This is not the time or place to make a scene," and turned away.

"So you haven't gone yet?" Eric sneered, looking up.

"No," he answered. "I daresay you are disappointed, but I can hardly regulate my movements quite according to your wishes."

"And I suppose you want to know your share?" said Eric. "Well, you won't have long to wait."

Then Ronald, striding into the embrasure of a window, handsome and smart as ever, but the ordinary devil-may-care expression softened down in face and eyes, stared through the window blankly into space.

He leant there against the window-frame, gazing into the Square, but in reality seeing nothing.

This was the end of all his dreams, all his hopes, the hope that his father, when his anger at Ronald's refusal to go into the Mincing Lane business should have burnt itself out, would accede to his ambition and desire, and not merely allow, but enable him, to adopt a literary career, afford him means and facilities for travel in far lands, so that when the time came for him to speak his message to his fellow creatures he might have something to say worth listening to.

Eric might sneer as he liked, Ronald felt it was far better, far more worth doing, to give the world a new song to sing, a new story to remember, new creations to love and rejoice with, new themes for laughter, even for tender tears, than to have wrung from it toll of wares it was compelled to have, or by buying and sweating in the cheapest of markets and grabbing and grasping—yes, and lying in its dearest, snatch and grab, and hold out of the price one fellow creature paid for what another fellow creature had produced or fashioned, the largest share of all for oneself who had done nothing but step between.

The lawyer read the will. The testator, declaring himself of sound mind, appointed as his trustees and executors his friend Richard Farningham, his partner, Boanerges Blagdon, and his son Eric Cosmo Geldart.

Then came sundry legacies and bequests to relatives, friends,

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institutions, and servants, a handsome one of £5,000 to his one time ward and adopted daughter, Clare Armitage.

After that a number of annuities to late employers and servants, and finally the testator devised and bequeathed the whole of the residue of his estate, both real and personal, to his eldest son, Eric Cosmo Geldart aforesaid; absolutely, declaring that his son, Ronald Harvey Geldart, knew for what reason the testator had revoked a former testamentary instrument in his favour, and had excluded him from any benefit out of or share in his estate.

While this was being read the listeners fixed their eyes upon the brothers. Eric Geldart, for his part, seemed absorbed in contemplation of his finger nails. His brother Ronald was gazing steadily through the window, obviously undergoing a terrible struggle to master his emotion. The eyes of more than one of the old servants watched him through a mist of tears.

The lawyer's voice ceased, as, gathering up the papers, he took off his spectacles.

Ronald Geldart advanced from the window, rested his hands upon the table, and looking full into Eric's white, set face, he said:

"You've played your part well, Judas, and the stakes are yours; you've robbed me of my birthright, that I could forgive you. Thank God, there are things to me of far more value than gold and what it buys! But one thing, Judas, I never will forgive, you've robbed me of my father's blessing. Yes, you were worse to me than Jacob was to Esau, for our dead mother bade us, ever since I can remember, share and share alike, and, were she now on earth, she would cry 'Shame' on you!"

"Clare," he said, almost appealingly, holding out his hand.

Then, without another word, he strode out of the room, out of the house that had been his birthplace and his home.

* * * * * * *

Relatives, lawyer, guests were gone. The servants had returned to the hall, Clare Armitage and Eric Geldart stood face to face.

"I am going now, Eric," she was saying, "going to my new home. Oh, how strange it will all seem leaving the dear old place!"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "Good-bye, good-bye!"

"Oh, Eric, how cold and hard you are!"

"Now, now, my dear Clare, don't commence a scene, and you know how I loathe tears."

"I know—I know; sentimentalism isn't one of your failings, Eric, only everyone isn't gifted with your absence of it, with your convenient forgetfulness. I can't forget that twenty years ago your father and your mother brought me here, a fatherless, motherless, friendless mite, and oh, Eric, what I've done for you weighs like a load upon my heart! If they know—if they know, if together in the Beyond they are seeing all, knowing all, what will they say of what I've done?"

"Now, what on earth are you raving about? What have you done?"

"Oh, you know—you know! And you know that for no one in the world but you would I have done as much."

"Don't talk in riddles, Clare, tell me what you mean."

"I mean the crime—our crime, or, rather, crimes—the keys I took, or rather stole for you!"

"For me, Clare?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, Eric, I felt just now as though I must at all hazards, at all costs, confess the truth, here on my knees where he stood, before them all; it seemed so wicked to sit here quite silent, it seemed like doing that awful thing again."

"Clare, are you dreaming or raving?"

"Eric, what do you mean?"

"I simply mean that if you have done what you say you have done—well, silence is prudence!"

"If I did it? You *know* I did it. For you, or, rather, with you, for though it was my hand that carried out the theft of your dead father's keys, it was your brain that planned it, your voice that urged it, your influence that impelled it—as you know."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Eric!" She almost shrieked his name, and with clenched hands and stern, set, defiant face, he answered:

"I know nothing, I admit nothing, I deny everything. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Eric? Ah, yes, yes. I see it is wisest for us to pretend — even to each other. Yes, yes, and good-bye, Eric, or, rather, *au revoir!*"

"I said good-bye!"

"Yes, until to-morrow."

"After what you have said, Miss Armitage, it must be good-bye for ever!"

He touched a bell. For a moment she stood there, spell-bound and speechless. The door opened.

"A hansom for Miss Armitage!"

The page hastened to the front door, and presently his whistle sounded.

Clare remained there, her hand upon the door, her feet upon the threshold. For some moments her breath came and went, almost in gasps, then in a low, hard voice, she said:

"So, then, I see the development of your plan. I hadn't seen quite far enough ahead before. I knew you were a villain, I never guessed you were a traitor."

He affected to ignore her and to be immersed in a book he

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snatched from the shelf beside him. Her hansom rattled up, she buttoned her glove.

"Having finished the evil work, you fling aside the tool you need no longer. Well—we shall see!"

She was gone. Gone without the scene and storm he had expected. And somehow Eric Geldart felt that had there been more storm, there would have been less peril.

FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Gulf that Separates.

But what was it that had happened to cleave this gulf between two brothers of the same blood? Why had Ronald Geldart hurled those stern and bitter words at Eric? Why, earlier in this story, did he fling himself there upon his knees beside his father's coffin in that tempestuous agony?

Let us carry back this story in retrospect to some weeks prior to the events related in the preceding chapters.

George Geldart paced his dining-room very much in the manner and mood of an enraged tiger. His son Eric, from the depths of his arm-chair, watched his father furtively, with observant eyes that shifted from the angry, irascible old man, striding to and fro, to the young one leaning by the mantelpiece gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"I am sick of it, dead sick of it!" the old man cried. "All these years I've toiled and moiled for two fellows who don't appear to have formed the slightest conception of the meaning of the word gratitude."

"Father!" from both.

"Don't speak to me, sir," he said, turning in a fury on the younger man, and, confound you, sir! Don't knit your brows at me, and don't stand there mooning at the fire, or else, dash it all, I shall lose my temper!"

A smile played about the well-shaped mouth of the younger man. And the elder, noting this, red and rampant with passion, exclaimed:

"Don't try me too far, or else, Ronald, I shall say something I shall be sorry for! I shall order you out of the house. I say it's monstrous, it's shameful, the ingratitude I'm experiencing from my sons!"

"I must ask you to except me, father!" said Eric in a cold, decisive voice.

"Well," growled the old man, "certainly you are not such an idiot as your brother, thank Heaven, for one quixotic fool is enough in any family!"

"A fool I may be, father, though I wouldn't allow anybody but you to speak such words to me, but an ingrate I am not. I acknowledge all your kindness, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart, and if you'll give me time I'll prove my gratitude."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, you're proving it excellently already. Not content with your three years at Heidelberg, where I was fool enough to send you, instead of pitchforking you straight away into my counting-house when you left school, you've been mooning and loafing about the Continent and the East for two whole years, and when at last you do condescend to return home, and I ask you when you will be prepared to enter the City house, you talk a lot of drivel about adaptability, disinclination for commercial pursuits, and you lay down the hare-brained proposition that you shall devote your days to scribbling a lot of infernal nonsense to fill a publisher's waste paper basket."

"No, no!" protested Ronald. "Everything I have written, so far, since I began to write in earnest at all, has been printed, and, really, father, it's from a sense of duty, though you don't seem able to see it, that I have decided not to go to Mincing Lane. I shall be a hindrance rather than a help. I am sure that in another walk in life I shall walk alone, and I think reach my goal!"

"Oh, then, you've decided! Very well, sir, be good enough to go to your room!" The old man had turned from red to white with passion. "And meantime I will decide what to do with a son who defies me. To your room, sir!"

"Father, you are unfair!"

"Out of my sight, I tell you!" The old man flung wide the door.

Ronald Geldart, turning upon his heel on the threshold with flashing eyes, and exerting all his will to hold himself, and remember the respect due to his father, repeated, "You are unfair!" then closed the door behind him, leaving George Geldart alone with his eldest son.

The old man threw himself into a chair, breathing heavily, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he asked.

"Idiotic," replied Eric, lighting a cigarette.

"I should think so," said his father, "even you are not such a fool as he."

"Thanks very much. I think if you've any further compliments to scatter, I will follow his example and leave the room."

"Well, you try my patience just as much as he. He won't come into the firm, and you, though you are in it, take sides with that insensate, muddle-headed Boanerges against me on every point."

"No, sir, on one point only."

"The most crucial of all, the point on which everything else turns. Eric, you must re-consider it. I tell you, my lad, there's a fortune in it."

While he was speaking the younger man's brows and his lips tightened.

"But, my dear father, it's against the terms of partnership agreement."

"Nonsense, our next profit and loss account must show a balance of twenty thousand pounds, out of that balance we can carry ten to reserve, the other ten, instead of dividing, let us apply to the furtherance of my system, the system I've thought out for years."

"And the system which is looked up in your own mind, which is a secret to Mr. Blagdon and to me."

"And which must be one till you assent. I'm not a stranger proposing a confidence trick, I'm the pillar of the whole concern, I've made the money, I tell you I can multiply our capital tenfold, twentyfold, a hundredfold."

"By embarking in another business, quite outside the scope of our partnership agreement."

The old man, at a loss for words, recommenced his sentry-go, then suddenly making a dash at the door, flung it open and was gone, banging it behind him.

"Old fool!" the young one muttered. "But, by George, if he only knew the truth! Ha, ha, ha! If he only knew that the twenty thousand that he wants to tap for his own pet wild cat scheme has gone in another little scheme!"

There was a tap at the door. A servant entered, ushering in a portly, pompous man of some five and fifty years. He was about to effusively greet the younger man, who, however, motioned him curtly to a chair, carefully closed the door, then asked in a quiet, dry tone.

"Well, what news?"

"Well, bad news, worse even than I dreaded, it's all gone, we're face to face with this, Eric, you and I have either got to make up ten thousand between us by next Wednesday, or else make a clean breast of it to your father, our mutual partner, and tell him that we've dabbled with our balance with the result that it is non-existent."

"Phew!" the younger whistled.

"How do you think he'll take it?"

"Kicking, biting, and fighting, he's just been on at me regarding the old fad, he wants ten thousand set aside to set afloat that madcap scheme of his; he's in a fury about another matter. Ronald has refused to come into the business, which is just as well, the fat would be in the fire if he went through the books."

"Well, I don't know how it's going to end, if he calls for that balance-sheet next Wednesday it's ruin to me, bankruptcy, disgrace. What's to be done?"

"Go upstairs and see him—say nothing!" and, with scared face left the room, leaving Eric pacing to and fro, thinking. If the doctors would! Such things had been known. If he thought his son had robbed him—and he had two sons!

(Further developments in the story next week.)

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The Man with the Strange Eyes.

Telling of a Hypnotist and Some Strings of Pearls.

CONTAINING THE INCIDENT DEPICTED ON THE COVER.

"Who is the girl over there?—the one in the white gown, with the strings of pearls round her neck?"

"My dear Staines, such ignorance would argue yourself unknown if you had not been trapesing about in foreign countries for so long. That 'girl in a white gown' is our newest heiress, Miss Muriel Reaside, and the pearls round her neck are part and portion of the most marvellous collection of jewels she has inherited from her father."

"Hum!" was the reply, whilst the man called Staines followed with his eyes the slim figure of the girl in question, who was at that moment standing beside the window talking animatedly to a tall, fair man of peculiarly pleasing appearance.

"Then she is an orphan?" It was the first speaker's voice again, and he turned upon his companion, John Lowe, a shrewd little man of middle age, a pair of piercingly bright dark eyes.

"Yes, an orphan, and, being just over age, an independent orphan," the shrewd little man laughed. "She would have been the prey of fortune-hunters, but fortunately she is already engaged to the man by her side, as good a fellow as ever breathed—Alan Macintyre."

Staines' eyes left Lowe's face, and once more flashed across the room in the direction of Muriel Reaside and her lover. A curious expression crept into them—an expression not good to see.

They narrowed slowly, and concentrated themselves upon the girl's face in a fixed, stony stare, whilst at the same time they retained their remarkable brilliancy.

A little smile just parted his thin, well-cut lips, but he uttered no word, and his companion was so intent upon gazing round the big drawing-room at the throng of well-dressed folk as to be unobservant of Staines' actions.

But at the other side of the room the girl upon whose face Staines' eyes were fixed suddenly shrank and shivered in the very middle of the sentence she was uttering, and with a half-frightened glance round her drew nearer to the open window, and put out her hand almost involuntarily towards her lover.

His startled face was instantly lowered towards hers.

"What is it, sweetheart?" he said anxiously, noting how the colour had faded from her cheeks. "Are you faint? Is it too hot here?"

"No—o," she whispered, looking round her again with a little shudder, "but—but, oh, Alan, I don't know what I felt all at once! Just as if some ugly, loathsome reptile had crawled over me, and were fascinating me as it might a bird."

She trembled again, and her lover drew her arm through his to lead her into the conservatory.

"What a fanciful little darling you are!" he said tenderly. "Lady Moore does not keep reptiles in her drawing-room—and in here, and——"

But before he could draw Muriel into the conservatory she had taken her hand quickly from his arm and was saying fast and nervously

"No, no, I don't want to leave the drawing-room, I would rather stay here—I *must* stay here!"

The colour was coming and going rapidly in her face, her eyes were unusually bright, and she turned her head from side to side with an uneasy, uncertain gesture, as though searching for someone.

At this precise moment two men approached the pair, the one a short man with a shrewd face, bald head, and pleasant smile, the other a tall, powerfully-built man, whose clean-shaven face and thin, well-cut lips evidenced considerable force of character, and whose dark and singularly piercing eyes shone with a strange brilliancy, and fastened themselves with a curious expression upon Muriel's troubled face.

"Miss Reaside," Lowe began in his hearty voice, "an old acquaintance of mine, just returned from prolonged travels in foreign parts, is anxious to be made known to you; may I introduce him?—Mr. Bertram Staines—Miss Muriel Reaside—Mr. Staines—Mr. Macintyre!"

The two men bowed stiffly to one another, Muriel also bowed, and then, with an odd, jerky motion, like some automaton, moved against its will, she held out a hand to the stranger, who took it and held it for the fraction of a second.

Another of those long shudders ran through the girl's slight frame. She lifted her eyes and looked up for a moment into the piercingly bright ones that watched her, then she said, slowly and automatically:

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Staines."

But the gladness was not reflected in her face, it did not regain its colour, and her eyes looked abnormally large and frightened, set in that white, still countenance, and although Staines talked to her for many minutes, she took no apparent interest in anything that he said. Indeed, there was an expression of intense relief upon her face when presently Alan touched her arm and gently asked her whether she would come and listen to the music in the next room.

She held out her hand to Staines.

"Good-bye," she said, the relief appearing now in the accents of her voice.

"I hope I may say '*au revoir*,' he answered courteously; "it has been a great pleasure to meet Lowe and other old friends here to-night, it is a great pleasure also to make new friends," and his charming bow included both Muriel and Alan in its graceful politeness.

"Who is that man Staines?" Alan Macintyre asked of John Lowe a few hours later, when, having taken Muriel home after Lady Moore's reception, he sat smoking in the club.

"Staines?" Lowe puffed a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling, and looked thoughtfully at Macintyre. "Well, he is a fellow I used to know fairly well, an interesting sort of chap, clever, brilliant, and all that sort of thing. Been abroad for years, not very flush of money, but none the worse for that."

"I don't cotton to him much," Macintyre answered shortly. "I don't know why, but I don't like the fellow's eyes."

"My dear chap, what rot! Forgive my bluntness, but really, poor Staines can't help having the eyes Providence has given him."

"Very likely not, but he can help the expression he puts into them, and I don't like it. I don't fancy the fellow, and I wish he had not been introduced to my *fiancée*."

Almost at the identical moment when this conversation was taking place Bertram Staines stood in the tiny sitting-room of a very third-class lodging house. The same smile with which he had looked across Lady Moore's drawing-room at Muriel again curved his lips, his eyes shone brightly.

"'As a bird into the snare of the fowler,'" he quoted softly. "She is likely to be easy prey, I fancy. I shall try to—to get what I want by fair means, and if fair means fail—well! then we must try—foul!"

* * * * *

"Muriel, I do not want to be a jealous beast, or to make

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exigeant demands upon you, but I do hate to see you becoming more and more friendly with that man Staines."

Muriel and Alan were walking slowly through the Park on a June evening three weeks or so after their first introduction to Bertram Staines. The girl no longer wore the old look of peace and happiness which had been her chief characteristic; she was worn, almost haggard, and her eyes had a strained, anxious expression.

She looked at her lover silently before answering his remark, then she said vehemently:

"I can't *bear* Mr. Staines, and you know it, Alan. Your jealousy is foolish, and most misplaced; I hate that man! I hate him! I hate him!"

"Then why is he so constantly by your side? Why do I find him at every party, at every entertainment to which you are invited? Why do I even hear your name coupled with his by some of the impertinent gossips who are always ready to take a woman's name in vain?" Alan asked irritably.

"I don't know! oh, I don't know!" Muriel cried, a sudden ring of passion in her voice, stopping dead in the deserted pathway in which they were walking. "I know I hate him; he is like a snake that repels and yet fascinates one."

"*Fascinates!*" Alan exclaimed scornfully, kicking a pebble from his path. "If that man fascinates you, I am sorry for you!"

"I can't explain," she said wearily, "and, oh! don't be vexed, Alan. I feel so utterly miserable, and I don't know what is the matter with me! Everything seems to have gone at sixes and sevens lately; ever since, ever since—I don't know when," and she drew her brows together in a puzzled frown, her eyes filling with tears.

"I can tell you when!" Alan replied savagely; "you have never been really the same since Lady Moore's party, when that beast Staines was first introduced to you."

A strong shudder shook Muriel from head to foot.

"I don't know what it was that night," she said faintly, "but I felt quite suddenly as though a reptile were crawling over me; it gave me the most awful feeling of fear and disgust; but I don't see what it had to do with Mr. Staines, much as I dislike him; and I hate his eyes!"

"Well, see that you have nothing to do with him or his eyes!" Alan said grimly. "Thank goodness you are going down to Beachmouth next week, and he is not likely to find you out there, or to know you are going."

"No, oh no!" the girl said breathlessly; "he will not know I am there, and I—I shall be safe with your sister, and in a big hotel. I think I am getting nervous and silly, Alan"—she looked fearfully round her—"and sea air will do me good. I feel frightened at everything nowadays, but at Beachmouth I shall be safe, and free from—Mr. Staines and his hateful eyes!"

Perhaps she would have felt less confident could she have seen a telegram that was dispatched the evening before from Bertram Staines' lodgings. It ran thus:

"Expect me on Wednesday," and it was addressed to:

"The Housekeeper,
The Den, Beachmouth."

* * * * *

Muriel Reaside, the lovely young heiress, was the admired of all beholders in the hotel at Beachmouth, where she was staying with Alan Macintyre's widowed sister.

The girl was brighter and happier than she had been for many weeks past; the colour was returning to her face, the light to her eyes. Some of the strained, haggard look was dying out of them, and on the night of the annual ball in the hotel she was among the brightest of the guests.

True, her complete happiness was marred by Alan's absence, but she was young enough to enjoy dancing for the sake of dancing, and as her lover was to join his sister and betrothed on the morrow, Muriel could afford to be happy.

Mrs. Carr (her future sister-in-law) watched her with loving eyes, rejoicing in the change a week had wrought in her, and admiring the fair beautiful face, the shapely young form, and the snowy neck, against which a treble row of costly pearls rested, when she suddenly saw a flash of some inexplicable feeling pass over Muriel's face.

The girl all at once left her partner's side, and made a quick step forward, her head a little bent, as though listening, her eyes grown fixed and anxious.

The colour died slowly from her face, and Mrs. Carr, fearing she was ill, went swiftly to her side.

"Are you faint, dear?" she asked. "Can I fetch——"

"No, thank you," Muriel interrupted her, speaking in a dreamy, sing-song voice quite unlike her own. "I am quite well, it is nothing; only I have forgotten something in my room. I will not be a moment."

Then, without another word, she turned from her puzzled partner, and from Mrs. Carr, and sped quickly from the room.

Mrs. Carr returned to her seat and her comfortable gossip with a friend, and no one saw Muriel flying upstairs with eager, hurrying steps to her own bedroom; no one was present to witness how she tore open her jewel-case to take out the articles of jewellery she had been wearing, and put them into a black bag she had snatched from the table; nobody saw her steal down the staircase again, bag in hand, and creep past the ballroom door, from which there floated the languid strains of a waltz.

On tiptoe, and with hurried, nervous steps the girl passed out into the hotel garden, but there was no trace of hesitation or delay in any of her actions; she moved straight forward as though she were perfectly well aware of what she wished to do, and with swift, unerring footsteps wound her way in and out of the garden path to the gate that led to the top of the cliff.

Opening this, she passed out upon the short grass, never pausing until she reached a broken-down shed in the shadow of which stood a man, in a slouch hat, and with a dark cloak thrown round him.

"I have come," she said, in that strange, sing-song voice; "I have brought all!"

The man stepped out of the shadow and looked down at her with keen, eager scrutiny; in the white light of the moon his eyes gleamed brightly, their steely glance as it met the girl's made her shiver.

He saw the shiver, and it seemed to enrage him. "Pshaw!" he muttered, "I said I would have you and your wealth—by fair means or foul—and if it has had to be foul, it is your own fault, and the fault of your fool of a lover. I could have won you but for him."

Muriel did not seem to grasp the meaning of the savagely-spoken words; her snowy neck and the pearls that incircled it shone white in the moonbeams as she stood there, her great eyes looking wistfully out towards the sea, that boomed softly on the rocks far below.

"You will come with me now," Staines (for it was he) said slowly, in a voice the mastery of which was well-nigh irresistible.

"Yes, I will come with you," she repeated mechanically.

"Give me your bag," he said next; and without a word of protest she handed him the bag.

"And I think there is no need for you to see the way we are going," he went on with a short laugh, and, whipping a silk handkerchief from his pocket as he spoke, "we may as well make assurance doubly sure."

So saying, he bound the handkerchief over Muriel's eyes, a process to which she submitted quietly enough, although at his touch she shuddered violently, and put her hand to her throat with a little gasping cry—grasping unconsciously at one of her gleaming rows of pearls.

The violence of her touch broke the string on which the pearls were strung, and two of the shining gems dropped to the ground unnoticed by either Staines or Muriel, whose fingers mechanically closed over the remainder of the row she held.

Staines had taken her other hand, and fixing his baleful eyes upon her, said in a deep, penetrating voice:

"Come!"

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Trembling violently, and white to the very lips, she nevertheless obeyed him as meekly as a child, whilst he guided her stumbling steps away from the hotel, and out into a lane that led from the cliffs and the sea to an inland valley.

The moon shone but faintly now, and dark clouds swept the horizon; a little wind sighed amongst the trees, and the girl shivered again as it swept across her bare neck and arms, and ruffled the soft masses of her hair.

The strange couple proceeded slowly, and in perfect silence, the man with his dark face and gleaming, evil eyes fixed upon Muriel's, the girl, in her low gown, with the shining pearls at her throat, and shining pearls in her hand, blindfolded.

By the time they had left the cliffs and the moaning sea some distance behind them, the moon was totally obscured, and Staines was obliged to grope his way in utter darkness along a lane thickly shaded by trees.

Presently a twinkling light appeared ahead, and in another moment a small house loomed in front of them—a house on the door of which Staines knocked softly.

A bolt inside was instantly thrust back, and still in silence Staines drew Muriel across the threshold, hushing, by a stern glance from his eyes, the exclamation on the lips of the evil-looking woman who admitted them, and leading the girl into a room on the right, he seated her gently upon a big armchair.

Then he laughed softly—a laugh not pleasant to hear.

"I think she and her fortune are likely to be mine now," he said, and laughed again, as with deft fingers he unfastened the handkerchief round her brow.

At that moment he perceived the broken string of pearls she held in her hand, and an oath broke from his lips as he snatched it from her and examined it.

"She must have been dropping these priceless pearls like so much dirt," he exclaimed impatiently, "and I never noticed it! Well, if they're gone, they're gone—thank Heaven, she has others left," and his greedy eyes glanced at the rows still round her neck and the bag in his hand, falling last upon the girl's white, unseeing face.

She sat just where he had placed her, still as a statue, looking straight before her with eyes that plainly saw nothing.

Staines touched her arm lightly, and looked deep into her eyes with his terrible concentrated gaze.

"Wake—now," he said, and in instant obedience to his voice an understanding expression dawned once more in her eyes; she turned her head slowly, the colour suddenly swept over her face and neck in a flood, and a cry broke from her lips.

She shrank back in the chair, snatching her arm from Staines' hand, and an infinite horror was in her eyes.

"You!" she gasped, "you? When did you come? Where am I? Where is Mrs. Carr? What is it? Oh, Alan—Alan—Alan."

The cry rang out through the quiet room, but the only answer to it was a mocking laugh from Staines.

"Alan is far enough away," he said. "Screaming won't help you. You are in a little house I found here when you told me you were going to be at Beachmouth. I thought I should like to be near you."

"*I told you?*" The words broke from her in gasps.

"Yes, you told me. When we met at Mrs. Grant's ball, I—well—I questioned you in my own way, and you answered me. This little house—The Den—is very quiet, very remote. I do not advise you to scream or make a fuss. You are entirely in my power." The evil light in his eyes and smile made Muriel shrink further from his reach, and cower back in the armchair, panting like some poor frightened animal, her fascinated, fearful eyes never leaving his face.

"But why—but why—have you done it?" she moaned. "Let me go! Ah, let me go!"

"No, no, my pretty," he said brutally, "here you are, here you will stay, till you are my wife. We will be married very soon—very soon now—in quite a few days."

The words seemed to revive the girl's paralysed energies, she leapt to her feet, her eyes flaming.

"I will not ever marry you," she cried. "I hate you—I *hate* you! Why have you done this?"

She looked wildly round her, and wrung her hands. Her voice broke suddenly, and then she sobbed:

"How did I come here?"

"You came because, from the first moment I saw you, I intended to make you my wife, and I intended to enjoy your fortune," he laughed softly and wickedly. "I got you here very easily. You are susceptible to another's will, as I found out the first night we met. I have willed you to talk to me, often and often, when you were most unwilling. I have willed you to tell me what you never meant to tell me. And to-night I stood outside your hotel, and willed you with all my might to come to me, and to bring your jewels with you. That's all, and I think possibly your Alan may not care to marry a woman who follows another man in this fashion."

The eyes that watched him grew fixed with horror; the girl's face became the colour of ashes, and with a choking cry she dropped unconscious at Staines' feet.

When she was once more aware of her surroundings she found herself lying on a couch in her own sitting-room in the hotel, and Alan sitting beside her, his eyes riveted on her face, with a look of intense love and anxiety.

She put out her hand feebly and smiled.

"How—did—you—find—me?" she whispered. "When—"

"This morning," was his reply. "My sister missed you last night, and, nearly frantic, wired for me as soon as possible. I was in despair; I thought—forgive me, sweet, but at first I thought you had gone of your own free will.

"Then, when we found you must have left in your evening dress, with no wraps, no luggage, I felt sure you had been taken away; and then, it seems little short of a miracle, I saw, on the grass outside, one of your pearls! I wandered on, and found another, and yet another, till gradually I traced you to a lonely house called "The Den," and there I found you, unconscious, and talking continually of your fear of Bertram Staines. He had gone out, leaving you in his housekeeper's care, confident that we should not trace you; and we might never have found you but for the pearls!"

"And he—he—will he make me follow him again?" Muriel said, with a shudder. "I felt as if I *must* go, it was an irresistible force. Will he——"

"Never again, sweetheart," was the answer, "he is safely in the clutches of the law, and long before he is free again you will be my wife, and, I trust, removed for ever from the baleful influence of the 'Man with the Strange Eyes.'"

L. G. Moberly.

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A Bad Beginning.

Telling of a Rough Road that Led to Happiness.

As the door shut behind the graceful figure of Marian Summers, the stern-visaged woman who had stood with her finger pointing to that door sank into a chair and kept her eyes fixed with a vacant stare on the carpet beneath her feet.

The fire of anger appeared to have been extinguished; the noise had acted on it as water does on flames. Another feeling arose within the not-easily penetrated heart of Miss Eliza Burton, and the vacant stare already mentioned was necessary to keep her eyes free from a suspicious moisture that wanted to surge into them.

"Have I done right?" she asked herself. And she answered vehemently: "Yes, yes, yes!" Yet something within her hoped that Marian would not take the injunction seriously. "She will have a good cry in her room and then she will yield and do as I wish!" continued the elderly spinster. "We shall see!"

She felt a little more cheerful after that reflection, but her cheerfulness was banished by hearing the sound of a cab stopping at the front door of the grand house in which she lived. Was Marian really taking her at her word?

She crept to the window and peered out into the street from behind the curtain. Two small trunks were being hoisted to the roof of the four-wheeler; Marian was saying "Good-bye" to the old housekeeper, who had known her since she was a child, fatherless and motherless, intrusted to the care of Aunt Eliza.

"So she thinks fit to leave me for *him!*" breathed Miss Burton, a hard expression creeping over her thin features. "Be it so! She must pay the penalty; and, if I am not mistaken, Roy Hamilton will also pay the penalty for marrying her and they will be glad to come back and ask for favours!"

Miss Burton was one of those persons who gain a reputation for benevolence by spending money in furtherance of parish work and relief societies and by personally participating in the work; yet, in private life, she could do hard things under the idea that it was "duty"—things which would have justified anyone in setting her down as a stony-hearted woman.

Miss Burton was not the only one of her kind in existence; such people are to be met with constantly. In the name of duty they perform many strange and paradoxical acts.

She conceived it to be her duty to prevent Marian Summers from marrying Roy Hamilton, and she was determined to do it at all costs.

Had she been asked for reasons, she would have said that Roy was not a desirable husband because she objected to her money ultimately going to the son of a man between whom and herself a feud had existed for the past twenty-five years!

As soon as Marian was fairly clear of the house, Miss Burton took another step in her plan of thwarting the marriage; taking up a pen, she scribbled a note to Dr. Hamilton:

My niece and your son wish to marry. I strongly object, and I have done what I can to stop it. I think you will object; then do your best to stop it!

She posted this abrupt epistle herself; she guessed the effect it would have upon the irascible man and she smiled grimly.

Marian Summers went straight to the humble dwelling of a woman who had been her nurse, and was welcomed with open arms. The woman's eyes were also wide open with astonishment; when she learnt what had happened she was wroth.

"Miss Burton ought to have a piece of somebody's mind!" she cried angrily. "She's an old——"

Marian placed her hand over Mrs. Porter's mouth in time to stifle the uncomplimentary epithet. When the hand was removed, Mrs. Porter vented her feelings by exclaiming: "So she is!" and leaving Marian to guess what was meant.

"If you can give me a room," said Marian, "I can earn enough to keep myself by painting lantern slides and plates and all that. I wasn't trained to do anything for a living, but I like painting and I used to do the slides for Aunt Eliza's parish work. And I have a little money!"

"The young gentleman won't let you do that for long, Miss Marian! He'll marry you!"

"Oh, not yet!"—Marian blushed divinely. "He must make headway in his profession first!"

But Mrs. Porter was right. As soon as Roy Hamilton knew what had taken place, he called at Mrs. Porter's and pressed his suit with such vehemence that Marian consented.

"I won't say one word against your wicked old aunt!" he said contradictorily in answer to Marian's exhortations. "Still, she is—— Oh, very well, my pet. I'll just forget her! But I feel so cross that——"

Once more Marian interrupted his outburst and he cooled down under the influence of a loving caress. He grew quite calm and happy as he wended his way homewards, unconscious of the bomb that was being prepared for him there.

"It has come to my knowledge that you are paying court to Miss Marian Summers," remarked his father abruptly. "That must cease!"

In the circumstances their peremptory tone was the worst which the doctor could have adopted. Coming on the top of the other injustice, it made Roy flare up like a flash-light.

"I shall not!" he declared decisively. "Who has been at work?"

"I am informed by Miss Burton, who stands in the position of guardian to Miss Summers," retorted his father unwarily. "She objects; so do I!"

"I object to both your objections!" said Roy calmly. He restrained his rising temper. "So does Marian! We shall be married as soon as the banns are published the third time!"

Neither of the two men could remember exactly what passed; Roy could not keep his wrath under control, despite his intention to remain calm; bitter words were exchanged, and they parted.

"Our married life will begin in storms, dear!" said Roy that evening, when he called to relate what had passed. "But we shall be all the happier! A bad beginning makes a good ending, although I am not sure that it is a bad beginning!"

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Marian tried to dissuade him and said they must part; the breach with his father meant blighting his chances of becoming a barrister, and he must set to work to earn a sustenance for himself and her in some other direction. Yet, when he asked her point blank if she wished them to part, the tears rose to her eyes and she had again to yield to his intreaties.

Thus, under these unfavourable auspices, they were married quietly and settled down to make each other happy in humble lodgings which they had poorly, but comfortably, furnished with the money they jointly possessed.

And they were happy. Roy had secured a berth in a solicitor's office at a salary which, if very modest, was sufficient for their immediate necessities, and (like everybody else) they hoped for more in course of time. They occasionally thought with regret of the estrangement from their nearest relations, but they by no means regretted the step they had taken.

For the first few months, however, both the young people hoped that the elders might relent and hold out some peace-offering. Miss Burton's name appeared with rather monotonous regularity in subscription lists and as one of the organisers of this or that entertainment, while Dr. Hamilton's doings remained a secret.

He had not made any special mark in the medical profession, although he had worked steadily and earnestly on certain lines. He had always been rather vexed that the register contained the name of another Dr. Hamilton who had attracted some attention; for strangers sometimes mistook Roy's father for the other man, and it is not pleasant, when you are accosted as a celebrity, to be compelled to own that you are not.!

Four years passed away. They were happy years, although not void of trouble; but hitherto the troubles had been such as to draw the young couple closer together and increase the sweetness of life. But the dark side was now becoming darker, and Marian was conscious of a grief that ate into her heart slowly but surely.

The expectations of "getting on" had not been fulfilled. Roy had been compelled to leave his original situation in consequence of changes in the firm. A relative had taken a position and there was no scope for Roy. He had obtained another post, but this was not quite so good, and the prospects of promotion were very hazy. Roy tried occasionally for a better berth, but he was unlucky. There seemed to be so many men on the same mission!

Marian saw that the hard work of the office, seated on a stool and with very little recreation, was telling on Roy's health; and she had a secret feeling that he grieved at having to wear threadbare clothes instead of being able to dress well. The third-rate tailoring, too, was a shock to his sensitive nature; he had been so particular about the fit of his garments.

Her own health remained good, but Roy was clearly in need of change and more nourishing food. Marian racked her brain for some way to procure the money to give Roy what he wanted, and the thought had crossed her mind of sinking her dignity and appealing to Aunt Eliza. She dismssed this idea, however; she knew that Roy would be mortally offended.

She had once hinted to Roy that it would be a good idea for her to do some slide painting, to give her occupation, but he had misinterpreted the suggestion.

"I am sorry, dearest," he said tenderly, "that I cannot give you all that I should like you to have, and if you feel that you must have more, then I will not object to your earning the extra money which I cannot!"

"Oh, no, Roy! It isn't that, dear, indeed it isn't!" she cried, her heart stabbed by these sorrowfully-spoken words, "I wouldn't paint them for anything! I don't want the money"—she was going to add "for myself," but she stopped. It would have hurt him just as much to have told him the truth!

But there came a time when she resolved to do it and say nothing about it. She could tell him that she could do with less for the housekeeping. And, later, if he learnt what she was doing, she would be able to show him her hoardings, the result of her work, and they would take a holiday, he would have better clothes, and they would be as happy as in the first year of married life.

"He will let me go on with the painting then!" she told herself. "And it may be the commencent of better times! He said that a bad beginning made a good ending; that hasn't come about yet, but it may!"

She went to a shop in the City noted for its slides; they were

"Marian, what is it, child? Are you *really* blind?"

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very busy in that line and glad of a fresh worker, so they gave her a chance. The artistic finish which she gave to the slides pleased the heads of the firm and they gave her regular employment at home.

The pay seemed rather poor, but many other women did the same thing for a living, and Marian did not complain. She hugged her secret and worked steadily; the knowledge that she was earning made her more joyous and Roy was pleased as well as surprised.

"I am glad to see you so merry, dear!" he told her one evening, on returning from the office. "I have been worrying about you! I fancied that you were fretting!"

"Then you mustn't harbour such foolish fancies any more!" she cried gaily. "If you come home with so sad a look as you have done lately, you will make me worry! I suppose it amounts to this; you have been thinking that I was dissatisfied, and I was feeling the same about you!"

Then they both laughed merrily and gave themselves up to the pleasure of the society of the other, and drove away the shadows for the time being.

"I am perplexed to understand how it is that you are managing with less money, Marian!" he said, a week or so later. "Now——"

"It isn't your business to trouble about the household management, you have to leave it to me. Experience does a great deal!" she replied with a laugh.

He was forced to be satisfied. Another week passed, and he made a remark which caused her to place her hand to her side, as if in pain. It confirmed a fear which had possessed her lately.

"Your eyes look weak, dear! You should bathe them with something. I'll look it up for you among my notes! My father told me the name of the lotion, but I can't remember it!"

She promised him that she would get some of the lotion and bathe her eyes night and morning; she kept her promise, for she knew that her sight was less keen, and she hoped that it might be a mere passing weakness, but her hopes were not realised.

"It is the sight; it is really failing!" she murmured in alarm. "I must go to the hospital; I cannot afford to pay an oculist!"

The sight, constitutionally weak, had been strained by the work of slide painting, and glaucoma, the dreaded forerunner of blindness, had attacked her eyes.

She went to the opthalmic hospital, and they told her that nothing much could be done; she must wait till they became very much worse, and then they would perform an operation. The result of that treatment was uncertain, but it was all that could be done. In the meantime she must keep her eyes closed as much as possible.

On hearing this terrible verdict she was constrained to tell Roy what she had done.

"Don't be angry with me, Roy, dear!" she pleaded, her poor eyes filled with tears. "It was my love for you that prompted me to do it!"

"I know it, Marian!" he replied gently as he stooped and kissed her lovingly. "We must hope for the best!"

How could he chide her? She had sacrificed herself for the love of him! He railed against the fate that made him so helpless to take her out of this poverty and raise her to the position to which she had been educated; he railed against his father and Miss Burton; but it was all useless, and, strong man as he was, he threw himself in a chair in the other room and wept with vexation.

As a rule, glaucoma takes time to develop, but Marian's case was an exception. The disease developed rapidly. There is no visible sign of the malady; the eyes look well to others, but the patient finds the sight becoming hazy, then a fog appears to be hanging before them, and all is grey. The sight is gone!

Marian's eyes were in the hazy stage, when white paper sometimes seems pinkish. The haze was increasing and reading was impossible for more than a few minutes, and even then only with great strain. In a week from the visit to the hospital she was unable to read, and could scarcely grope her way about. The disease was not ripe enough for the operation, they told her, and she had to go home and wait in mental anguish.

She was lying on the couch when a knock at the door aroused her from her unpleasant meditations.

"If you please, Mrs. Hamilton," said the kindly landlady, "there's a boy downstairs from the City, and he says that them slides is wanted, and the customer is in a fine way, and the firm wants an explanation of the shameful way you've served 'em!"

It was not clear from the landlady's outpouring whether it was the heads of the firm or the slides which had been treated shamefully. Marian started up in alarm.

"Oh, dear!" she groaned. "I had quite forgotten them! I remember that I had a special set to do, and this trouble drove it clean out of my mind! Whatever shall I do?"

The landlady suggested the simple device of returning the slides untouched, with a message to the effect that she had been ill; but Marian recollected that the slides were for a particular customer, who gave the firm a lot of work, and this might lead to the total loss of this customer. The firm had been kind to her, and she felt that some explanation was really due to them.

"I'll go to the firm and explain!" she declared. "I can get them to put me in a 'bus when I come out, and I can ride right to this corner. I'll go with the boy now!"

Mrs. Mansell protested vigorously, but Marian was firm. She went with the astonished lad, who looked at her blue glasses with curiosity, but piloted her gently down the street and into the omnibus.

"It's a lady as wants 'em, ma'am," said the boy in response to Marian's question. "She was in a hawful temper about it, and I wouldn't ha' been in the guv'ner's boots for a sovereign! She asked me how long I'd be coming to you, and said as she would be at the shop again by the time I got back!"

"Then perhaps I can mollify her and so help your master," remarked Marian. The boy did not comprehend the term "mollify," but he said nothing. "I must bear the blame," continued Marian, "as it is my fault—or my misfortune!"

Marian arrived at the shop before the return of the irate customer. The proprietor was aghast at the immensity of his trouble when he found that the slides were untouched.

"Let me stop and explain to her!" said Marian. "I can sit here, and you can tell me when she comes, as I can't see her!"

"I am extremely sorry for you!" murmured the proprietor. "I fancy you won't want me to tell you when she comes in; you'll soon know she's here!"

Marian heard the swing doors open shortly afterwards, and she waited for a torrent of abuse, addressed to the proprietor, but the new-comer said nothing, and Marian concluded that this was another customer. She heard some low talk, and then someone approached her, and the head of the firm said:

"Mrs. Hamilton, this is the lady for whom the slides were intended. I have told her that you would explain!"

"I am very sorry, madam!" began Marian, rather lamely. "I was unfortunately attacked by——" She could not go on; it was too painful to speak of her misfortune, and she broke down. She tried to get a glimpse of the woman before her, but in vain.

There was a dead silence. The customer coughed, as if to clear some obstruction from her throat.

"Marian!" said a voice, the sound of which set her brain in a whirl. "Marian, what is it, child? Are you *really* blind?" The last dread word was uttered in a horrified tone.

"Aunt Eliza!" gasped Marian, stretching her hands in front of her.

"Yes, child!" came the reply, and—oh, how strangely gentle it was! And the name "Marian" ended with a sound that was suspiciously like a sob.

"I'm going into your private room!" declared Miss Burton to the master, and she marched Marian to the back of the

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shop. "Now, sit down there, Marian, and tell me all—all!"

So Marian told her all, sobbing the while; and Miss Burton took her home in a cab and went off in that same cab for a clever man who had made that complaint a special study.

Miss Burton was gone some time. Marian lay still, hardly able to comprehend the swift course of events. What a strange meeting with Aunt Eliza, after more than four years! And how completely changed was that worthy relative's manner towards her! It was the power of misfortune which had worked this miracle, so misfortune is likely to bring some compensating advantages, and it is right that it should!

Roy would be home soon, and how surprised he would be! But Aunt Eliza returned first, accompanied by the medical gentleman.

"Now James!" she said authoritatively. "Here she is! What can you do for her?"

The stranger pulled down the blind, lighted the lamp, and did what he could to transform the apartment into a dark room, so that he could use the ophthalmoscope and examine Marian's eyes.

"H'm! Not so bad!" he said, and Marian fancied that he heaved a sigh of relief. "You want some special glasses, my dear, which I will have made for you, and in a month or so your sight will be good enough for you to get about and read a little. It will come back again in time. Don't upset yourself about what the other men told you, they are still in the dark about this disease, but I have gone farther than they, and I'll cure you without an operation! But, mind, no more slide painting! Eh, Eliza?"

Marian was too overjoyed to notice the familiar style of speech. She stammered out her thanks to both of them, but the medical gentleman cut her short, though not unkindly.

"Tut, tut! It's a pleasure to do something for a woman who will do so much for the man she loves. You are a model wife, my dear! Ah, if I had known!"

"If *we* had known, James!" interposed Aunt Eliza sharply. "I take my share of the blame, mind!"

"Yes, yes! But we'll soon make it all up!"

Marian was vaguely wondering what it all meant when a quick step was heard on the stairs. The stranger sprang up from his chair. Roy entered the room hurriedly.

"Marian, how are they to-day? I——"

He stopped in amazement, his arms dropped by his side, and his faltering lips framed the word, "Father!"

"Yes, Roy, your father—come to ask forgiveness for the wrong he did your wife four years ago, when he thought that she was not a worthy helpmeet for you! But I can at least do her some good, make some reparation! I have done something in those four years!"

"Are you the Dr. Hamilton who has made discoveries in eye diseases? I thought it was the other man!" gasped Roy.

Then father and son stepped towards each other and grasped hands.

Aunt Eliza placed her arm round Marian's waist.

"It was as much my fault as anyone's," she said weeping softly. "Oh, I am so sorry! James and I were cousins, and we might have been—— Ah, me! I was too hot-tempered and we fell out, and the feud lasted till this very day, when I went to him and asked his help for my niece and his daughter-in-law!"

"The good ending has come, Marian!" cried Roy.

F. Brewster.

"Do you see anything coming our way?" asked the morning star of a companion. "Not yet," was the reply, "but I see a servant below there who is about to light her kitchen fire with paraffin oil."

"I don't see why I can't keep my husband at home," said a distressed-looking little woman. "Why don't you try to make home attractive for him?" "I have. I have taken up the drawing-room carpet, sprinkled sawdust on the floor, and put a beer-keg in the room, but, somehow or other, it doesn't seem to make any difference."

CONVINCING SIGNS.

Telling of How a Girl Knew She was Going to Have a Proposal.

They happened to meet in a large draper's shop the other day, and they had a conversation which sent one of them away with floods of light illuminating her soul.

She was one of those girls who are adored by old ladies and constantly invited to tea by them to meet bachelor sons, and who count all the admirers they ever had on the fingers of one hand.

The other—well, she was different. She was one of those maddening creatures who are always mysteriously supplied with roses and bonbons, and escorted everywhere, in spite of the fact that all the other girls are agreed that "there is absolutely nothing in her."

The latter young woman was meditating over some silks when the other one greeted her.

"I suppose you are trying to decide between the old rose and the pale green?" she said.

"Well, no," replied the other girl frankly. "You see, I am getting my wedding things, and I think I'll have both." Then she looked down to blush and up to see the effect of her words.

"Is it possible? I——"

"Yes, dear, and you can't imagine how nervous I am."

"Well, do tell me how he——" began the other girl dreamily.

"Proposed? Oh, but he hasn't done it yet!"

"But I thought that you——"

"Were selecting a trousseau? So I am, goosie. You see, it is like this. He will call at eight this evening, and by nine we shall be formally engaged."

"But how do you know?" helplessly asked the other girl.

"When a man asks you in an anxious tone if you think a married man ought to give up his club, you may know that his intentions are serious, and when he follows it up a few days later by asking you if you don't think a man has a right to smoke all over his own house it is high time to decide when the wedding shall be."

"My goodness!"

"Yes, but that wasn't what convinced me."

"Oh, do tell me about it."

"No, it was simply this; I met him in the street yesterday, and he was reading a paper so intently that he didn't even see me until I spoke. Then he blushed violently, and in great confusion thrust his paper into his overcoat pocket. Well, he went home with me, and—now, you must never tell this as long as you live."

"I never, never will."

"Well, I was so curious to see what he had been reading that confused him, so that I made an excuse to slip out into the hall, where his coat was hanging, and take the paper out of his pocket, and what do you think it was?"

"Oh, I can't imagine."

"It was a ladies' paper, and the article that he had been reading was one which dealt with 'The Choice of a Home.' Now, do you see why I am selecting my trousseau?" she asked triumphantly.

"Yes, I do," meekly replied the other girl.

P. W. Lyon.

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODE ONE.

The Trap is Baited.

"My Dear Olive,—*Will you join our house party this week-end? We have several other nice people coming down, and I am sure you will like them all. The lawn is in perfect condition, so bring your favourite racquet with you. If it should rain, we shall have to fall back on music, or ping-pong, and as Mr. Dean Fisher, the famous Bridge player, will be here, we can count upon being taught the most fascinating game of the age. In any case, we will take care that you enjoy yourself immensely. Do come, there's a dear, for old time's sake. There is a train from Euston at 4.35 on Friday afternoon, and Harry will meet you at this end. All love.—Your affectionate school-friend,* "Annabel Vernon."

"How lovely!" was my mental exclamation, after reading the above letter. "I'm longing for a glimpse of country life again, and nothing could please me better than to go down to Hertfordshire just now. I haven't played tennis for two years, but I shall soon get into practice again. But I wonder what made Annabel remember me just now, after losing touch with me for such a long time?"

It certainly was odd, but all the more pleasant on that account, that Annabel should renew our old friendship in this unconventional manner, and I determined to accept the invitation in as unquestioning a spirit as it had been given. To this end I immediately began my preparations, and for the next few days was happily occupied in buying various dainty but inexpensive additions to my wardrobe, for I naturally wanted to do justice to Annabel's good nature.

My choice was limited to half-mourning tints, for it was not more than six months since I had lost my only remaining near relative, the aunt with whom I had lived nearly three years, and I had no wish to show disrespect to the memory of so good a friend as she had been to me. Still, I had ample reason to be satisfied with what I thought it necessary to take down to Vernon Towers for a week-end visit, and I began my journey in the happy consciousness of being able to do credit to both my hostess and myself.

True to promise, Mr. Vernon met me at the station, and although I had never seen him before, he and I were soon chatting as merrily together as if we had known each other for ages.

As the trap turned smartly into the drive leading up to Vernon Towers, Annabel came flying to meet us, and she greeted me so rapturously that I felt less lonely than I had felt for many a long month.

"You darling!" she exclaimed, after kissing me affectionately on both cheeks. "It was so good of you to come!"

"No, the goodness was on your side. I've been very lonely, and been hardly anywhere since—since——"

"Yes, yes, I know. But we won't talk of your troubles now. You've come here to enjoy yourself. My word, how lovely you look! And what a smart frock you have on! You make me feel a regular dowdy little country mouse."

Rattling on thus inconsequently, Mrs. Vernon, herself a picture of dainty grace, led the way to a delightful room which awaited my occupation.

"There, now," she smiled. "Make yourself absolutely at home. If there is anything lacking for your comfort, don't hesitate to order it at once. You'll excuse me now, won't you, dear? I'm off to dress for dinner, and you have nice time to do the same. I'll send you a cup of tea, and will see you as soon as you come downstairs."

A second later, and my friend had hurried away to her own dressing-room, leaving me full of pleasurable anticipation concerning the enjoyment in store for me.

My dinner dress was very becoming to my fair hair and delicate complexion. It was also exceedingly smart, there being nothing about it to betray the fact that I had made it myself, and as I was known to have recently lost a relative, it would not occur to anybody that I would still have chosen black for economy's sake. To tell the truth, the whole extent of my fortune was but one hundred and fifty pounds a year, although by dint of careful management, I got as much effect out of it as some women would have got out of three times that amount.

It saves a tremendous lot when you can make and trim your own hats and dresses, as I was very fond of doing, and it was no part of my plan in life to tell everybody that my invariably stylish appearance owed nothing to either milliners or dressmakers.

'H'm! Peter Robinson, or Marshall and Snelgrove?" queried Annabel, looking very critically at me when we met in the drawing-room just after the first dinner bell had sent forth its warning peal.

"Neither," was my laughing response. "I prefer to be more exclusive."

"Lucky girl! I wish I could afford to stipulate for exclusive models. It takes me all my time to make my allowance spin out from one quarter to another."

I was about to rectify the wrong impression which my remark had apparently created, but lost my opportunity, for some of the other guests put in an appearance, and I was promptly introduced to them.

"Mrs. Grainger, here is the school-friend I told you about. Olive, this is Mrs. Grainger, a near neighbour of ours. Mr. Taskot, come over here, and let me introduce you to Miss Beresford. You ought to get on very well together, as you are both ardent tennis players. Mr. Fisher, I don't think I will give you the pleasure of an introduction."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Vernon," protested Mr. Fisher, a spruce little man of about five-and-forty. "I shall be disconsolate if you leave me out of the running altogether. Pray, what have I done to earn banishment from Paradise?"

"You promised to give me a lesson in Bridge this afternoon, and you failed to keep your promise."

"That was my fault," interposed Mrs. Grainger. "We needed a fourth, and I wouldn't let him off till we finished. But we can do without him to-morrow, for Miss Beresford can take his place."

"She'll beat you all into fits. Nobody at school ever stood a chance against her."

It was Mrs. Vernon who volunteered this information, and I qualified it by saying, "I haven't touched a racquet for ages, so I shall be a perfect novice at the game. In fact, I don't think I shall venture to play yet awhile."

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"What a pity! I quite thought tennis would be your favourite amusement. Never mind, you'll enjoy Bridge all the more. Ah, there goes the second dinner bell."

EPISODE TWO.

I Enter the Trap.

THE dinner was a merry function, and I could not help admiring the ease and ability with which Annabel did the honours of the house. The menu had been carefully thought out, the dinner itself was beautifully cooked and immaculately served, and the table decorations evidenced much artistic taste.

Looking at Harry Vernon, I thought him a most lucky individual to have secured such a clever little wife, even as I thought her most fortunate in having such a handsome, good-natured husband, and such a beautiful home, apparently accompanied by any amount of money.

The only thing that jarred upon me at all was Annabel's addiction to slang, but, where everything else was so faultless, it would have been unkind to lay too much stress upon a habit that was probably due to mere exuberance of spirits.

Besides, it would have been ungrateful to see anything wrong in the old friend who had, after years of silence, no sooner remembered my existence than she had made plans for my happiness.

When one is determined to make the best of everything, it is easy to enjoy the gifts of the gods. But if a girl who has hitherto had hardly a glimpse of Society finds herself suddenly exalted to be the centre of an admiring group of devotees, and to whom libations of compliments, admiration, and deference are poured out unstintedly, it is not surprising that she is slightly carried away by excess of delight.

It was so with me.

I had occupied a subordinate position all my life, and although my aunt had been almost a mother to me, she had naturally been first in importance in all things at home, and no one had served her more willingly than myself. After her death, I had led a quiet life, principally because my lot was cast amongst people who had neither the money nor the opportunity to be very gay. Besides, the annuity which enabled us to live in much greater luxury than any of our neighbours was no longer in existence, and the little fortune that was bequeathed to me had been saved by my aunt out of her surplus income.

Thus it was that the new atmosphere in which I moved was doubly delightful to me, and as the bachelors of the party were as deferential as if I had been some great heiress, nothing was wanting to complete my enjoyment.

I shall never forget that first evening at Vernon Towers. Neither shall I forget the awakening which followed all too soon.

After coffee, Mr. Vernon suggested that somebody should sing, and Annabel immediately pressed me to do so.

"*I* sing!" was my amused exclamation. "Why, I couldn't to save my life! Don't you remember, Annabel, how you all used to laugh at me whenever I raised my voice?"

"H'm! Perhaps I do. But that is years ago, and I daresay you have taken lessons since then."

"Indeed I haven't! What use would it have been to waste time on a voice like mine?"

"Well, that's a pity, for nobody else seems given to music. I'm a real stupid at it myself. What shall we do to pass the evening away?"

"I'll give you the lesson in Bridge which some of you profess to want," replied Mr. Dean Fisher, and his offer was received with a chorus of acclamation by all save myself, who said ruefully: "I'm afraid it is no use counting me even as a pupil, for I have never handled cards in my life, and know nothing whatever about them."

"You poor dear!" exclaimed Annabel. "What a lot of pleasure you have missed! But you shall soon make up for lost time, and I'll give you no end of wrinkles."

"All the same, I think you had better leave me out, for I shall only spoil fun for other people."

"Very well, dear, please yourself. You shall be looker-on for one evening."

"Then you and I and one other will have to be 'lookers-on' also," remarked Harry Vernon.

"Yes, we must have Miss Beresford, if we are to make up two sets," agreed Mr. Fisher, "unless you care to play a three-cornered game."

"Of course. There are only seven of us without Olive. Come, dear, that settles it, doesn't it? You wouldn't like to spoil sport for the lot of us, would you?"

When Annabel put it like that, I felt that it would be extremely unkind to refuse, so, though I feared lest I should look ridiculous by reason of my ignorance, I consented to sit down and go through the rudiments of Bridge, prior to playing as a Mr. Bainbrig's partner. This gentleman did not arrive till dinner was over, and I gathered that he and his sister, who came with him, had recently taken a house within a mile of the Towers.

They were both well on to forty, Miss Bainbrig being rather younger than her brother. But they were both very handsome, and were still in the first pleasurable flush of succeeding to a big inheritance, which had been none the less welcome because it was unexpected. In fact, everybody here, except myself, seemed to be rich, and I could not help wishing that I was rich too, for I had not then quite realised how much a person has to be thankful for who can count upon a certain £150 per annum.

"I hear you haven't played cards before," observed Miss Bainbrig, "so I shall have somebody to keep me company, if I play as badly as usual."

"Don't you know anything about Bridge either?" I asked, and received for answer: "My dear young lady, I never had time to think of mere amusement until I was suddenly transformed from a poor governess into an heiress. That is where you have the advantage of me. You have always been well off, and heiress-ship sits easily upon you in consequence."

"You surely don't imagine——"

"Olive," interrupted Annabel, "you are wasting everybody's time. Do sit down."

Thus admonished, I took my seat at the table, and tried my hardest to understand all I was told, without appearing stupid.

"We'll just have a preliminary canter, by way of showing Miss Bainbrig and Miss Beresford how to handle the cards, and then we will have a rubber," quoth Mr. Fisher, sitting down as Miss Bainbrig's partner.

Very much interested, we spent a quarter of an hour in grasping the elementaries of card playing, and Mr. Dean Fisher was good enough to say that both Miss Bainbrig and I were likely to prove extraordinarily apt pupils.

"I think we may just as well shape our first game

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now," he said smilingly. "Practice is much the best way of teaching anything. What shall the points be?"

"The points?" I asked, feeling very dense, but at the same time being resolved to learn all there was to learn, so that when I began to try a real game, I might be more on a footing with those who could already boast a knowledge of Bridge.

"Well, you see, Miss Beresford," I was told, "one must play for at least a trifle, however small. Otherwise there is not sufficient stimulus to do your best. But the stakes shall be merely nominal. What do you say to a penny a point?"

Even I, with my small margin for extravagances, thought there could be little harm in this, and we all agreed without hesitation, although I did wonder just for a second what my dear aunt would have thought, if she could have seen me playing for money. "Still," I reflected, "to lose or win a penny on a game cannot amount to more than a few coppers either way during the course of an evening, and now that I intend to go out more than I have done before, it will be useful for me to have learnt the great Society accomplishment."

"I will deal, choose trumps, and play Dummy, and will explain my methods as I go on," said Mr. Fisher, who was evidently anxious to make his lessons thorough. "Then the ladies will know what to do when their turn for dealing comes."

Mr. Bainbrig had no objection, and we began.

"Hearts are trumps," said the dealer. "Play your lead, Miss Beresford. That's right. You should draw the ace with that card. Now then, Miss Bainbrig, turn your cards up."

All Miss Bainbrig's cards were now exposed on the table, and it seemed funny that she should not be allowed to play one of them herself, but await her partner's direction each time. I was relieved to see that 'Dummy,' as the exposed cards were called, only had two trumps, the knave and the ten, for I was already keenly excited at the idea of possibly proving as skilful or as lucky as my antagonists.

It transpired presently that Mr. Fisher held the three other face cards of the trump suit, thus giving him and his partner all the five honours. But Mr. Bainbrig and I won the odd trick, and scored eight below the Bridge, and in the next hand we were luckier still, for, diamonds being chosen as trumps by me, we won four tricks, and scored twenty-four below the Bridge.

"Thirty-two," counted Mr. Fisher. "That's one game to you."

I could hardly contain my delight at this announcement, and Mr. Bainbrig, who was almost as great a novice as we two lady pupils, beamed just as happily as I did.

Perhaps we should not have been quite so elated if we had fully grasped the fact that Mr. Fisher having scored twelve above the Bridge for having no trumps, and his partner forty-eight, because the four trumps she had were all honours, they were in infinitely better case than the players who had won the game.

The next game was won right off by our opponents, who scored forty above the Bridge for Grand Slam, and, as hearts were again trumps, they made fifty-six below the Bridge, our score being absolutely *nil*.

"That's one game each—very good indeed," smiled Mr. Fisher. "Now for the conquering game."

Perhaps Mr. Bainbrig made a clever calculation, and perhaps he imagined himself to be extra cautious. Anyhow, when he dealt, he declared *sans atout*, or "no trumps," and we won the game with one trick, scoring twelve plus a hundred for winning the rubber; while our opponents marked thirty for three aces in Mr. Fisher's hand.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Miss Beresford, the rubber is yours, and I must actually acknowledge you my victor. Don't tell me that you knew nothing about cards."

EPISODE THREE.

A Morning Meeting.

We played two or three more rubbers, and as my partner and I always seemed to be getting the best of it, I was as eager to continue playing as anybody else. Rendered cautious, Miss Bainbrig almost invariably chose black trumps, which counted much less than red ones. But Mr. Fisher seemed to become suddenly imbued with a mania for "doubling," while the games followed quickly upon each other's heels.

"You are a rubber to the good," he said to me, after we had been playing some hours. "But I don't quite know how we stand. I'll reckon up the score above the Bridge afterwards. It's such a bother to stop and do it now."

"But we've won the most games, haven't we?" I asked eagerly, and was both proud and pleased when he answered ruefully: "Oh, yes, you have beaten us in that respect. Miss Bainbrig, I can't understand how it is we've been so unlucky."

"Neither can I," was the rather cross response. "I thought you were a most wonderful player."

"Well, of course," was the deprecating answer, "luck goes a long way, and perhaps it will change for us to-morrow. I'm sure our opponents will give us our revenge."

"Yes, to-morrow," I said. "To-morrow is Saturday. And on Monday I should like to have still another lesson."

"Very well then," agreed Mr. Bainbrig, "we will say to-morrow. There is nothing to prevent us from coming to-morrow evening, is there, Edith?"

"No, I think not," replied Miss Bainbrig. "We can come, and we shall get to know exactly how many pennies we have won or lost to-night."

"Yes, I'll have the scoring block added up by then. Mind you bring a few pennies with you, so that we may square accounts."

We all laughed merrily at this, and I added to the fun by pretending that I meant to buy something very extravagant with my pennies.

I had been too much engrossed in what was going on at our table to notice how the others were amusing themselves. But I gathered afterwards that Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had been opponents, and that they had been playing for shilling points. Mrs. Grainger and Mr. Taskot owned to being comparative novices at Bridge, and I thought it very nice of the Vernons to spend their time teaching a game of which they were so fond, when they might just as well have invited some clever people to amuse themselves with.

On the Saturday morning I rose more languidly than usual, for late hours were quite an innovation with me, and the excitement of the previous evening had helped to fatigue me. But I no sooner looked out of my window at the lovely scenery which surrounded Vernon Towers than my languor vanished like magic, and I hastened my toilet, so that I might enjoy a brisk walk in the fresh air before breakfast.

I made my way to a woody eminence about half a mile from the Towers, and was revelling in the joy of gathering

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a huge handful of fragrant bluebells, when I heard advancing footsteps, and, looking up from my pleasant occupation, I saw Mr. Taskot approaching me.

"By Jove, this is lucky!" he exclaimed. "I never expected to find you out of doors at this time of day. How do you feel after last night's dissipation?"

"Dissipation?" I laughed. "It surely isn't dissipation to learn a game of cards?"

"No, of course not," was the prompt admission. "You ladies retired quite early."

"Much later than I usually do, though. I am generally in bed by ten or half-past."

"Then you must live in Sleepy Hollow when you are at home, and I pity you."

At this remark I felt myself colour hotly, for I fancied it was intended as a kind of hint that Mr. Taskot knew all about my modest circumstances, and my new surroundings had already imbued me with a desire to appear quite as smart as my fresh associates.

"It all depends upon what you call 'Sleepy Hollow,'" I retorted. "Personally, I don't think it matters which end of the day you choose for enjoyment, so long as you get it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Beresford. I really meant to hint my envy of the idyllic life you lead."

"How do you know that my life is idyllic?"

"The fact is patent to the most simple observer. You are as fresh as a mountain daisy, and as sweet as one of those bluebells."

At this highly-exaggerated compliment I drew myself up to my most imposing height, and coldly bade Mr. Taskot "good morning." His familiarity jarred upon me, and I had an instinctive feeling that it had its origin in something that had conduced to lessen the respect which I considered to be my due, and which had hitherto always been conceded to me by any men with whom I was acquainted.

Apparently realising that I meant to maintain my dignity, Mr. Taskot hastened to apologise, and his profuse explanations succeeded in removing the unpleasant impression he had created.

"The fact is," he said, as we walked slowly back towards the house together—"the fact is, Miss Beresford, I'm the most awful ass imaginable. I always say the most tactless things one could think of, and I've the silliest way of forgetting that ladies don't like to be talked to as if they were dairy-maids."

"You find yourself so used to paying flattery to dairy-maids that you forget when you are talking to a lady? Is that what you mean to imply?"

"Miss Beresford, I had a suspicion yesterday that I was a very slow person, compared with you. I am sure of it to-day."

"I don't think I follow you."

"Oh, it's easy enough. You look as amiable as a Derby winner. But you can sting like a wasp when you like."

"Thank you. I'm afraid I do not appreciate the compliment."

"All the same, it is a compliment. if you will only accept it in the spirit in which it is offered. Let me try again to show you what I mean. I started by saying that I was slow, compared with you. You grant that much?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, then, I will prove it. When I came down here yesterday morning, I bragged of being a first-rate tennis player and a crack Bridge player, whereas I'm a very poor hand at both. You, on the other hand, played the dark horse, and vowed that you had never handled a card in your life. Result—you win a few rubbers, and I lose a pot of money after you imagine we have all shut up for the night."

"You lost a lot of money?"

"Heaps."

"But why risk it? Unless you don't mind losing?"

"If you come down to a country house where Bridge is the ruling deity, how are you to help yourself? Besides, a novice is always fool enough to think his luck will come uppermost directly, and I suppose I'm like all the rest in believing that when I tackle the cards this forenoon I shall leave Vernon hopelessly in the shade. Besides, I don't mind losing a pony or two."

By this time we had reached the house, and as it was close upon breakfast time, I hurried up to my own room, to freshen my toilet before going to the dining-room. I put my blue-bells in water, but felt somehow that I had been cheated of my full enjoyment in bringing them.

What was there in Mr. Taskot that jarred upon me every time he spoke? I gave him credit for not wanting to be anything but courteous and complimentary to me. And I certainly had no reason to suppose that the Vernons would invite an undesirable guest to their house. Nevertheless, his mode of expressing himself did not strike me as infallibly well-bred, and many of his phrases were, as he himself owned, quite out of place when speaking with a lady.

"I'll avoid another early morning encounter with Mr. Taskot," I told myself. "It will not do to create the impression that I am going out of my way to cultivate the society of the bachelor visitors at the Towers. Dear me, it's pouring with rain! What a blessing I got in before it came on."

At breakfast everybody lamented the sudden change in the weather, which would effectually prevent an adjournment to the tennis lawn, but there was no danger of our being troubled with *ennui*, for Annabel suggested that Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Vernon, Mr. Fisher, and I should play a rubber.

"No, I'll give place to Taskot," was Harry's magnanimous concession. "I have a few things to attend to, and if I don't turn up at lunch, I shall see you all then."

"Very well, then, I'll be Miss Beresford's partner," agreed Mr. Taskot. "But do you think the ladies will like to go shilling points?"

"No," drawled Mr. Fisher. "Miss Beresford played penny points last night, and I'm going to take my revenge on the same terms."

I was glad to hear this, for though I was eager to continue my lessons in Bridge, I would not risk losing more than a few coppers. At least, that was my idea, and so long as my partner and I won a fair proportion of games, I felt not the slightest premonition of coming mischief, although the persistent rain formed the excuse for spending nearly the whole day at the card-tables.

In the evening the Bainbrigs returned, and the programme of last night was practically repeated. I made rapid strides in knowledge, and the more insight I had in the game, the more fascinated did I become with it, and I felt positively sorry when the Bainbrigs rose to take their departure, after playing for a few hours against Mr. and Mrs. Vernon.

"Now, then, Mr. Fisher, how do we stand?" inquired Mr. Bainbrig. "We want to square up before we go home."

In the light of after knowledge, I feel convinced that Mr. Fisher, to whom Annabel

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handed her scoring block for final addition, wilfully delayed adding up the honours scores, knowing very well that none of the people to whom he professed to be giving a few good-natured lessons would have gone on playing if they had guessed how matters really stood at the beginning. Indeed, even Miss Bainbrig, who had spoken so complacently of the joys of heiress-ship, looked astounded when she received a little slip of paper, on which her indebtedness to her various opponents was marked.

But neither she nor her brother kept my attention long just then, for Annabel beckoned to me to join her at the other end of the room, and I hastened to hear what she had to say to me.

"How have you enjoyed your Bridge lessons?" she inquired, with a smile. "I hope you have found the time pass pleasantly, in spite of to-day's rain."

"It's been just lovely!" was my enthusiastic reply. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

"I can quite believe that. For you must have been very much interested, or you couldn't have picked the game up as quickly as you have done. Mr. Fisher says that, for a novice, you are simply marvellous. You've played hours and hours, and only lost £11 7s. 10d."

"£11 7s. 10d.!" I almost screamed. "Annabel, you are making a frightful mistake! It isn't possible! I've only played for a penny a game!"

"Penny points, dear. That means a penny for every point, and sometimes you have been hundreds of points below your opponents in one rubber."

"But I've helped to win several rubbers, so I must have cleared on those games what I lost on the others."

"On the contrary, even where you won the rubber, your opponents had big scores above the Bridge, which left your score nowhere. But, as I said before, you have lost remarkably little for a novice, and £11 7s. 10d. means very little to you."

"Very little!" I groaned, sinking into the nearest chair, for my limbs were trembling under me, and I felt as if I should faint, so great was my surprise and horror at the information just given me. "Very little. Why, it means ruin!"

(In next week's instalment Mr. Taskot comes to my assistance.)

Gent: "What sort of a crop did you get from that field? Has it made good hay?" Farmer: "Hay? Why, bless yer, zur, Oi doan't trouble much 'bout it; a crop o' them 'vertisement boards pays Oi better!"

Miss de Fashion: "Mother, what shall we send Miss de Style for her wedding present?" Mrs. de Fashion: "Will the list be published in the paper?" "No; she says that's vulgar." "Send her a plated saltspoon."

Beggar (at a lonely crossing): "Please, sir, won't yer give me sixpence?" Gentleman: "Why should a big, strong, able-bodied man like you take to begging?" Beggar: "Because I'm big, an' strong, an' able-bodied enough to enforce my demands. See?"

"Yesterday," said Jabson, "I refused a poor woman a request for a small sum of money, and in consequence of my act I passed a sleepless night. The tones of her voice were ringing in my ears the whole time." "Your softness of heart does you credit," said Mabson; "who was the woman?" "My wife."

Your Editor Chats.

Before you read this you will probably have perused the first instalment of our new serial which starts on the front page. It is the story of what a man did for greed of gold and desire for power. Many thrilling incidents are related, and I am sure that the story will hold your interest from start to finish. I shall be glad to know what readers think of "The Snare of Gold."

Another feature of this issue is the first of a series of Confessions of a Girl Gambler, which are related under the title of "The 'Bridge' of Ruin." These confessions will give you an insight into what goes on at Society card parties and how friends dupe friends in order that they may extract large sums of money from them. Only recently some correspondence was published in the daily papers regarding the large amounts of money lost and won nightly at Bridge among the upper classes. Many of you may, perhaps, have thought it impossible for so much to have changed hands in a single night, but after reading these articles you will quite understand how it could happen.

The tenth list in the Juggled Letters Competition appears, as you will see, on the next page. In two weeks' time the last list will appear.

I am sorry not yet to be able to announce the result of the Buried Stations Competition. The checking of the attempts is being proceeded with as rapidly as possible, and as soon as it is completed the result will be published.

The most popular story in the issue of *Short Stories* dated July 18th was The Sisters; the others came in the following order:

A Woman Hater, Hilda's Hero, A Weir-Mitchell Victim, George Chester's Mistake, Playing with Fire, A Matter of Spelling, The Bottle of Cement.

The only competitor whose list gave the titles in their correct order was Mr. J. Roden, 239 Newcombe Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, and to him the gold-plated pencil-case has been awarded.

This is our Holiday Number, and I hope that everyone who reads it will think of the little slum children who are pining for a day in the country. Not only should they think of them, however, but send a contribution towards giving them a day of pleasure. Ninepence pays for a whole day's outing for one child, inclusive of a good supply of wholesome food.

This day means so much to these poor little mites, that if they do not get the opportunity of having it their disappointment is very great. Let everyone who reads this appeal send along ninepence—or more—and then the number of happy faces will be increased. All contributions should be addressed to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and they will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Your Editor.

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COMPLETE IN TWELVE LISTS.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES,** *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Two more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

TENTH LIST.

109. AEHILLMOWY	115. BCEIIKMNOOR .....
110. CEGHIINNRSV	116. AAEGHORRT .....
111. ACDEELNOPS	117. ACDEEFGNORSV .....
112. ABEKLORTY	118. AACEFLORSTTYY .....
113. EEHMNORSTT	119. ACEFHNORRSW .....
114. AAFHLMOSTW	120. ACEENNPZ .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Cupid at the Helm.

Telling of the Winning of a "New Woman."

"ARE you determined to enter the race, Marion, in spite of the wishes of your friends?"

The season was drawing to a close at the popular seaside watering place, and the contest of the year for small sailing boats was to be sailed that day. The test was not only to decide the speed of the boats but to prove the skill of the sailors as well, and interest was greatly increased by the fact that one of the contestants was a woman.

A crowd of fashionable young men and women thronged the pier, chatting gaily among themselves and calling challenges and good wishes to the owners of the pretty craft.

Marion Dare had been the belle of the season. Her bright, happy nature and dauntless spirit had won the devotion of all who knew her; her slightest wish was anticipated by her many admirers, and she ruled her little court by the magic of her laughing eyes.

She had accepted the wager that "a woman's greatest possible skill could not stand the test of man's superior strength and muscle," and had avowed her determination to win the trophy from any man who wished to compete for it.

Startled by the familiar voice, she looked up quickly from the coil of rope she was untangling, surprised to find the speaker so near.

"I am quite resolved, Tom, so please say no more about it. I shall prove to you that the 'new woman' is not to be despised as a rival."

The man flushed at the thrust. He hated himself for his well-known opinion of the up-to-date girl.

A summer spent almost entirely in the society of a charming example of that type of young womanhood had altered his views very materially, and he had discovered many proofs of tender, womanly sweetness beneath the good-fellowship of this athletic girl's manner.

There was a note of tenderness in the earnest voice which a less determined listener would have found hard to resist.

"But, Marion, it is dangerous, foolhardy, for a woman to go out in a boat alone; you yourself can see a storm is threatening. Will nothing I can say induce you to remain on shore?"

She smiled brightly at his troubled face. "How dare you question my skill, sir? You who taught me all I know. I challenge you to combat. The race lies between our boats, and I warn you I shall lose no trick to win."

She waved her hand to him as the wind filled her sail and the little craft glided out into the bay.

With a gesture of impatience the skipper of the *Lurline* followed quickly in the wake of his pretty antagonist, and at a signal from the judges' boat the race started, amid loud cheers from friends on shore.

Marion showed her superior seamanship by crossing the line first by a clever manœuvre. Other boats followed in close pursuit, their sails outspread like the wings of white doves. There was a piping breeze from the north-west, and the boats flashed merrily through the waves, leaving billows of white foam behind them.

The young skipper of the *Lurline* soon outsailed the other craft, and came within speaking distance of the leading boat.

He called gaily across the water, "Shall it be gloves against a new pennant?"

The wind was steadily increasing, and now a squall struck the boats and laid them so low that their keels showed to windward. When they righted Marion screamed back, "Twelve buttons, if I win!"

The other boats were far behind and the race lay between these two. Marion stood bravely to her helm, never giving way an inch in her course, even though the squalls threatened to wreck her little craft. The *Lurline* was steadily gaining on her lead and the thought of defeat put her on her mettle.

About half the course was covered now, and a cheer went up from the shore as the *Lurline* came abreast the rival craft to windward. The boats tore madly through the water side by side; the excitement was at its height and each sailor watched eagerly for some point of advantage.

Suddenly a great puff of wind swept over the bay and struck the mainsail of the *Lurline* squarely, tearing it into ribbons. As the boom swept round it hit the skipper in the back and knocked him into the sea.

Obliged to exert every effort to keep her boat in its course, Marion was oblivious to all else until startled by the horrified cries of the watchers on land. Looking back to ascertain the cause she was shocked to discover the poor disabled *Lurline* drifting helplessly out to sea, without a skipper.

She brought her boat quickly about, gazing eagerly across the waves for some sign of the shipwrecked man. Finally, with a little moan of joy, she steered towards a black speck on the surface of the water.

It was the work of an instant to bring her boat alongside the drowning man, but the girl who held the tiller endured the agony of hours in that short race with death.

Wild shouts of joy greeted the pair as the young girl assisted her dripping companion over the side of the boat. Shaking the water from his eyes, the rescued man turned eagerly to his pretty opponent.

"I tell you, Marion, if you had been less prompt to act you would have had no rival sailor in these waters."

The woman asserted herself over the skipper, and now that the danger was past Marion burst into tears. Two dripping arms went round her, and she rested her head on a very broad but damp shoulder.

"Poor little girl, the strain has been too much!"

Marion cried softly to herself, and made no effort to leave the moist embrace. The guiding hand on the tiller almost relaxed its hold and the boat was kept to its own course, while Cupid took the helm. At last the sobbing ceased, and from somewhere in the vicinity of the lapel of his coat a saucy voice murmured:

"You were saved by a 'new woman,' Tom."

The arms tightened their embrace, as he pressed his cheek lovingly against the dark hair.

"Yes, God bless her! I adore the 'new woman.'"

She lifted her head—her glorious eyes shining with happiness.

"But I love you in the old-fashioned way, dear," she whispered.

Eric Canthorpe.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.
NURSE BEAUMONT, who knew Lady Maitland previous to her second marriage.

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

"My Life Upon Her Faith."

"I'm more glad than I can say, sir, to see you something like your old self," Gilbert Chase said, as he stood in Jack Maitland's den the day following his departure from St. Pancras Station.

"And I to see you, Chase," replied Sir Trevor's son and heir, holding out his hand, which was still somewhat thin and delicate-looking, while his frank, handsome face had lost a little of its careless good-humour, and gained instead an expression of determination and sadness. He had been out of bed only a few days, and was still weak, though he was practically well enough to go about.

Gilbert Chase looked at him keenly as he seated himself in a chair facing his young host, to whom his usually blunted sympathies had been attracted.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "it's a long time, Mr. Maitland, since we parted, and much has happened in it, putting your accident on one side. By the way, I wish to ask you, sir," he went on, scanning the weary face of the boy who had employed him to solve the mystery of the missing girl's parentage some months ago, "whether on the night of the ball you did meet Mr. Digby Scarlett? You will remember, sir, you mentioned to me that you had an appointment with him?"

Jack flushed; the reason that occasioned the appointment recurring in a bitter flash of mockery, as he thought how the girl for whom he had desired to fight, had capitulated irrevocably, and was now out of his reach for ever!

"I remember the appointment I made with Mr. Scarlett very well," he said, after a pause, speaking calmly, "but did not meet him, and was about to retrace my steps, when I suddenly seemed to come to an end of everything."

"Humph!" murmured the detective in a disappointed tone. "Have you any idea as to the extent of your stroll before you turned back?"

Jack frowned. "Oh, no great distance," he answered carelessly; "this side of the spinny."

Gilbert Chase started. This side of the spinny! Then how was it that the stump of the Havana he had since treasured so carefully had lain on the far side of the spinny?

According to Digby Scarlett he had missed his adversary and returned to the Manor. "How then," the detective wondered, with a quickening of his breath, "had he managed to fling his half-finished cigar so close to the old oak in the place he professed ignorance of?"

He looked at the boy, who seemed to have grown so strangely and suddenly into a pre-occupied man, and wondered whether he had learnt of the weaving of Fate round the lovely foundling for whose sake he had so narrowly escaped death.

"Are you inclined to let me tell you some news, sir?" he began gravely, leaning forward, "some news that may distress you, yet which I feel it my duty to tell you?"

The thoughts of the boy flew to his sweetheart—she who was now the wife of another! Even the detective wished to sympathise with the man she had jilted, he thought bitterly, his young pride hurt that others should see his desolation.

"I know it," he answered curtly, "my step-mother acquainted me with the fact some days ago. If you don't mind, we will drop the subject, Chase."

Gilbert Chase swallowed a surprised gurgle.

He had been prepared for horror, dismay, even passionate protestations of denial, but this cool acknowledgment and desire to turn to other topics was an unexpected reception of his news. Had he, after all, he asked himself, made a mistake in thinking that the love of the boy was stronger than it really had been?

Surely, if his love were worth a straw, he would have shown more feeling than that on hearing of his sweetheart being wanted by the police!

Gilbert Chase felt that he had been wrong in his estimate of the strength of affection of which Jack Maitland was capable. After all, youth had not the tenacity of purpose in affairs of the heart that more mature age possessed. Yet, somehow, he felt sorry that the love idyll could be so lightly cast aside.

"Then you are no longer interested in the parentage of that poor young lady, Mr. Maitland?" he asked, after a pause.

"I don't consider now that I have a right to interfere with her private affairs," Jack returned bitterly. "She has someone else to unravel the mystery—should she wish it!"

The detective rose slowly to his feet. He felt disappointed at the half-hearted interest Sir Trevor Maitland's son and heir took in the whirligig of time! He wanted to say something that would rouse him from his lethargy—something to stir the dormant fire and spirit that had been there on the night of the ball.

"Well, perhaps you are right, Mr. Maitland," he replied drily, "the mystery will be solved in a way that will, I fancy, startle us when it is. The veil of the past will not rest long on the shoulders of Ivy Strange when she stands in the dock to answer to the charge of murder! The police have a knack of getting at the root of these matters, you know!"

While he had been speaking the face of the boy in the chair had undergone a strange medley of expressions, ranging from perplexity, wonder, horror, and finally rage.

He started to his feet, trembling with the force of the new passion within him, upsetting the chair behind him with a noisy clatter.

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"Good Heavens, man!" he gasped, "what do you mean? Have you gone mad, or have I?"

Gilbert Chase shook his head.

"No, we are neither of us mad, Mr. Maitland; in fact you are now more in possession of your faculties than you ever were—you were asleep before, you are awake now—and so am I."

"Then—then——" Jack spoke slowly, choosing his words with painful precision—"you were in earnest when you connected the name of that most pure and innocent of girls with that of a *murderess?*"

"I was," the other replied; "and I understood, Mr. Maitland, that you had heard from your step-mother that Ivy Strange was wanted by the police for complicity in the murder of a tramp who was shot in the spinny, the same night you were—the night of the *bal masqué*."

Jack drew his hand across his eyes, as though to sweep away all lingering doubts of dreaming from his mind. The detective's words did not appear to be spoken in jest; a certain gleam in his eyes indicated that he was in deadly earnest.

"A tramp in the spinny!" he said. "I don't understand. Why should she, a girl, ignorant of the very existence of such crimes, commit one, and why a tramp?"

"Why?" the detective echoed softly. "For no reason, Mr. Maitland, unless that tramp turned out to be an undesirable encumbrance, such as a *father*, for instance!"

"Father! Father!" he muttered. "But I thought——" He stopped suddenly, a memory from those long distant days confronting him with a sinister significance. The face of the girl he had loved so passionately, wide-eyed and terror-stricken, telling him to cease seeking to find out the past.

He had attached no reason to her words then, but that of an over-strained mind! But now he shuddered as he recalled little gestures and half-uttered sentences, that fitted, mosaic-like, into the empty crevices of his mind, filling them with a fearful dread of something he could not understand.

He raised his hand to his brow; it was wet with a chilly dampness, that made him feel suddenly weak and helpless.

"How was she to find out such a relationship?" he said harshly. "She would have mentioned it to me immediately; she knew of my efforts to trace her parents."

"How she knew, Mr. Maitland," Chase replied gravely, "I am not quite sure—yet. But I happened to overhear the man—an ex-convict called Mike Holland—declare himself as her father in the spinny some days before the murder took place. And also, on the night you were shot, I myself met a woman in the wood, heavily cloaked, coming from the direction of the spinny.

"I caught her wrist, but she bit my hand suddenly, and I let go, not without leaving a bruise on her wrist though. Afterwards I recognised that same bruise on the wrist of Ivy Strange!"

Jack was silent; the words that kept dancing in his brain were those that had slipped from the detective so glibly, but to him were writ in letters of flame—"an ex-convict, called Mike Holland!"

Then that mark, that fearful stigma of shame on the brow of the innocent girl he had loved so dearly, had its cruel origin in the broad-arrow that the convict had worn, and whose crime—according to the Scriptures — must be visited upon the helpless, guiltless, third and fourth generations!

Oh, the cruelty! The mocking cruelty of Fate, that should have allowed so fair a flower to spring from such a stagnant root!

He looked at Gilbert Chase, to see whether he connected the mark on the girl's brow, about which he himself had told him, with the murdered convict, but apparently he had forgotten the conversation, for the detective's face was impassive, and his eyes mildly vacant, as he returned his host's gaze.

"Surely you must be making some mistake, Chase?" Jack said eagerly. "Just think—a low tramp, a gaol-bird—to be the father of a girl as beautiful and refined-looking as—as her ladyship herself! It is incredible."

Gilbert Chase raised his eyebrows the slightest shade higher. "Ah—yes—that may be so, Mr. Maitland," he said slowly; "but Ivy Strange was the only person likely to profit by the death of such a disreputable parent as Mike Holland, and in spite of her looking as refined as her ladyship, I'm afraid that would only prove that she had a strong motive for suppressing the ex-convict!"

"Tell me what time the man was murdered?" Jack asked again, after a pause, in which he had been thinking swiftly and connecting loose ideas that had floated away from their moorings during the time he had lain ill.

"About ten minutes after you had been shot," the detective replied, wondering what thoughts were evolving behind the once alert brain of Sir Trevor's son and heir.

"Ten minutes," Jack murmured. "That was the night of the ball, Chase? Ah, I'm beginning to understand now," he cried, his voice quickening with a subdued excitement. "Nurse Beaumont warned me to get well and strong for Ivy's sake, as she was in danger, and needed my help sorely. I did not know then what she meant; but now I do! I can prove that Ivy was in the Manor when I saw you outside and afterwards left you to meet Digby Scarlett."

Gilbert Chase blinked his eyelids—a nervous trick of his when surprised.

"Softly—softly, Mr. Maitland," he murmured; "let me understand. How do you know that the young lady was in the Manor then?"

Jack hesitated, and a sudden flush mantled on his cheek as he remembered how, acting on the spur of the moment, he had carried his fainting sweetheart into his step-mother's dressing-room, where he knew she would be able to rest in peace.

Then outside he had met his father and, afraid lest his anger should be roused against the girl, he had, for the first time in his life, parried his parent's questioning with a prevarication. He wished he had not, now that he saw what it would mean to the girl whose life was in jeopardy.

The slightly cynical smile that was curving the thin lips of the detective deepened the colour in his face, but at the same time decided his answer.

"I hesitated to tell you," he said, with a quiet dignity, "not because I was afraid to, but at first I was uncertain whether it would be wise, since I knew my father objected to the engagement that existed between us, and I desired to spare her. But I will tell you how I know that Ivy Strange was in the Manor when I left it.

"She had fainted, and I took her to my step-mother's dressing-room; then, meeting my father in the corridor, I shielded her from his possible anger by saying I had taken Lady Maitland into her room. I am sorry now," he said simply, "that I made an excuse; but it was with the best of intentions. You believe my word, I hope?"

Gilbert Chase smiled. "In my calling, Mr. Maitland," he said quietly, "we are trained never to accept biassed statements of any description; but I may say that I should like to see Sir Trevor for a moment before I go. Did any of the servants see you with her?" he went on. "It will be as well to prove an *alibi*. They are sure to have noticed that it was not her ladyship."

Jack frowned thoughtfully. "One of the maids saw me carrying her," he said; "I don't remember which one. Besides, Ivy was wearing a blue domino, and was masked, so wouldn't be recognised."

"Ah! And who is Nurse Beaumont?" queried the detective, scribbling in his notebook as he spoke.

"The woman who was engaged to nurse me," Jack replied. "She left rather suddenly the other day. My step-mother told me that she had wished to go. But, hang it all, Chase!" he went on impetuously, "don't cross-examine me like this. Tell me—is—is Ivy Strange found yet?"

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"Not yet; but she will be very soon," replied the other shortly. "We suspect she is in London; all criminals fly there, and have been heard to swear that it is the best hiding-place on earth!"

Jack winced, and a momentary desire seized him to fling the smooth-faced detective out of the room. Then he remembered that the man was only doing his duty, and that he had first sought him out to take up the inquiry into his poor little love's parentage.

A sudden thought seized him, filling him with a new spring of life.

If she were hiding, then she could not possibly be married to his enemy; for he knew Digby Scarlett sufficiently to be sure he would not try to marry a girl under a cloud, even had she the beauty of a Venus!

Yet that letter, purporting to be from Digby Scarlett, which his step-mother had shown him, said deliberately that they were to be married the next day! He dare not mention that letter to the detective lest he should demand to see it, and so obtain Ivy's address through Digby Scarlett. But one question he could not resist, in the hope of knowing the worst—or the best.

"Are you searching for her under her own name or another?" he asked, turning to light his cigarette.

"Her own name," replied the detective drily, "as another would hardly do—since she hasn't one. But her description is in every police-station in the United Kingdom; it is only a matter of time now!"

Jack went up to him quickly, and grasped his arms.

"Chase, look here; found or not, Ivy Strange is as innocent of that murder as I am—or you! Good Heavens! man, that girl could no more handle a weapon than a fly! I tell you that there is some diabolical agency working at the bottom of all this, and I mean to find out what it is! Don't, because you are helping to hound her down," he exclaimed passionately, "refuse to assist me in finding out the real truth about her past; for I will stake my life on her not being the child of the convict, in spite——" He stopped suddenly.

"In spite," the detective finished, "of her being marked by a broad arrow! I understand, Mr. Maitland," he went on; "and have not neglected any of my inquiries regarding Miss Strange; though things look very black just now against her—the fact of her running away, for instance! But now, if I may, Mr. Maitland, I should like the opportunity of a few words with Sir Trevor."

Jack touched the electric button on the wall.

"Lawson, ask Sir Trevor whether Mr. Chase may have a few moments' conversation with him," he said, when the man appeared in answer to his ring.

"You see, Mr. Maitland," said the detective, "if Sir Trevor tells me that he saw you coming out of her ladyship's dressing-room, and her ladyship also owns to having been elsewhere at the time, then, of course, that raises a strong point in Miss Strange's favour."

Jack nodded. He was painfully keen that his father should see Gilbert Chase, and know how imperative it was that his evidence should save the life of the girl he had wished to adopt.

Suddenly Lawson returned—his face white and frightened.

"If you please, Mr. Jack," he said, gazing from one to the other hesitatingly, "the squire is ill in her ladyship's boudoir."

"Ill!" Jack and the detective exclaimed simultaneously.

"Why, he was quite well this afternoon," the boy continued. "What has happened?"

Before the man could make any reply, there was a sound of shuffling feet, and, flinging the door wide open, Jack Maitland and Gilbert Chase saw a sight that froze the words on their tongues.

Lifted on either side by Heriot North and Digby Scarlett came Sir Trevor, grimacing and mumbling to himself, a withered, shapeless mass of humanity, the skeleton of what he had been at lunch; while the faces of the two men who assisted him were also strangely white and livid—a dark red stain being on Digby Scarlett's chin.

Jack's eyes shot over their heads to the woman who followed the tragic trio, with a pale face and set, gleaming eyes, hard and tearless like diamonds.

He went forward quickly, and touched her on the arm.

"Mater! Tell me, in pity's name, what is the matter with—my father?"

The detective, watching keenly this domestic tragedy, saw her large eyes flicker with a strange light, and her mouth twitched as she replied coldly:

"Sir Trevor has had a sudden stroke—or mental collapse—while talking to—to Mr. North and Mr. Scarlett in my boudoir. They are taking him to his room."

Her eyes travelled to his companion, and when they met the steady gaze of the detective standing beside him, she bit her lip with a sudden spasm, then raising her head with a haughty gesture, she followed the procession of death.

"My father! a stroke!" Jack muttered; "then——"

His eyes met those of the detective, who finished the sentence for him—"then he will not be able to prove an *alibi* for you, Mr. Maitland. I am sorry!"

When he was alone, Gilbert Chase strolled across the spinny to the "Rest," and waited outside the gates for the coming of the master.

THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Ray of Light.

As he stood under the shadow of the large tree facing the gates, and smoking a cigarette bestowed upon him by Jack Maitland, Gilbert Chase speculated upon the sudden breakdown of the hale and hearty squire of Melton. What could have brought about the collapse in her ladyship's boudoir?

The faces of the two men who had upheld the Squire had worn peculiar expressions, Digby Scarlett's, indeed, having resembled that of a fiend, while Heriot North had been almost as grey as the stricken man.

Even the beautiful woman, at whom he had glanced with new interest, had also seemed deeply stirred by some emotion which she had concealed beneath her frozen exterior—an emotion that appeared apart from the trouble that had fallen upon her.

What, he wondered, had taken place in the boudoir between those four souls—the lips of one, indeed, sealed perhaps for ever.

Suddenly he roused himself. A woman was coming along the path, a dirty-looking creature, whose draggled and scanty attire pointed to a long tramp through all sorts of weather. But it was not her wardrobe that attracted the professional acumen of Gilbert Chase, but her face—the usual low-bred type, that suggested a partially stunted growth of the mental faculties.

He moved forward swiftly as she drew nearer, and waited with a grim smile of satisfaction for her to speak to him, feeling pretty certain that she would do so; and he was right, for, seeing him in the gathering twilight, the woman began her customary plea for alms.

"Please, kind sir, a copper," she wailed; then started back, as the detective grasped her by the arm, and said sternly:

"I thought you would come back in time! Now, answer me a few questions, or I will take you to the 'lock-up' for begging!"

The woman's face paled under the layers of dirt that had accumulated on it, and into her shifty eyes there flashed a look of abject terror, as she tried to pull her arm from the strong hand that held her.

"Lemme go!" she cried; "I ain't doin' nothin'—only arstin' fur a copper! An' wot can I tell yer that yer don't knows on, as I s'pose yer one o' them 'splits'!"

Gilbert Chase smiled grimly. He had already learnt something from the woman's phraseology; a term he had been quick to classify as thieves' slang, and only used by those mem

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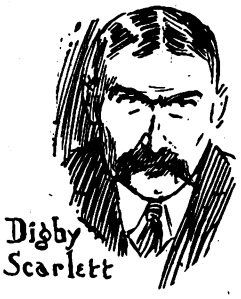

bers of the fraternity who, periodically, became guests of His Majesty! It was the word "splits," by which detectives in criminology were known in the conversations of the submerged tenth!

"This is what I wish to ask you, my good madam," he said sarcastically. "What were you doing in the 'New Age' bar some few weeks ago, and why did you call a certain lady who was there 'Polly'? I've been waiting for you to return. I knew it wouldn't be long, and," he went on sternly, "if you tell me any lies, it will be the worse for you! You may find yourself behind a locked door again!"

It was a chance shot, but it did its work, for the woman's loose, coarse mouth quivered as she replied fearfully:

"Please, sir, I was a-doin' no 'arm; s'elp me if I was! I 'ad come to Melton to find my 'usbin', pore Mike 'Olland!"

Gilbert Chase's hand tightened unconsciously on the woman's arm. This was an unexpected *denouement* that appealed to his sense of the dramatic, and he blessed the sudden impulse that had led him to the gate of the "Rest," and enabled him to kill two birds with one stone.

"Why didn't you come forward at the inquest?" he said sternly.

She hesitated, and shifted uneasily under the detective's eyes.

"Becos I only come out o' quod a week or two ago!" she muttered sullenly. "As soon as I knew, I come 'ere; tramped all the way, too."

He looked at her thoughtfully. In spite of his vast experience with the men and women of her class, he could detect the truth when it was spoken even by such outcasts as the woman before him.

"Then if you came to Melton as soon as you knew of your husband's murder," he said slowly, "why, since you were afraid to visit the police-station and learn about him, did you visit the place at all—unless you wished to see someone who was not dead?"

The woman gazed restlessly round, as though meditating an attempt at an escape. Then seeing the futility of it, she said sullenly:

"I came to see no one! Jest to look abaht! I didn't even know as 'ow Polly were in Melton. W'en I saw 'er I thort as 'ow she 'ad come up to find out abaht Mike too."

"What is Polly's surname?" demanded the detective sharply—"and is she related to you?"

"She's called Polly Martin—down wi' our lot," the woman answered unwillingly; "but 'er real nime is Polly 'Olland; she were Mike's twin-sister."

Gilbert Chase stifled an exclamation, and his pale blue eyes glittered with suppressed excitement. So "Mary Mason" was unrobed of her respectability. He would deal summarily with her when they met again. In the meantime he must not lose sight of this woman.

If he let her go, he knew her slippery nature well enough to guess that she would not come back once she was free. Yet, on the other hand, if he left his post to take her to the station, he might miss a still more important quarry.

As he was speculating on his next move, the heavy tramp of steps came out of the gloom, with the measured tread that has become a policeman's peculiarity.

"Ah, Robert," he said, beckoning the man to him. "I want you to keep this woman at the station until I come. She is the wife of the murdered Mike Holland, and I have some inquiries to make before she goes. There's no charge against her," he added, in answer to the policeman's look of inquiry; "I only wish to satisfy a few doubts."

No sooner had the woman disappeared with her custodian, than another figure approached the gates of the "Rest."

Gilbert Chase drew a long breath of relief.

"I was just in time," he muttered. "I might have missed him in another minute."

The master of the "Rest" was looking pleased, and a smile of triumph on his lips accentuated the hate lying dormant in his dark eyes. But the smile faded as a slim, alert man stepped quickly up to him.

"I've been waiting on the off-chance of seeing you, sir," he said pleasantly.

Digby Scarlett looked at him scowlingly, and a black cloud crossed his face as he recognised his interlocutor.

"I'm afraid I'm engaged this evening," he said brusquely. "You had better call again, my man."

The detective's face flushed, and his mouth grew set, as he replied suavely:

"I also shall be engaged later, Mr. Scarlett. And if it is at all convenient to you, I think, if I may suggest it, that it would be advisable were you to see me now. I fancy what I have to say may interest you."

Digby Scarlett looked at him sharply, but could infer nothing from the smooth face and soft voice of the detective. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly with an assumption of amused good humour.

"Very well, Chase, since you will see me, I suppose I must submit with a good grace! The reason I did not wish to be disturbed to-night was because I have not yet recovered from the dreadful shock of seeing poor Sir Trevor Maitland struck down so suddenly."

He led the way into the library, and switched on the electric light, then turned to his companion with a gesture towards the spirit carafe on the side-table.

The detective shook his head. "No, thank you, sir. I never drink between meals," a speech not strictly true, but Gilbert Chase had work before him that required a clear head.

"Well," said Scarlett, flinging himself into a deep, leather-chair, "what is this news, Chase, that you prophesied would interest me?"

The detective fixed his expressionless, blue eyes upon the saturnine face of the man in the chair. He wondered how his next speech would affect his self-possession.

"I particularly wished to see you, sir," he began slowly, "because, firstly, I happen to be in possession of something belonging to you—a telegram."

Digby Scarlett looked at him with a startled glance, and the artificial smile with which he had listened to his visitor's opening words gave way under the momentary stiffening of the muscles round his mouth.

"How's that?" he queried, after a pause. "I do not remember expecting a telegram; and even if I did, I fail to understand how it could have fallen into your hands. 'Chase' and 'Scarlett' are not names easily confused, are they?"

"No," rejoined Gilbert Chase genially. "It happened like this. I was leaving St. Pancras by the same train as yourself, the other day, and though you did not see me, I noticed you some time before the train left. Then a telegraph boy ran up to me with a telegram, and as I expected one from a colleague, I never thought of asking the boy to repeat the name, which I did not catch in the bustle of starting; and so it was not till afterwards that I saw I had made a mistake and read something certainly not intended for my eyes," and he laughed softly.

Digby Scarlett put out his hand peremptorily. It was trembling, and the sharp eyes of Gilbert Chase noticed that his upper lip was quivering, in spite of the sheltering moustache.

"Give it to me then, since you say it was mine," Scarlett said curtly.

After a moment's search through all his pockets with minute care, under the increasing impatience of his host, the detective shook his head.

"There, now," he said, in a vexed tone, "after taking

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great care of it, I have left it at the 'New Age' with my things. But," he added hastily, "I can remember every word, Mr. Scarlett. It was not an ordinary message. It was dated from Rotherhithe, and ran like this:

"*Plant successful. 'V' accidentally drowned; send money.*—LAMPITT."

A red gleam flickered in Digby Scarlett's eyes, and he fell back in his chair with a hoarse laugh.

"No wonder you were astonished at such a telegram, Chase. 'V' is the name of a mad dog I wanted disposed of—it stands for Vixen, and great caution had to be used before she could be brought near the river."

"I quite believe it," said the detective gravely; but whether in irony or not, Digby Scarlett could not decide.

He rose from the chair, and taking a cigar from his case, said:

"Then you will leave that telegram here when you are passing, Chase? I will say 'good night' now; I am dog-tired."

"Not so tired as the *dog* that was—drowned, sir," replied the detective simply, playing with the brim of his hat, with an absent look in his eyes.

Digby Scarlett bit his lip. "I am tired enough to wish for no other society to-night than my own," he retorted grimly. "So, good evening to you, Mr. Chase."

"One moment, sir," interrupted the other suavely, as his host touched the bell.

"Well"—impatiently—"what is it now?"

"Only that I had a long chat with Mrs. Phillpott when in London," began Gilbert Chase quietly, "and took away with me the photograph of a lady whom I believe is your sister—so Mrs. Phillpott told me. I did not know that the wife of the man you prosecuted eighteen years ago was your sister, Mr. Scarlett!"

Digby Scarlett raised his eyes, and after a long, swift scrutiny, dropped them under the steady gaze of the mild blue ones of the man who was concealing more than he revealed.

"Well," he said harshly, "what of it? And why should I not inquire about a woman without your interference, Mr. Chase? *I* am not 'wanted' by the police, you know."

"I am sure, sir, you are not to blame for *that*," murmured the man from Scotland Yard respectfully. Then he added, "The picture of Mrs. Grant is very lovely. She reminded me strongly of another face which both you and I have seen recently. You will know whom I mean, Mr. Scarlett—names are not necessary."

Digby Scarlett turned savagely upon him. "You really leave a great deal to my imagination, Mr. Chase! I have no idea as to the lady you mean. You police-court chaps have a way of wrapping a mystery round a lamp-post!"

Gilbert Chase smiled at him thoughtfully. "Perhaps so, sir, I am afraid we are very dense—sometimes; then we chance upon a ray of light, and follow it up—and follow it up," he repeated softly.

At the door he paused and said suddenly: "Can you remember what conversation you and Mr. North were having with her ladyship when Sir Trevor overheard you, sir?"

The master of the "Rest" grew ashen under the tan of his skin, and his lips parted in a cruel sneer.

"No, I can't!" he retorted roughly. "You had better curb your impatience till Sir Trevor recovers—if he ever does!"

"If he ever does," the detective repeated; then added: "I will call on Mr. North to-morrow—his memory may be better than yours."

When he was alone, Digby Scarlett flung himself in a chair, and laughed long and loudly.

"You are very clever, Mr. Chase; but you will not gain much by hanging round me! Confound that telegram!" he muttered—the laugh dying on his lips; "it might have been

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

awkward! But he must not see that fool North to-morrow; the hysterical 'man of honour' will bleat everything out, then there will be an end to my little plans. No; I must prevent him from killing the goose that lays my golden eggs! Once the police tumble to my plot it will be U.P. with me!"

He rose, and dug the poker so savagely into the fire that a piece of wood fell out upon the fur rug, and a tiny blaze sprang up. He ground it with his heel, then smiled evilly.

"My question is answered; I no longer am in doubt as to the method of silencing Mr. Heriot North—and at the same time wiping out my debt with him!"

When the night grew darker, a figure heavily cloaked and with a soft slouch hat on, slipped out of the hall door of the "Rest," and vanished into the gloom.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Flame in the Sky.

When Gilbert Chase left the "Rest," he walked quickly towards the village, in the direction of the police-station. He was satisfied with his interview with the master of the "Rest," and chuckled grimly once or twice. "I don't fancy we got much change out of each other; but at the same time, I made Mr. Digby Scarlett feel very uncomfortable! He was a bit of a juggins to think that I would be such a simpleton as to have given him that telegram! No; it is safely locked up with my other little documents."

Arriving at the police-station, he was told that the woman claiming to be the wife of the murdered man, Mike Holland had been detained in one of the cells on suspicion of having stolen half-a-sovereign that dropped on the floor from her pocket. The inspector on duty had waited for the dectetive to question her, as he was last with her.

When the woman was brought into the charge-room she piteously cried out at the sight of Gilbert Chase.

"Don't let 'em lock me up, mister! I swear I didn't steal it! If I was to drop dead this very instant, I'm as innercent as a babe unborn!"

"Oh, we know all about that 'babe,'" said the inspector humorously; "you're all babes till you're convicted. Come, now; tell us how a woman in your poor condition came to have half-a-sovereign in your pocket?"

"It was give me by a young lidy in the Park in London, sir;" wailed the woman; "I told 'er I was walkin' to Melton to see my 'usbin's grave, an' she took such a interest in it that she gave it to me, sayin' as I was to keep it in memory of my little gal as was lost years ago. She was a lovely young lidy, sir," the woman panted; "tall an' with fair 'air and large sad eyes—like a pictur'!"

Gilbert Chase started, and whispered something to the inspector who showed him the half-sovereign. It was a Jubilee one; and the professional instinct of the detective was aroused as he remembered that the missing girl, Ivy Strange, had gone away with a present from Sir Trevor of ten Jubilee half-sovereigns.

The inspector looked at her doubtfully, then said slowly: "Well, as there's no one to charge you with theft I must let you go—though I don't credit you with telling the truth—you are discharged!"

Gilbert Chase put his hand on the woman's arm. "Tell me; was the lady who gave you that money anything like this picture, or that?"

He pointed to the placards that are pasted on the walls of police-stations, with photos of the people "wanted," then showed her a picture he had taken from his pocket.

The woman gazed round the walls until she saw the likeness he pointed out, then gazed at the piece of cardboard in his hand. As she did so, she uttered a hoarse cry.

"The lidy!—the lidy!" she whispered under her breath.

"Well," said the detective, "do you recognise this lady?"

The woman raised her head. All the cunning of her kind had returned to her, and she guessed instinctively that the lady whose face she was asked to recognise was in some trouble, and she was not the one to "round on a pal."

"No," she said boldly. "I never seed 'er afore. The lidy who give me the 'arf quid was red-haired, and 'er 'usbin' give 'er the money for me."

Gilbert Chase glanced at her sharply. Her dense face revealed nothing, and she looked at him with an expression of fatuous innocence.

"Where are you living?" he said abruptly.

"Fourteen Dorset Street, Whitechapel," she replied glibly. "If yer wants me, I'll be glad to come, mister."

He let her go reluctantly. After all, she was not of much use, now that he knew her relation to Mary Mason; and she would probably hang about the village for a day or two.

Once free of the police-station, the woman glanced back with a grin.

"Thort yer was goin' to make me split on *'er*, did yer?" she muttered. "Not much; I may be a wrong 'un, but I ain't a-goin' to round on *'er!* Now, I'll try to find Polly, she must be in service abaht 'ere!"

* * * * *

That night, when the village of Melton was wrapped in slumber and the inhabitants dreamt of a land where all was sunny and warm, a tiny tongue of fire curled above the roof of a house not far from the Manor. The tongue grew into a flame, and the flame into a vivid sheet of crimson fire that lit the sky with a brilliant radiance far and wide; and in that house lay Heriot North, the man who held a secret.

(To be concluded shortly.)

Little Sister: "Most of the articles in your paper this month is awful poor." Little brother (editor of an amateur monthly): "I know it, but the boys that wrote 'em sent stamps for their return, an' I wanted the stamps."

"My wife has been studying geology, and the house is so full of rocks I can't find a place to sit down." "What will you do about it?" "I've induced her to take up astronomy." "Is that any better?" "Of course; she can't collect specimens."

A dog was advertised to play on a piano in a circus. When the time came for the dog to perform, he got on a seat and began playing. Suddenly someone in the crowd shouted "Rats!" Upon which the dog bounded off the seat. The piano kept on playing.

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A Way of Getting Even.

Medicus: "I wish I knew how to get even with that undertaker." She: "Why not retire from practice?"

Not the Only One.

He: "Remember that you have promised solemnly to be a sister to me." She: "Yes, but you mustn't behave as though you were the only relative of that kind I have in the world."

Cows-Milk; Calves-Jelly.

Nellie: "Oh! do look at those pretty little cows." Maud: "They are not cows, they are calves." Nellie: "But what is the difference?" Maud: "Why, cows give milk, and calves give jelly."

Breaking It Gently.

Quarryman: "Shure, an' it's sad news I've got to tell ye, Missis Murphy; your husband has broken his new watch." Mrs. Murphy: "How did he do it?" Quarryman: "A ten-ton rock fell on him."

Money Made by Pen.

Wealthy Stranger: "Yes; and I made my money, every farthing of it, by my pen." Tompkins: "Ah! a novelist, or a dramatist, maybe?" Wealthy Stranger: "Not me. I used to keep a sheep farm in New Zealand."

Definition of Genteel.

A servant who prided herself on being employed in a "genteel family" was asked what she meant by a "genteel family." "Where they have two or three kinds of wine, and the gentleman uses bad language," was the reply.

No Sympathy Given.

He (after pulling against tide for a couple of hours under a broiling sun): "Don't you think it would be rather a good idea to pull up for a while under the shade of one of those jolly old trees?" She: "And break the spell of this delicious motion? Not for worlds."

Misunderstood.

Ugly Customer: "What price did you say this cape was?" Pretty Milliner: "Seven guineas, madam." Ugly Customer (after a pause): "Don't you think that rather a dreadful figure?" Pretty Milliner: "Well, madam, since you say so, it is not the best I have seen—but I think you will find the cape will hide it."

All But.

"Dear Mabel, do you love me?" "O-h, George!" "Don't you, Mabel? Just a little tiny bit?" "W-e-ll, y-e-s, George." "And if I married you, would your father furnish us a house?" "Yes, George." "And take me into partnership?" "Yes, George." "And would your mother keep away from us, except when I invited her?" "She would, George." "And your brothers and sisters, too?" "Why, certainly, George." "And of course the old gentleman would settle my debts?" "Of course, George." "Darling, will you marry me?" "No, George."

Broken, but Mended.

He: "So the engagement is at an end?" She: "Yes." He: "Who broke it?" She: "The minister who married us."

One was Enough.

He (in an argument): "Well, thank goodness, I'm not two-faced." She: "You ought to be thankful. One face like yours is enough."

Doesn't Always Follow.

She: "Do you believe the howling of a dog is always followed by a death?" He: "No; not always; sometimes the man who shoots at the dog is a poor marksman."

The Roots are Deep.

Nelly: "I don't see how getting one's feet wet causes toothache." Jack: "You don't? If you had ever had a tooth pulled you would know that the roots run down to your toes."

To Show His Bravery.

Mrs. Frailty: "Before we were married you often wished there was some brave deed you could do to show your love." Mr. Frailty: "Yes, dear, and I would do it now." Mrs. Frailty: "Then, love, go down into the kitchen and discharge Bridget."

At a Travelling Show.

Irate Visitor: "I call this a downright fraud! You advertise on your bills 'The Most Remarkable Dwarf in the World,' and he turns out to be five feet five inches high!" Bland Showman: "Exactly so, sir. That's just what's so remarkable about him. He's the tallest dwarf on record!"

Prompted by Kindness.

Lady of the House: "I should think a big, strong fellow like you would rather work than go round begging." Sloppy Sim: "I would if it wasn't for one thing." Lady: "What's that?" Sloppy Sim: "I ain't got no fambly meself, and I'm afraid if I went to work I might crowd out some poor chap who has little ones to support."

Near Freezing Point.

"Perhaps it is best after all," remarked the rejected suitor as he lingered in the hall. "A man of twenty-five would soon tire of a wife who hovered round the thirty-two mark." "Why, Mr. Ardent," said the woman in the case, "how very ungallant of you to insinuate that I am thirty-two." "Well, perhaps you are not," he replied, "but it certainly struck me that you were somewhere near the freezing point."

His Narrow Escape.

Emma: "No, George, it cannot be. We must part." (Bitterly.) "My purse-proud father will not accept a poor man for his son-in-law." George (frantically): "Say not so. I cannot give thee up. My heart will break. I——" Purse-proud father enters the room without observing them. Throws himself into a chair and groans aloud: "Bankruptcy! Ruin! Every penny swept away!" George (sweeping himself away at these words): "Farewell, then, Emma, since you discard me." But he says to himself, "Wonderfully narrow escape that."

A New Way of Doing it.

"Alberta," began the young man, somewhat huskily, "are your folks all well?" "Quite well, Mr. Watkins, thank you." "I have come this evening, Alberta," he resumed, heroically, "to—to—bring back this volume of Dante you lent me last evening——" "Why, you haven't finished it already, Mr. Watkins?" "And to say that I—that I—like—that I like Dante first rate." "Dante is so soulful," said Alberta softly. "He's immense," assented Watkins, heartily; "and speaking of Dante, I—er——" "Yes." "There isn't a poet of modern times, in my opinion, that comes up to Dante." "Except Tennyson." "And, speaking of Tennyson, Alberta—I—er—" "Yes." "Will you let me make you a present one day of a volume of Tennyson, with the inscription on the fly-leaf, 'To my——'" "Well?" "'To my wife, Alberta?'"

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Plain Women Become Beautiful.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Matrimonial Difficulty.

"MATER" is worried about the marriage of her daughter. The latter is a very pretty girl, and has recently become engaged. "MATER," however, is a widow, and her husband has only recently died. Since that event they have had no fixed abode, but have lived mostly at seaside boarding-houses. "MATER" wishes her daughter's wedding to be a good one, and one which will show her off favourably before her husband's relations. How can she best arrange about the place of ceremony?

* * * * *

It is quite often, "MATER," that houses are lent for the purposes of wedding festivities. As you have no fixed abode, I presume it is not very important at which church or chapel the ceremony takes place. Why not, then, persuade some relation or friend of yours—and you must have some—to allow the entertaining to take place at their house, and the marriage at their place of worship?

* * * * *

If this is not possible, perhaps you can take rooms for a week at which you could entertain your guests, or, failing that, why not arrange your spread at a hotel? I quite see that you wish your daughter to appear favourably before her husband's friends, and you should try to arrange something of the kind I suggest.

The Sweetheart as Critic.

"GEORGE" is an actor, and engaged to a girl. For a long time she has been true to him; and has spoken very highly of his acting—a thing "GEORGE" is very sensitive about. The other day, however, somebody told "GEORGE" that he had heard that his girl often spoke very disparagingly about the way he played parts, and in the presence of people likely to be useful to him. Do I think he has a right to be offended with her, and to break off the match?

* * * * *

It certainly is a little hard to hear that one's own sweetheart has spoken unkindly about one's abilities. Criticism is all right, but it depends on the critic. If your sweetheart does not really think you act well, it was very wrong of her to speak to you in flattering terms about it. In any case, a loyal sweetheart ought to try to further her lover's interests behind his back by saying nice things about him.

* * * * *

To do otherwise is unkind. Whatever she may have said about your acting, however, should not alter your determination to do your best, and if other people really think you act well, I should not be discouraged by her opinions. If you can get any distinct case of her having spoken unkindly about you, bring it to her notice, and get her explanation. Don't go by hearsay.

Is She Flirting?

"FRED" is worried about his sweetheart. She is, he believes, very true to him, but often talks to other men, and in a very intimate way. He does not want to appear too jealous, but do I not think it wrong of her to act as she is doing?

* * * * *

If she assures you of her love for you, you ought to trust her. The other men may be old friends, whom she cannot drop just because she is engaged to you. You cannot expect her to give up all other society.

The Time for Second Marriage.

"I AM a widow, and my husband has been dead ten months," writes "TRIXY." "I am desperately in love with a widower, who is very kind and has offered to marry me. I should be very happy with him, but my friends object to my marrying again so soon. Do you think it is advisable to accept his offer?"

* * * * *

If you are so very much in love with him, you would be foolish to refuse his offer out of a consideration for your late husband's memory, which evidently you do not feel. Marry the widower, if you love him, but it would be in better taste to postpone the ceremony for a year, if he is willing to do so.

The Absent Friend's Girl.

"A FRIEND of mine," writes "IN DOUBT," "is a sailor, and has gone away for three years. A few weeks before he went he became attached to a girl. Since he has gone, she has stopped me in the street, and spoken to me very often. Is it right for me, a single young man, to stop and talk to her or pass her by? I like her very well, and wish she were mine She writes to her sweetheart every other week."

* * * * *

There is no harm in your speaking to her at all, but beware of making your meetings too frequent. You say you wish she were yours. Well, depend on it if you see too much of her, that feeling will increase, and you will be stealing your friend's sweetheart, which would be a cruel thing to do. The poor fellow would be thinking all the time she was true to him, only to realise that he had been betrayed by his friend. No, I should have as little as possible to do with the absent man's sweetheart, and the sooner you cease meetings with her the better.

Reading to Children.

"E. M. P." is in charge of several young children, and is expected to read stories to them. She herself dislikes children's stories as they are namby-pamby and old-fashioned. Can I recommend her a style of book which is an improvement on those she has in mind?

* * * * *

The books "E. M. P." has mentioned to me in her list are certainly old-fashioned, and as I look back to reading them as a child, they do seem to be a little "namby-pamby." But "E. M. P." should remember that children do not think that at the time. They love in their little hearts to find the good child getting the best of things, and the bad one the worst, which is generally the case in old-fashioned children's stories.

* * * * *

"E. M. P." should keep her reading to such stories, as a great deal depends on the way a young child is taught to look at good and evil from the very first. Whether they are boys or girls they will find out sooner or later what a bold, bad world it is, but it is better it should be later.

Cynthia

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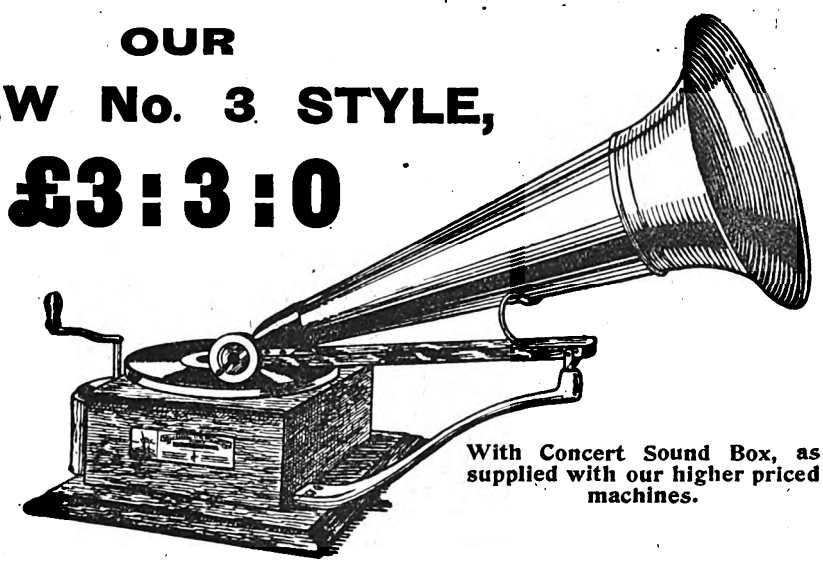

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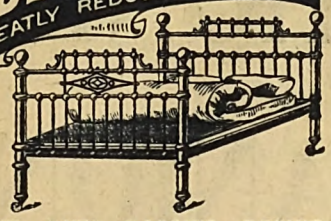

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SHORT STORIES

No. 763.] Week ending August 15th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

A PANEL OF THE DOOR WAS DASHED IN AND A HAND INSERTED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Power of the Past." See page 199.)

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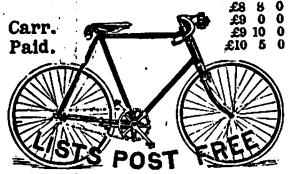

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George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

For four days Geldart has had nothing to eat or drink, and he accepts with alacrity Stanyer's invitation to dine with him. Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him. He thinks that at last he sees an opportunity of working a pet scheme over which he had fallen out with his son Eric and Boanerges Blagdon.

After the funeral of what are supposed to be the remains of George Geldart, the great man's will is read. With the exception of a few bequests to servants and friends, everything is left to Eric. Ronald is present at the reading of the will, and there is a scene between him and Eric, the latter being accused of foul play regarding the father's dealings with the younger brother and the reason that he is disinherited.

George Geldart was offended with his second son because he did not wish to enter the City business. Eric, whose one desire is to obtain gold and power, fosters his father's ill-feeling towards Ronald. Shortly after a stormy interview with his father, Eric is visited by Blagdon, who tells him that things are going wrong, and wants to know what is to be done in the matter of telling George Geldart.

"Go upstairs and see him—say nothing," replies Eric, and with scared face Blagdon goes out of the room, leaving Eric pacing to and fro, thinking. If the doctors would! Such things had been known. If he thought his son had robbed him—and he had two sons!

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Gulf that Separates.

"Eric!"

The door opened, a girl with a pale face and sad eyes glided into the room.

"Well, Clare?" he asked impatiently.

"Eric, dear, how your face hardens, how your voice hardens when I speak to you now. Ah, me, ah, me! Haven't you a smile for me, a kind word, how grudging you men are of those things when a woman has been all ungrudging."

An impatient exclamation was on his lips, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he suppressed it, and said:

"Clare, I am on the brink of a volcano."

"I know—I know, the deficit. Only a week from Wednesday when your father must know. Why not anticipate his discovering it and make a clean breast of it?"

"Bah, he'd turn me out of the firm, out of his house, cut me out of his will, you know he would."

"But what's the alternative?" the girl asked.

"Only one desperate step. Look here, Clare, you know he hoards money in thousands, in tens of thousands."

"Yes, it's part of the pet scheme he's been evolving for years, the system he talks about, but never tells about."

"Yes," said Eric with a bitter sneer, and he tapped his forehead. "He wants the firm to forsake its legitimate business for his harum-scarum, mad-brained folly, wants Blagdon and me to pledge ourselves to adopt it in sheer reliance on his testimony to its merits."

"But, Eric, he's very wise, a genius in these matters. Why do you thwart him?"

"You know what genius is allied to? Our concern is sound. Though Blagdon and I have gone a bit wrong in outside operations that doesn't affect the soundness of the firm; if we let the house involve itself in speculation foreign to its purpose then our sheet anchor's gone. No, no, you'll help, you must. You have access to the keys of his private safe, you must get me those keys."

"But Eric, that is treachery!"

"Clare, what is a wife's first duty, to love, honour, and obey!"

"But I am not your wife—despite your promises!"

"You have my promises, and I will keep them. If you give earnest of your willingness to obey, get me those keys."

His will was her law. That night, when all the house was fast asleep, Clare Armitage, its adopted daughter, the confidant and amanuensis of its master, took to Eric Geldart the key of the private safe in the library towards which apartment, with cat-like tread, the pair descended. The safe duly opened, from within an inner drawer Eric lifted a roll of crisp, flimsy paper.

"The old man's hoard!" he whispered, and with eager, trembling fingers he flicked over and counted the notes.

"Eric," said Clare, "you won't keep them—all?"

"No, not all," he answered sententiously, but even as he spoke he pushed back and closed the empty drawer.

"You've taken all," she whispered, her heart reproaching her for her ingratitude towards the head of the house, impelled by her love for the elder son of it.

"As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he answered under his breath. "It was the only way!"

"But, Eric, you are closing the safe. Why not leave it open? Can't we leave marks for forcing and wrenching, as though it had been broken open? It would be better for him to think that thieves, I mean real thieves—— Oh, God, but that's what we are—strange thieves had robbed him!"

"No, no," he answered curtly, "I have a better plan than that!" He placed a selected few in another pocket, then made his way like a thief in the night to his brother's empty room, and from the smaller batch he took certain of the notes, placing them in his brother's pocket-book, others in the drawer of a small cabinet, then he withdrew.

And Clare, following him like a shadow, just as close and just as silently, and watching every movement with horror dilated eyes, when they had left the room, whispered in anguish:

"Oh, Eric, Eric, this is too bad, too bad! I shall never look Ronald in the face again! Eric, we must undo what we have done. Oh, for the love of Heaven! While there is time!"

"No, no!" he answered. "It is too late, there is no time." For even as he spoke they heard the click of a pass key in the front door, and his brother's footstep in the hall, and on tip-toe the scoundrel and his myrmidon went their respective ways.

On the evening of the following day, George Geldart, after applying himself in his library to the abstruse calculations which had for some time past seemed to possess him, went to the safe muttering:

"Ten thousand pounds! Why, we could start it with a thousand, a hundred—the fools!"

He flung open the safe, pulled back the door, and gasped:

"Why—why—why, what's this?" Quickly he opened and shut drawer after drawer, then sank into a chair, gripping his head in his hands, and muttering, "Robbed, robbed, robbed!"

But how—by whom? He scanned the safe narrowly. There was no trace of violence, no mark of tool or implement. He reflected on whom could suspicion with any semblance of reason fall? His servants were faithful, tried and trusted. Clare, Eric, Ronald? He dismissed impatiently the thought of coupling them with the affair, even for a moment. But he was a man swift of idea, prompt of action. In the interests of the innocent themselves it was best that those least suspected should be subjected to investigation as rigid and as searching as those who haply might have been tempted.

And Eric Geldart, noting his father's preoccupation, and his strange questions, boldly challenged him, so boldly indeed that the old man blurted out the truth.

"Then," replied Eric, "it is only fitting that search should be made from the highest to the lowest. I am the eldest son of the house, I insist the search begins with me," and, despite his father's protestation of absolute reliance in his innocence, he insisted then and there, leading his father to his room, and going through every desk, trunk, drawer, and article of clothing.

And Clare, too, professing wonder at their quest, and informed as to its nature, insisted on the like inquisition. As to Ronald, "Oh, well," Eric urged, "Ronald is absent on one of his jaunts, it would hardly be fair to make a search in his absence," and his father answered, "True."

Only later on, when old Geldart, noting a book absent from the library shelves, a breach of his inexorable law, had demanded who had taken it, and had been told that Ronald once again in this respect had sinned, his father, fuming with rage, strode upstairs to his room, searching high and low for the missing book.

And in his quest, lifting the flap of Ronald's writing-desk, discovered with a cry of horror, not the missing book, but that which for a thousand-fold its value he would not have discovered there.

A moment later Ronald entered and turned a look of inquiry on his father.

"I came here," said George Geldart, "to search for a missing book, little thinking I should find here the missing money."

"Father, what do you mean?" demanded Ronald sternly.

"I mean what I say, what I see," and he pointed to the incriminating note. "Now, sir, where are the rest? Now that you are here I insist upon your room being subject to the same rigid investigation as Clare's and Eric's, with their assent, even at their own request."

"But, sir," said Ronald, "you must tell me first that you are certain. Good Heavens! Is it possible that you, my father—But there, search if you will!"

And George Geldart searched, with the result that in a drawer he found two other notes, each for a hundred pounds, in the pocket of a jacket another still, with the result that after

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a violent scene, which cost both father and son more agony than either had experienced before, the younger man went from his father's house, vowing never to look upon his father's face again until he called him back to ask his pardon.

Next day George Geldart sent for his solicitor to recast his will.

So far Eric Geldart's evil scheme was working as smoothly as could be expected. But even yet they were not all complete. A viler, crueller design he had conceived was still unaccomplished.

Another surreptitious visit, not this time to the safe, but to a cash-box in his father's escritoire, and he possessed himself of yet another roll of notes, part of that strange hoard his father had been for long accumulating.

And amongst them found, to his surprise, a slip of blue paper bearing a brick-red bill stamp.

"Hullo!" he chuckled, "Boney's been tapping the old man for fifteen hundred, I must make him redeem this at a discount."

* * * * *

George Geldart waxed enthusiastic. That was his way on one particular subject, the subject Blagdon had broached, strangely enough the very one that as a rule he shunted.

"Look here, sir," he said, rapping the table. "This is where the Americans get ahead of us. They're not so tied down by conventions. Why, in America there's scarcely a man of any eminence who hasn't been half a dozen things.

"Look at old Abe Lincoln, Stonewall Jackson, Garfield, McKinley, look at Roosevelt, writer, soldier, politician. Men out there try their hands at as many implements as come along, till they find the one that suits them best. Over here a man mustn't take a certain step because he's too young, another because he is too old; over there a man jumps just when he thinks he will, and that's when he thinks the right time has come.

"The old man's hoard!" he whispered, fingering the notes with eager, trembling fingers.

"But over here"—then scorn possessed him—"I suggest to my son and my other partner a new idea in the way of business—Bah, I've no patience with them, 'It isn't in our line!' 'It's out of our groove!' and so on.

"That's the British way, we go jogging and jogging along in a circle, and then we wonder why people who are living in their own era, their own day, their own hour, leave us behind, and when I express my determination to go my own road, my son, who of course knows more than his father, hints more or less politely, that I am too old."

And so they shepherded him to the track they had in mind.

"Of course you have your own ideas," said the doctor, "you think even at your time of life you could do better in a new line than that you've worked a lifetime in?"

"I don't think at all, I know that with co-operation I could make in one year more money than I've made in all my life in produce in Mincing Lane. I have a secret, a secret so valuable that the fabled Philosopher's Stone would, if it existed, be as dross to it. I can't work it alone, or else I'd venture.

"I'd take the plunge without a moment's hesitation, and while they were toiling and moiling and scraping and screwing and grinding their tens and their hundreds out of beggarly microscopic margins, I'd glean it in, gather it in!" And the old man opened his arms as though enfolding to his heart his sheaves of golden grain.

"And your system's infallible?"

"Absolutely."

"But neither Mr. Blagdon nor your son Eric is quite insensible to commercial advantages, although your second boy is a bit of a visionary. Do they indorse your system?"

The old man hesitated. "They want to test it, but it requires no test. They want to know the secret before they buy it."

"Is that unnatural in business?"

"Not as between strangers, but between men who know each other, who trust each other——"

Suddenly he paused. Why was he launching into confidences with this man, whom, somehow, he never liked, and why was this man so inquisitive? He took up a newspaper. Blagdon and MacQuoich exchanged glances, then the latter, rising, said:

"I'll rejoin Miss Clare in the drawing-room, perhaps in my absence you will be able to bring your partner to your way of thinking."

Pushing aside the *portière* he opened the door, walked through and closed it, then opened it ajar and stood there, listening.

"I wish you wouldn't bring up business matters before third parties," said Geldart testily; "I don't care for that man, anyway, can't think why on earth he called."

"Well, I like that," said Blagdon, "seeing that you've been monopolising the conversation for the last half hour as you generally do. By Jove, Geldart, when you're in the stirrups on your Rosinante, tilting at your windmills, you're as oblivious to the rest of the world as the other Don Quixote!"

"Blagdon!" said the other, "be foolish if you must, but don't be rude."

"I was about to make the same remark."

"Mr. Blagdon, if you forget you are my guest I am bound to bear in mind I am your host."

"Yes," said the other, looking at his watch, "for a few minutes longer. Why did you send for me?"

"You know very well, I told you in my letter."

"I don't."

"I told you in my letter."

"You said, come over to my place on Sunday afternoon."

"Yes, and I added 'to arrange about your note of hand.'"

"My what?"

"Your note of hand that I mentioned in my letter."

"You didn't mention any note of hand, and I don't know what you're driving at."

Geldart passed his hand across his forehead, and Blagdon went on:

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"Look here, my friend, take my advice, break yourself of your habit of launching out about your wonderful system, because it leads you to dream."

"Now, what the dickens do you mean? You know very well that your promissory note, days of grace and all, ran out yesterday, and I sent for you to learn what further time you wanted."

"My promissory note?"

"Yes, for fifteen hundred pounds."

"Geldart, what on earth are you dreaming about, raving about, I never gave a promissory note to any man in my life!"

"I think you're right so far, one of us is indeed raving."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys, then crossing the room to an escritoire, unlocked and flung open a drawer, saying: "I'll show you your own handwriting, perhaps that will convince you better than your partner's word."

"Show me my note of hand for fifteen hundred pounds or any other sum given to you or any other man, and I'll redeem it within twenty-four hours and pay an equal sum to any charity you like to name."

George Geldart looked his partner for a moment in the eyes, withdrew from an open draw an envelope, tore it apart—it was empty! Snatching out the drawer he threw its contents on the desk, rummaged amongst them with trembling hands, then clenching those hands, he faced his partner.

"Gone! gone! gone! and you—you——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" the other laughed, "come, Don Quixote, once again it's only a windmill you are tilting at."

"The note you gave me isn't there, but it's been stolen as the other notes were stolen—and you know by whom—and you're in league with him—I see it all; I've been suspecting all along, but now I know."

"You know what? What do you dare to say?"

"I say that you—the man I've trusted and befriended, are a liar, a traitor, a swindler, and a thief! Ah!"

A cry bubbled up in his swelling throat, the veins stood out upon his forehead like tangled wires. He staggered, threw up his arms, spun round and with a crash fell at the feet of the false friend who had betrayed him.

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor, gliding into the room and looking in Blagdon's hang-dog face, and instantly he knelt beside the prostrate man.

"What is it? Apoplexy?" gasped the other.

"No! no! Fling up that window, stand back, give him air!" cried the doctor, swiftly unbuttoning his clothes and opening his shirt and vest, he placed his hand within that vest; then after a few seconds, with the other's help, he lifted the huge grey head a little. It fell back heavily.

"I didn't mean this," whispered Blagdon, "I didn't think I should bring on a fit."

"You haven't!" said the doctor in a low tone, looking up into the face distraught and distorted with terror, "He is dead—and you have killed him!"

FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Face in the Crowd.

Eric Geldart's chance had come.

For years he had aspired to Parliamentary honours, had figured prominently in political controversies, losing no opportunity of appearing before the public, whether in the columns of a newspaper or on the planks of a platform.

And now at last he was invited to contest the constituency of Little Claverton in the interests of the Progressive-Conservative Party, a new, small, but by no means insignificant section, composed mainly of malcontents recruited from either of the great divisions and who had by their activity and generalship recently forced themselves into prominence.

Neither side particularly liked the new party, but both were remarkably civil to it, as it was numerically strong enough to be dangerous in the event of a close division.

That was its strength, the strength it knew and unceasingly exerted, concealing its purpose until the last possible moment, and, like the guerilla band it was, harassing hosts immeasurably superior.

Outside the house the members of the new party were all things to all men, assuring the Conservative elector that the ancient institutions he prized were the especial objects of their solicitude, and the most advanced Radical that the "Pro-Con" Party, as the band of political guerillas had been dubbed, was going all the way with him, only a trifle ahead.

Principles so elastic suited Eric Geldart admirably, and having for some considerable time attached himself to the party in its operations outside St. Stephen's, he had finally been selected to contest Little Claverton in its behalf, that borough specially commending itself to the party as a likely one on account of the equality of its ultra-Tory and advanced Radical sections, as evidenced by its poll at the two previous elections.

So to Little Claverton he went, canvassed it, flooded it with addresses, stumped it, fly-posted all its available space with placards in blue and red as distinguished from the Tory candidates's which were blue, and the Radical's which were red only, and in all these and yet other ways warning the Conservative elector of the recklessness of its Radical candidate's programme, and the Radical elector of the dangerously retrograde tendencies of the Tory candidate's avowed policy.

And then he won Lord Lynton to his side. This was his master-stroke, his ace of trumps.

By a convenient fiction peers of the realm are forbidden to influence Parliamentary elections, but Lupus, fifteenth Baron Lynton, Lord of the Manor of Little Claverton, tenant in tail of Lynton Court and the magnificent estates surrounding it, and freeholder of nine-tenths of the little market town of Little Claverton, usually made his fiat and sent a good round Tory politician of crusted port wine principles to St. Stephens, and his opponent about his business.

But it had happened that Lord Lynton had quarrelled with his party. Another peer had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of the county, a position Lynton had coveted, and to express his indignation, his lordship was prepared, if necessary, to recommend his tenants to vote for the most rampant Radical whoever denounced lords and landlords.

But here was a middle course! By supporting with his influence the Progressive-Conservative candidate, he was able to deliver "a nasty one" at his whilom friends, without conferring any benefit upon his old opponents. And so it came to pass that Eric Geldart, his programme and his policy, were made right welcome at Lynton Court.

And thus it came to pass that Eric Geldart met Madeleine Lorraine. And, having met her, made a vow that he would spare no means, fair or unfair, to win her for his own.

For she was fair, and fresh, and sweet; tender as April, bright as June, so fair that she need not have despaired of a coronet, had she not been heiress to a peerage in her own right, albeit, that title was all but a barren one—her father being as poor as proud.

And Eric Geldart, who loved glitter in general and, above all, the glitter of a coronet, and the be-all and end-all of whose existence was his own advantage, said to himself, when first spell-bound he gazed on her, "If I can but win her, I must win all the rest."

And so he set to work to win his double prize; courted his electors as assiduously as he courted Madeleine, hampered in neither suits by a slavish regard for fact.

Once or twice her father prevailed upon her to occupy a seat beside the candidate whirling through the streets of the quaint old town on a motor-car gay with colours.

Impelled by the same influence she occupied with other ladies a seat upon Eric Geldart's platform, and he was glad to reflect that on that particular occasion he made his ablest speech, fenced most successfully with his hecklers, and undoubtedly made the strongest impression he had succeeded in effecting on the constituents. That meeting over, he conducted her to her carriage.

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"You excelled yourself to-night," she said, extending him her dainty hand.

He pressed it a moment in a lingering hold, and answered in a whisper, looking straight into her wonderful violet eyes, "I had such inspiration."

"Of course," she said, "the enthusiasm of the meeting."

"No," he answered, "your presence. I think, Miss Madeleine, with you to cheer me, I could win life's battle all along the line."

She paled for a moment, her fair brow knitted with a puzzled expression; then without a word, she gathered up her train, entered the carriage, and was gone.

At last the polling day arrived. Little Claverton was ablaze with bunting and excitement. Eric Geldart and his committee were here, there, and everywhere, rallying undecided voters, marshalling the faithful, rallying the wavering.

Uneasiness began to reign in the camps of the Reds and the Blues, who noted their respective colours combined too ubiquitously for their satisfaction, and then, at last, candidates, committee-men, counters, officials, and all were assembled in Little Claverton Town Hall, which was surrounded by a multitude, alternately cheering and groaning, singing party songs, yelling party cries.

At last upon that crowd there fell a hush when out on the balcony stepped Mr. Mayor, to announce that Mr. Eric Cosmo Geldart was returned Member of Parliament for Little Claverton.

A great shout went up, greater yet when the numbers were announced, the victorious candidate having polled 5,215 votes, and a greater babel than ever arose when the remaining numbers were declared, and it was found that the Progressive-Conservative majority was only a matter of fifty over that of the Radical candidate, between whom and his Conservative opponent the difference was only twenty-five.

Whirling his overcoat round he flung it full at the heads of the maddened horses.

When at last that clamour had somewhat subsided, Eric Geldart, M.P., stepped out upon the balcony to thank his supporters, to shake hands with his opponents, and to propose a vote of thanks to the returning officer.

Exultant with victory, he stood there looking down upon the sea of faces, drinking in its roar of clamour, like an intoxicating draught. Then, his gaze roving over that wide sea, there upon its fringe they rested upon a face looking up at him, as it were, out of the gloom, with a gaze of stern reproach.

And there, in the view of all, he clapped one hand on his heart, waved the other in the air, and fell back heavily in the arms of those around him, exclaiming:

"Father—father—mercy!"

SIXTH CHAPTER.

Ronald Plays the Hero.

Ronald Geldart left the house that he had once called home with his heart overflowing with gall and wormwood.

Life itself, the world around him, seemed to be all bitterness, with rampant falsehood crushing with tyrant heel the helpless truth. Yes! Bitterness filled his heart even against the father he had loved.

Up to a point there had been in his heart no bitterness, even at the end. Beside his father's coffin he had thrown himself in a tempest of tears, but that posthumous voice delivering its unjust sentence in the hard, cold phrasing of the law, had deadened all remorse, all regret, awakening anger and resentment.

His father had died unforgiving and unjust, had left him disinherited—so let it be, he had chosen not only to deprive him of his patrimony, but to leave it on record that he had done so deliberately, therefore he owed him nothing save his being—an unasked gift—owed his memory no gratitude.

He had shaken from his shoes the dust of his father's house. A sudden bitter resolve swelled in his heart, he would divest himself even of his father's name. Yes, of the name borne by Eric, Eric, who had always hated him, conspired against him, whose lifelong dread had been lest he should not gain the larger half. He had the whole now, let him keep it—all—all, he, Ronald, would not share with him even the abstract advantage of a name.

His heart was sore as well as bitter, for a man is cut to the quick when his own kith wound him, the winter wind of ingratitude is never more keen than when it blows from homeward.

No, not even the name, the only thing his father had left him, and even as to that had left him not of choice. That father had stripped him of his patrimony, the empty name he would divest himself of, his brother grudged him even that—as he grudged him a brother's share—let him take that too!

Absorbed in his meditations he strode moodily along.

"Hallo, Geldart!" a cheery acquaintance hailed him in passing. With his head bent, his hands clasped behind him, he strode along, shut his ears, his heart, to the sound of the name he had determined to abandon.

"What a black-looking brute!" said his friend's friend. "By Jove, if a chap cut me like that I should remember, and I should remember to forget him."

"You bet your life I shall," said Geldart's friend, or rather his friend no longer, "he's no loss, there are one or two very queer stories about concerning him."

"Was that his governor who died the other day?"

"Yes, and they say the cause was connected with the shock of finding that that surly brute had mixed the old man's money with his own, and yet Ronnie Geldart was once as bright and breezy as Brighton."

Meanwhile the object of the above remarks went on his way, feeling a strange, morbid satisfaction in having disowned the name of those who had disowned him. And, all of a sudden, he was awakened from his abstracted gloom by a sound of excited shouting.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" and another sound, the clatter of gallop-

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ing hoofs. Looking up he noticed everyone gazing in the same direction, many people with paling faces.

Then he noted the cabs and carriages, carts and other vehicles in the roadway pulling in sharply to either side, and away down along the vista of the street there came, careering at a mad gallop, two carriage horses, their ears back, their heads down, stretched out like the steeds of a Roman chariot in a mad stampede. They had got their bits, they were bolting!

In vain the hatless man, with a white face, leaning back on his box, strained at the reins till they were tense as wire, looking ahead with the fear of death in his white face; this time the brute beasts and not the man were masters.

And in the smart brougham there sat a slender girl, her face set and white, but rather with the dignity of a marble statue than with the pallor of a craven terror. One hand she had upon each side of the carriage, but there was nothing to be done, to leap would have been to seek not safety but certain death, and so she sat there impassive to rigidity as one who, face to face with the Grim Monster, seemed to say, "Well, then, so be it, I am ready!"

There was no time to think, barely time to act. Ronald Geldart wildly bounded into the centre of the road, threw up both his arms, but the maddened horses came on, straight at him. Swiftly he slipped his arms out of his overcoat, whirled it round, then flung it full at the heads of the bolting horses. For a moment, blinded, they swerved, that was his chance! With a wild leap he seized the offside bridle, wrenched the plunging horse aside, checked him.

The brute reared up on his hind legs, taking Ronald off his feet; there was a desperate struggle between horse and man, and the odds were on the horse. Only just at that moment one of those prosaic heroes, who, enrolled beneath the banner of Peace, aid her to win her victories no less glorious than those of War, rushed to Ronald's aid.

"Hold on, sir," shouted the constable, as he seized the nearside horse's rein and ear, "I've got this one!"

And Ronald held on. Just at that moment the brute with whom he wrestled, rearing once more on his hind legs, lost them, slipped and fell heavily with a crash, and Ronald went down under him, while a groan arose from all who saw. "Poor, brave fellow, he's killed!"

But by this time the coachman had slipped off from the box, the traces were cut, the plunging beasts secured, the one that had fallen on Ronald raised and led away. They lifted the unconscious man and carried him to an adjacent surgery.

Half an hour or so later he emerged from his swoon feeling he had been concerned in a combined earthquake and volcanic eruption, his head was bandaged, his right wrist was in splints, and he was dimly conscious of numbness and pain all over.

A fair face was bending over him—a face lighted by the most wonderful eyes into which he had ever looked, a pair of dreamy, drowning eyes, that seemed to him like sapphire lamps veiled by sweeping lashes. She who gazed upon him bent her stately, shapely little head, crowned with its wealth of red-gold hair, that framed it like a halo.

Then she rose and turned to go.

"Poor fellow," she said, "I am afraid it will be some time before he is conscious.

"Let every care be taken of him, and when he recovers ask him to send his name and address to, or call at Lorraine House. I am sure my father, Lord Lynton, would like to add his thanks to mine."

She glided from the room, attended by the doctor, who, returning, said to his assistant:

"I think he's asleep now, best leave him for a quarter of an hour or so, Nature's sweet restorer will do more for him than we can do. Wonder who he is, I don't like to ransack his pockets for papers, seems mean, we'll find out when he wakes."

The baize door closed behind them. A few minutes later Ronald Geldart rose with difficulty, resumed his overcoat, took his hat, and limped out of the room down the stairs, and out into the street.

He meant to bury his identity, he was not going to have his name bandied about in this paper and that, so that she of those sapphire eyes should learn that the man who had gone to her aid was the Ronald Geldart who rested under the shadow of an unjust ban and an unmerited suspicion.

Nevertheless, an instinct within him whispered that though a lapse of days, perhaps of hours, might efface him from her memory, her sweet presence, her graciousness, her loveliness, would be with him a happy recollection far longer.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter.

There were times when to George Geldart it seemed that his mortal life in that identity had really ceased, and that the doctrine of transmigration of consciousness of soul was being furnished with proof and instance in himself.

It was a strange, uncanny experience to be meeting in the City and elsewhere people he had known familiarly, and be passed unrecognised.

True he had to some extent disguised himself by covering his round double chin with a peaked beard, but he felt, not without a cold thrill, that even had he not done this, it was unnecessary, that even had he appeared to these people "in his habit as he lived," he would have remained unrecognised.

George Geldart to them was dead and buried.

A strange experience it was too, when taking up the *City Press* after luncheon he read an account of his funeral, together with a synopsis of his "career of usefulness and philanthropy," setting out the position he had occupied on the boards of City companies and benevolent institutions.

There was a beggar man to whom he had been good in the way of alms, cast-off clothes, and so on, and it was to George Geldart a study to observe the different expression on that man's face as he now passed him; the absence of the air of expectancy, the beaming cordiality, the effusive gratitude. To a certain extent it was healthier, for now the coppers, the only coins he could afford, were received with a condescending toleration, none the less because the truer.

One reflection consoled and sustained him. He was no longer George Geldart; in the centre of the swim, folks could not say that he owed everything of the present to his past and to the name he bore; the commercial instinct and faculty were strong within him, all the stronger and the more invigorated by virtue of his circumstances.

He had set himself to work practising with small means on a small scale the operations he had formerly carried on on a large one, and it pleased him to prove how true were the rules of the game, how irresistible the sterling qualities which in the main go to make a successful man, and to recognise that, given time and average opportunity, he was competent to achieve, from his new standpoint, a fortune and a position quite equal to that he had left behind him in that other life.

His business arrangement with Stanyer worked without a hitch. Every week day from ten to five and till two on Saturdays, Geldart repaired to the little office on the second floor of Crosby Square, E.C., as punctually as his employer could have expected or desired had he been present to check his time.

But he was not there. By the mail after that chance interview with the friend of his youth, he had returned to Australia, leaving Geldart with little more to do than to mark the fluctuations of the Share Market, to report such occurrences as were noteworthy in connection with the same, and every now and then to attend Stanyer's brokers and give instructions as to the carrying out of various transactions.

(Another instalment next week.)

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The Power of the Past.

A Little Romance of Love and a Bygone Crime.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

PART THE FIRST.

The Past is Unveiled.

"You won't do as I wish? You won't even ask her?"

"I—I can't, dad."

The answer was given gently yet firmly. If the words were broken by a slight stammer, it was that of pity rather than indecision. The speaker—a vigorous, youthful figure, in light summer garments and a Panama hat—looked gravely at his questioner, a man short, square, middle-aged, and florid. The latter was striding erratically about a small though lofty room, whose many and regular angles, and opposing, diamond-paned windows, showed that it was one of the apartments contained in a tower of octagonal shape.

The room was handsomely decorated but somewhat bare of furniture. A big pedestal-desk, a Turkish carpet, a lounge chair or two, a smoker's table, an oaken cabinet of narrow drawers, and a heap of novels, were all that diversified the polished floor.

On the mantelpiece, under a glass shade, was a gilt and plaster model of a huge nugget, flanked by other cases with specimens of gold-bearing ore. Outside the tall, deeply-set windows blazed the hot noon of an August day, brooding over a pleasant English landscape.

The elder man halted suddenly, plunging his hands into his coat-pockets, and setting a strong jaw under a grey moustache. His eyes were hard, and his whole expression desperate and bitter in the extreme.

"Dick," he exclaimed fiercely, "you don't know what this marriage means to me, you can't. But you do know, you have known for years, that I have set my heart on you and Evelyn Hatton being man and wife. Why should you back out now, why should you set up your will against mine?"

He paused, obviously seeking to moderate his anger.

"Evelyn is pretty enough," he went on, "isn't she, and good enough, and well-educated enough? I've seen to that. I'm a rough diamond myself, but I know that a young fellow of your position and breeding wants a real, slap-up lady for a wife. Well, Evie's all that. And you like her, you've always let me see that."

"Y-yes," faltered the other, tracing the pattern of the carpet with a boot-toe.

"Then," said his father, with a return of angry desperation, "I'm not going to let you play old Harry with my plans at this time of day. You hear me, my lad? I've struggled and fought and starved—and—and other things that needn't concern you—to make my boy rich and a gentleman. I've given you your fling; you've had your college and your university and your travels. And now you've got to come to heel for once in your life and do what I tell you. And that is, ask Evelyn Hatton to marry you. You shall, as sure as my name is John Jardine."

He stepped up to his son and laid a hand on the younger man's shoulder. A nervous anxiety showed itself in his keen, masterful visage.

"Dick," he added, "you'll do it—you'll give your old dad his way for once, won't you?"

Richard Jardine turned his hat about in his fingers. "Dad," he said, "she—she doesn't love me."

His father started back.

"Pshaw!" he cried, "absurd! Of course she loves you. What girl wouldn't? You're young, good-looking, good-tempered, well-bred, and you've a rich dad—any girl is going to snap at Dick Jardine. Ask her, my boy, ask her—I'll bet you a thousand pounds to a penny she says, 'Dick, I'm yours.'"

Dick winced.

"I believe she would say 'Yes,' dad," he owned; "but it wouldn't be out of love, because—because I know she doesn't love me. Yet she would say 'Yes,' and why? Think of the obligations you have placed her under. Without their having the least claim upon you, unless being the wife and child of an old acquaintance be a claim, you rescued her and her mother from poverty, you brought them to Lazonby, you have given them for years an ample income and a home almost at your own gates. It was noble of you, dad, it was princely, but how now can she refuse to give herself to me—your son?"

"Refuse, of course she can't," said John Jardine sharply.

"I would rather she refused me," answered his son steadily, "than that she said 'Yes' out of gratitude. If she were a blood-relation of yours, like—like Hector Fane—she—she need not feel so bound by your kindness. But she does, she must feel bound, and as I know she does not love me, I cannot ask her to marry me. I am sorry, dad, but I cannot, I—I will not."

John Jardine bit his lip—so savagely that a crimson drop or two stained his large, even teeth, and his eyes flashed.

"You won't," he said, "then I have done with you. You have dealt me the deadliest blow it was in the power of any living soul to deal me. You have denied me the realisation of the one ambition for which I have lived, you have turned the happiness of my old age into dust and ashes—you, my only son! May everything you do in the future be fraught with sorrow for you; may your life be bitter and hateful to you, as you have made mine to me."

Richard Jardine shivered.

"Dad, dad, for Heaven's sake!" he cried, "you don't comprehend what you are saying. I would give my life to please you, and you know it. But I will not marry a woman who does not love me; that would be to do her a hideous and irreparable wrong, which would bring other and worse wrongs in its train."

His father took a hasty step to the door of the room and flung it wide.

"Go!" he said, and his florid face twitched as he uttered the word—"go, and never, so long as you live, let me set eyes on you again."

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The young man at whom this abrupt command was hurled, remained, as though transfixed by astonishment. Slowly a certain proud self-confidence kindled in his bearing, and, with a mute inclination of his head, he moved from the apartment.

John Jardine stood gazing after him, then, with a motion like that of a despairing woman, he wrung his hands, and an involuntary moan of uncontrollable anguish escaped him.

Covering his face with his palms, he sat down at his desk. There was something pitiable about the absolute collapse of the burly form, the quiver of the large and sinewy fingers, and the droop of the masterful grey head. Finally he drew a sibilant breath and looked up; his tanned countenance had grown strangely pale.

"My one chance," he muttered—"my one chance of happiness and peace of mind. And it is Dick who robs me of it. If I forgive him may——"

He left the sentence unfinished. The murmur of voices had reached his ears; one of them was soft yet brightly musical, the other harsher and masculine. John Jardine rose and passed out into the hall.

At the sunlit opening of the great doors a couple of horses were waiting, and the dismounted riders, a man and a woman, were crossing towards him. The woman, in her dark and trailing habit, was unmistakably young and charming, with generous brown eyes, smooth braids of brown hair, and a delicate, proud little profile.

Her companion was fair—almost colourlessly fair; his moustache and hair were ashen in their fairness. Pale blue eyes, dazzling teeth, and a secretive, half-cynical smile, it was of these that anyone who saw Hector Fane carried away an abiding recollection. On the whole, he was a handsome, if a selfish type, and his smart riding-clothes showed a well-knit, indolent frame.

John Jardine's glance went past him to the figure in the sweeping black gown.

"So you have had your ride, Evelyn," he said awkwardly.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Jardine," he was told; "but we—we missed you and Dick. Have you quite finished talking this wonderful 'business'?"

She spoke with a gay simplicity that yet had a vague embarrassment in it.

John Jardine avoided her gaze.

"Quite," he said, "with Dick. But now I want a word with you. Hector will excuse us, I am sure."

Hector Fane assented politely. "Oh, certainly," he declared, and turned away with easy nonchalance as Evelyn Hatton passed into the curiously-shaped room on whose threshold John Jardine had been standing. The latter followed her, and the door closed.

A low whistle stole from Hector Fane's lips, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"What does that mean?" he demanded, under his breath. "Dick stays in all morning to talk 'business,' and then my precious uncle wants a word with her. We—we must make certain."

His slow, cynical smile flickered over his features, and he strolled off. His destination was a large, book-lined room, that opened from the hall a few yards away.

Hector Fane entered it loungingly, shut himself in, drew a chair to the great writing-table, and took a sheet of paper and a pen. He trifled with them for a minute, then laid them down, and springing up, went to a heavy door on the further side of the library. Massive as it seemed, it gave access to nothing more than a deep cupboard.

Hector Fane stepped into it; it—like the library—was lined with books, but smaller and more valuable ones. A gleam of light was visible at the back. There was a second door to it. Hector Fane pressed close to this and leant down.

Only the thickness of a few painted planks separated him from the octagonal room that was John Jardine's "den." Thanks to that fact and a favouring keyhole, he could see and hear almost all that was passing. The quickness with which he took up his position of vantage suggested that he was not occupying it for the first time.

John Jardine, he perceived, was standing at the oaken cabinet of drawers. Hard by, in the lounge-chair, her hands—in their leather riding-gauntlets—trifling with her whip, sat Evelyn Hatton. While the unsuspected eavesdropper peered and listened, John Jardine turned and came across the room, a folded document of some sort in his grasp.

"Evie," he said, and his voice shook a little, "I must call you that once more, as I hoped, in the end, to have the right to call you. But when you have heard what I am going to tell you, you will hate to think that I ever called you by a pet name, that I ever touched your hand."

Evelyn Hatton looked up at him astonished and startled. John Jardine motioned to the paper in his fingers.

"It's all written down here," he continued; "it was signed and witnessed years ago. And yet I hoped that no eyes but mine would ever see it; I hoped to be able to burn it on your wedding-day. I have lived in that hope, and now the hope is taken from me."

He unfolded the paper, and refolded it again.

"I'd rather tell it you," he said. "Listen! Ten years ago I, John Jardine, became famous, as everybody knows, by reason of having discovered the great Pike Hill gold mine. It's a lie, I didn't discover it, your father, David Hatton, did."

John Jardine made a quick gesture; an expression of horror had blanched Evelyn Hatton's face.

"Don't, my lass, don't," he begged, "it's not as bad as that. I did him no bodily harm, thank Heaven. He was dying when I found him. Oh, yes, I told you and your mother the truth when I said I had known your father, and when I told you that he must be dead, I was telling you what, alas, I knew to be true."

He paused. Hector Fane, crouching in his recess, had displaced an unsteadily poised book; the volume made a muffled sound in falling. John Jardine hesitated an instant at the noise, then, satisfied of its unimportance, went on.

"Your father was a clever geologist. He had found the Pike Hill Reef, worked out the main dip of it, and bought up, in a false name, a lot of shallow claims above it. On his way to the coast to raise capital for sinking his shafts he was attacked, robbed, and badly wounded. He died in my arms, died of his injuries, blessing me for having promised to secure to you your rights in his discovery, which he had confided to me, after binding me to fidelity with a terrible oath."

Evelyn Hatton rose involuntarily. John Jardine fumbled with the document he held.

"That oath I broke," he pursued, wretchedly, "I—I had had shocking bad luck myself up till then, and—and I wanted to be rich for Dick's sake. I stole your father's claims—*your* claims—and worked them as my own. It was in getting down on to the reef I found the famous Jardine nugget."

He pointed to the plaster model on the mantelpiece.

"That's all there is to say," he added. "I am rich with your money. I am a low, mean thief, a thief who has stolen from the widow and the orphan. I have hated myself for it always. If I could have persuaded Dick to marry you you need never have known, that's what I've lived in hopes of."

The unseen listener, kneeling in the dark with an ear and an eye alternately to the keyhole of the double-doored cupboard, frowned thoughtfully. Evelyn Hatton had bowed her head and was blushing a tremulous rosy-red.

"But it wasn't to be," said John Jardine. "I laid my commands on the lad, and he defies me—his own father!—to my face; won't ask you at any price, because you love someone else, and he knows it. So my plan's busted, and I can't make things right as I had counted on being able to do, without betraying myself. That's why I've turned to and told you the truth."

Evelyn Hatton's brown head drooped lower and lower.

"Does—does Dick know?" she asked.

"No," answered John Jardine drily, "not why I wanted him to marry you."

The gauntleted hands plucked at the lash of the riding-switch.

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"I'm—I'm so glad," faltered its owner nervously. She looked up quickly. "Mr. Jardine," she said, "I—I suppose you did very wrong. But you—you were thinking about Dick, weren't you, and you really gave us all we needed, mother and I. And you—you were kind to father when he was dying. So please keep the money, and don't say a word to Dick."

John Jardine gasped. "I couldn't do that," he told her. "You've got to have the money back, and as Dick won't carry out my plan of getting it back to you and keeping it for himself at the same time, we'll have to take the straight road. There were only those two ways for it."

Evelyn made an imperious little gesture.

"Please," she said, "I won't let you speak another word about it. Let everything be as it is at present. I'm sure it's best; it—it would be very, very, very, cruel to tell mother after all these years. I wish you'd never told me."

She checked herself on the point of holding out her hand. Somehow she could not quite be with him as of old, not all at once.

"Mr. Fane will be waiting to ride home with me," she remarked, "please let me run away and forget that you ever said what you have said."

John Jardine stood silent, irresolute. She studied him, lingering.

"I'm so glad Dick doesn't know," she said, "so glad and thankful—remember, you mustn't tell him, ever."

John Jardine did not answer, he had turned to put back the "confession" in the drawer of the oaken cabinet. Hector Fane could see his every motion—the drawer was the third one down, and he was locking it with a key that hung on the free end of his watchchain, where it was thrust into his right-hand vest-pocket.

"You will promise not to tell Dick," said Evelyn, still lingering. "He—he loves you so much it would nearly kill him."

John Jardine seemed to fail suddenly where he stood. He did not answer, but Evelyn thought that he shook his head slightly.

"There, that's sensible!" she exclaimed, "and now I must run away. Mr. Fane will be getting impatient. Good-bye for this morning." And she went towards the door, but glanced back to say, "Oh, I do wish you hadn't told me."

Hector Fane saw and heard no more; he had risen from his crouching position, emerged from the recess, and was already gliding out of the library. His uncle saw him meet Evelyn Hatton in the hall; another moment and there came to his ear the sound of their horses' feet as they rode off together. Then he rang the bell.

"Ask Mr. Richard to be kind enough to come here," he ordered the servant gruffly. The footman went on the indicated errand.

"Mr. Richard is not in the house, sir," he returned to report. "His man is busy packing some things. He is to meet Mr. Richard at Lazonby in time for the noon express."

His master leant heavily on the desk. John Jardine hesitated, alternate waves of anger and alarm flitting across his florid features. Finally he consulted his watch.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "Have me Deerfoot saddled—at once." The footman bowed and hurried off, puzzled by his master's demeanour. John Jardine covered his face for an instant.

"Heaven forgive me," he muttered, "my own boy!" He shivered and set his teeth. "I must tell him all," he said, "and then—then we will go away together and begin life again."

With another glance at his watch, he hastened out to the stables to mount his favourite horse and ride sharply down the avenue from Lazonby Court, the fine country seat where he had spent so many guilty years.

There was plenty of time to meet the noon express at Lazonby station, and he drew rein as he passed out of the avenue on to the high road. He had almost overtaken Evelyn and her cavalier, they were riding in front of him, their horses close together, the riders almost knee to knee, John Jardine started and a groan burst from his lips. Evelyn had leant over still closer to her companion.

"The lad's right," he said; "it is not he she loves. Blind, blind, not to see what he meant. Hector! Great Heaven, that—that puppy to cut out my brave, my gallant lad!"

He sat on his horse, staring at the two till they rounded a bend. If he could only have known that, earlier in the morning, as they walked their horses under the shade of the chestnuts which bordered the long high road, Hector Fane had proposed to Evelyn Hatton and had been—rejected.

PART THE SECOND.

The Past is Defeated.

"You—you're not angry with me, Hector?"

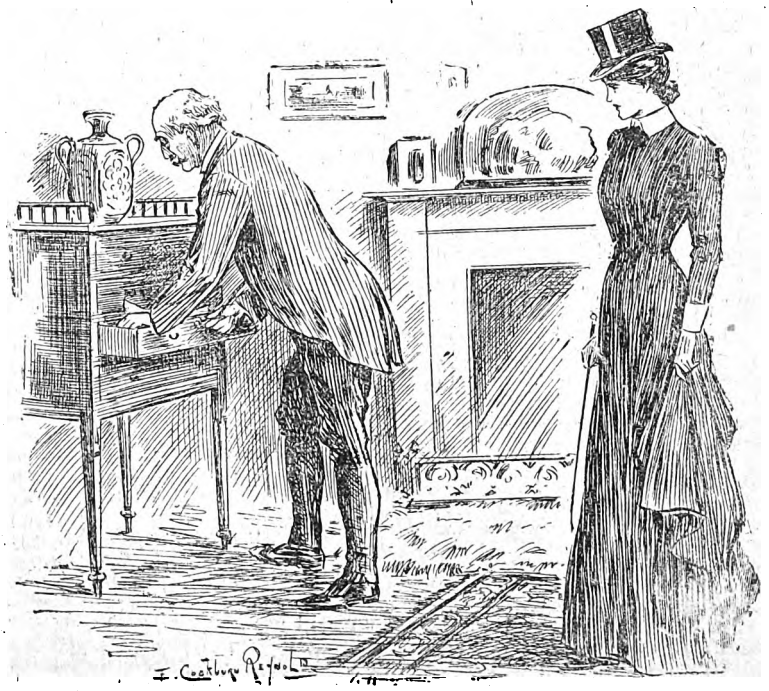
Unconscious of the eyes that, from the foot of the avenue they had just left, watched her graceful gesture, Evelyn Hatton bent over in her saddle to look into the face of Hector Fane. He had scarcely spoken since they left the Court. Nor did he answer now.

"Hector," added his companion gently, "we have grown up together, you and I—and Dick. You won't let my having had to say 'No' make any difference? You will still let us be good friends?"

Hector Fane roused himself from his own thoughts.

"Of course, since you wish it," he replied, and turned his head as if to conceal a spasm of emotion. But his blue eyes were cold and thoughtful.

In reality he was wondering what move he should take in the strange game of living chess that lay before him. Hector



He was locking the drawer with the key that hung on his watch-chain.

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Fane was very shrewd and selfish, he had been pondering the problem coolly.

Some hour or so before, he had proposed to the woman at his side—because—because she was beautiful and his uncle's *protégée*, sure, he knew, of a handsome dowry. Now he had learnt that she was rich in her own right, and that John Jardine, his own kinsman, was a criminal.

To Hector Fane himself, John Jardine had been a veritable fairy god-father. He had gone through a great university with Richard Jardine, and John Jardine had footed the bills. And his pay as a subaltern in the fine regiment to which he belonged was supplemented by a generous allowance from his uncle, who entertained his nephew and that person's regimental friends sumptuously and often.

But of late Hector had displayed a preference for coming to Lazonby Court alone, and no little of his time had been spent at the Hermitage, the pretty modern bungalow residence in which, almost at the gates of the Court, John Jardine had installed Evelyn Hatton and her mother.

These visits had culminated in a proposal and—a refusal, a refusal that had piqued Hector's pride and self-interest more than it had hurt his heart. To that pique the powerful instinct of cupidity had now been added, for Hector Fane was both poor and extravagant.

Eavesdropping is not common among officers and gentlemen, but for years Hector Fane had cherished the idea of supplanting Richard Jardine in the affection of his choleric father, and had shrunk from nothing to keep himself intimately acquainted with the state of affairs between them. Hence his familiarity with the recess in the library that formed a kind of "ear" to his uncle's "den."

And now, in the light of his extraordinary discovery, he had been asking himself what was his best—that is to say, his most profitable line of action. At the moment when Evelyn, rousing from her own reverie, addressed him so pleadingly, he had come to a decision. He turned and met her glance with an admirable assumption of deep feeling.

"I know you care for me more than I deserve," he added, "and I cannot bear to lose whatever of love you choose to give me. Some day, perhaps——"

He had begun upon a diplomatic sentence, intended to suggest that he had not quite abandoned the hope of winning a further portion of her love. But the remark was interrupted, and by the *teuf-teuf* of a motor-horn. A huge yellow motor-car shot past them as they drew sharply to the near side of the road. A second later, a riderless horse dashed by at the headlong gallop of uncontrollable terror.

Evelyn cried out. "That was Deerfoot, Mr. Jardine's hunter," she said, "and saddled. What can have happened? We left Mr. Jardine in his room. Who can have been riding the horse—not—not Dick?"

White to the lips, she turned her mare and started back along the road at a gallop. Hector followed her, a terrible hope in his heart that the thrown rider might prove to be his cousin injured, dying. For he had read the meaning of Evelyn's blanched cheeks and trembling lips, he knew now why she had rejected him. She loved Richard Jardine.

The mare was fleeter than his cob—by the time he had caught up with his companion, Evelyn had dismounted and was kneeling at the wayside, by a frightfully still and crumpled figure. He sprang down, and, as he did so, recognised in the stalwart form, and grey head his uncle, John Jardine.

While they bent over him, seeking in vain to evoke some sign of life, the horn of the motor-car was heard again. Its occupants had caught the frightened horse and were returning. They alighted, horrified at the catastrophe.

"A doctor! Go for a doctor!" Evelyn adjured them. The leather-clad *chauffeur* leapt into the car and went off like the wind. His passengers, anxious and pitiful, gathered round the prostrate man.

For five minutes John Jardine neither moved nor spoke. Then his eyes opened and his right hand, stealing to the free end of his watch-chain, pulled out the little key.

"Evie," he murmured.

Evelyn bent over him.

"Yes, yes," she said.

John Jardine pushed the key into her hand.

"Take it—it off," he faltered.

She obeyed. Hector Fane, standing by, watched, coldly and keenly.

"The—the old horse has—has done for me," gasped the injured man. "I can feel it. But you'll—the paper—it will right you. The third drawer in my cabinet."

"Hush, please, please, hush!" she whispered.

He moved his head restlessly.

"Dick," he said, "my—my boy—forgive—for——" He drifted into unconsciousness again. Evelyn's tears fell fast.

"Will the doctor never come?" she sobbed. The motor-horn answered her, and the car sped up. Someone sat by the *chauffeur*—a clever young Lazonby surgeon, picked up as he was entering his own gate. Quietly he came and knelt down by the injured man.

When he looked up his face was grave. But he said nothing, only ordered a gate to be taken from its hinges and himself helped to lift his patient on to it. When the bearers of the rough ambulance moved off the young surgeon walked by it.

Hector Fane drew level with him. "I am his nephew," he said; "is there any—any danger?"

The young surgeon answered him with an ominous directness. "I cannot," he was told gravely, "say that there is any hope."

Hector bent his head assentingly and stepped back. He put Evelyn on her mare and led his own cob. Nor did it escape him that Evelyn's now ungloved fingers were closed upon some object other than her reins—the key that John Jardine had given her.

The surgeon was piloting his ambulance-bearers past the avenue which led to the Court.

"I am taking him to my house," he said to Hector Fane; "it is nearer and better. He may not recover consciousness, if there is anyone who ought to see him——"

The warning was left significantly unfinished. Evelyn drew rein.

"Dick!" she exclaimed, a world of pity in her tones. "I will go and bring him." And she shook her mare into a gallop and darted up the avenue.

Hector Fane's eyes flashed, and, as the surgeon moved on with the sad little procession, he himself sprang to his saddle and galloped after her. She was going to his rival, and, moreover, she held a tiny key—the key of the dying man's past.

Fast as he rode, she was there before him—she had hurled her mare across fence and lawn.

"Mr. Richard was leaving for London by the noon express," the footman told her, when she had leapt down and hurried into the hall, "his man has gone over to the station with his bag. We understand that Mr. Jardine has gone over to the station too."

Evelyn looked at her watch, it was past noon already, but she turned back to her mare. A thought crossed her mind—the key in her hand. John Jardine was dying, and his honour—his and Dick's—lay in a drawer in the octagonal room.

"I—I will write a telegram," she said, "your master has met with a bad accident." And cutting short the footman's ejaculations, she went into John Jardine's "den."

She pushed the door to, to shield her movements. It had a spring lock and clicked smartly as she stepped across the room to open the third drawer in the oaken cabinet. A sheet of paper lay on the top of its other contents; she recognised it in an instant, and snatched it up. She was about to pocket it, then recollected that there was no pocket in her habit, and that besides, the paper was dangerous in the extreme. It could only be rendered harmless by destruction.

A box of matches—on the smoker's table by the desk—caught her eye. She seized it, struck one, and lit a corner of the paper. As it blazed she heard Hector Fane's voice at the door, and knew that he must have followed her. She

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thrust the drawer to and stood irresolute, yet bent upon the burning of the paper.

Suddenly, to her amazement, a panel of the door was dashed in, a hand was inserted, the spring latch withdrawn, and Hector Fane, with an oath, flung himself upon her. The paper, half consumed, fluttered to her feet.

She wrenched herself free from the grasp in which he held her, for he was beside himself with futile rage; the footman, incredulous and stupefied, peered in at the shattered door.

"Hector!" she cried, "how dare you—are you mad?"

"Mad!" he repeated, snatching up the paper and beating out the flame, "not I—let them laugh that win. I knew what you wanted to come back here for with the key he gave you. I knew—I know everything."

Evelyn clutched at the charred yet still dangerous document, but he flung her off. Then suddenly he too was gripped—by the neck—the paper he held was taken from him and delivered to Evelyn, and he himself was pitched ignominiously into a corner of the room. Richard Jardine had entered unperceived.

Ill news travels fast. He had heard at the station of his father's accident, and by a natural misapprehension had returned at breakneck speed to the home he had believed left behind him for ever. Nor could he have made his appearance at a more opportune moment.

The rest of the paper was burnt after all, for Evelyn completed that process at her leisure. But Dick had to learn its purport; for the wretched Hector blurted out so much of the truth—though not, luckily, before Richard Jardine had hustled from the room the interested footman and several more of the Court domestics—that the secret could not be hidden from him.

Yet good came out of evil, for Dick was not so dense as not to perceive the significance of Evelyn's ardent self-sacrifice. Moreover, her attitude towards Hector Fane was effectual in removing from Richard's mind a fixed, though quite unwarranted idea that she was in love with that unpleasant person.

John Jardine did not die—the young surgeon, though of a pessimistic disposition, performed an important operation of the first magnitude, and, to his great professional advancement, it proved successful. But Evelyn will have it that his patient's recovery was really due to the fact that one night, in the temporary absence of the nurse, she whispered to him that Dick and she were *engaged*.

As for Mr. Hector Fane's knowledge of a certain secret, a smart lawyer took him in hand and bullied him into a withdrawal and an apology. And John Jardine still treats him generously, though he will never consent to see him. Even now no one is quite sure how he found out the secret in question.

R. Norman Silver.

DEAR LOVE.

The Tale of a Misunderstanding.

It was entirely Alan Rothbury's own fault that he was, as he put it, a wanderer on the face of the earth. In confidential moments he would add that it was "a woman's doing." As a matter of fact, it was his temper that was to blame.

Alan had what his nurse used to call a "nasty" temper, a jealous, passionate, utterly unreasonable temper.

In nursery days he had been known to throw his bread and milk at his sister, because their nurse had put an extra spoonful of sugar into the basin of that chubby and much-enduring little person.

And after the little sister grew up and had a husband and children and a house out Hampstead way, Alan continued to throw things at her, figuratively speaking, if she did not make enough of him when he came to visit her, or if the children were not sufficiently enthusiastic in their welcome of Uncle Alan.

"How I wish Alan were married!" sighed Mrs. Harwood one evening, as her brother bounced out of the room in a temper.

"Yes," agreed her husband. "Then he'd stay at home and not come bothering us with his temper."

"Alan has a good heart, dear," said Alan's sister reproachfully.

"And a beastly temper. Oh, yes, I know he's a good fellow, Winnie, dear, but he's so jealous and unreasonable, and has such wonderful ideas of what *Mrs. Rothbury* must be, that he'll never find a girl to suit him."

"Carmela Gordon might," observed Winnie. "I shall ask her to dinner to-morrow."

Alan was great on the attributes of woman in all relations of life, but especially as wife, and more especially as *his* wife.

Most men fall in love first, and think of suitability afterwards, but Alan first carefully considered Carmela Gordon's fitness for the post of Mrs. Rothbury, and then, being satisfied, fell in—no, majestically walked into love with her.

There were many things in women to which Alan objected, but Carmela emerged, triumphantly from every test. Bicycling, Alan considered unwomanly, and Carmela did not cycle; golf was unwomanly, and Carmela played no out-of-door games. Sewing, music, and gardening were womanly pursuits, and Carmela was an exquisite needlewoman, a brilliant pianiste, and an enthusiastic gardener.

Her personal appearance was exactly what Alan most admired. She was tall; Alan was rather under medium height. She was dark; Alan's hair and moustache were auburn—in boyhood's sunny hours he had been known to his schoolfellows as Ginger or Carrots.

Carmela was stately, dignified, and reserved; Alan quick, talkative, and demonstrative.

Carmela's voice was charming, her enunciation unusually clear and somewhat measured. Alan was genuinely attached to this stately lady, and admired her dignity and reserve, though it fretted him that she did not unbend to him, even after they were formally engaged.

Carmela was motherless, and lived with her father, whose only child she was, in a large, old-fashioned house, standing in its own grounds, not far from where the Harwoods lived. She was generally to be found among her flowers when Alan came to see her on the long, sweet, summer evenings during their engagement.

The wedding day was still some six weeks off, when one evening, after having written to postpone his visit to his betrothed, he changed his mind, and went on the wings of love and in a hansom to The Elms, the not very uncommon name of Carmela's home.

Learning that she was, as usual, in the rose garden, Alan went quickly down the broad walk, and was turning into the garden when voices from the summer-house on his right arrested him. It was a man who was speaking as Alan paused, but the next moment Carmela's musical voice rang out, clear and distinct.

"Oh, you must not desert me. I could not do without you, dear love."

Alan stood rooted to the spot. Was this his Carmela, his proud, undemonstrative Carmela? She had never called *him* dear love, never even dear Alan.

The man's voice came again, but it was too low pitched for Alan to distinguish the words.

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"Yes, of course, but my marriage will make no difference," came Carmela's slow, sweet tones, each word distinct. "Indeed it will give me more freedom. You know there have been many difficulties here, but when I am in my own house I can arrange matters as I like. You must promise me to come—do, dear love."

Rigid with horror, Alan turned away. He would not reproach the traitress, he would have no scene; he would simply go away. So without a word of explanation to anyone, and leaving an address with his solicitors, coupled with instructions to give it to no one else, and to forward none but business letters, Alan disappeared.

For five years he roamed about, shooting big game, and telling casual acquaintances that he was a lone exile, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and that it was all a woman's doing.

But at the end of five years he got tired of this amusement, and resolved to go home to see what changes had taken place there. Perhaps Carmela might be a widow, and he would rejoice in her sorrow.

Very much astonished, but very pleased, was little Mrs. Harwood when her erratic brother walked in just in time for dinner one lovely June evening, five years almost to a day after his disappearance.

Not a question was put as to his reasons for his eccentric behaviour, for Winnie and her husband knew Alan's temper too well to venture on unpleasant topics, and it was not until dinner was over, and they were sitting out on the verandah, that Carmela Gordon was mentioned.

"And how is Carmela?" asked Alan, quite coolly, but busy over his cigar, which wouldn't draw.

"I'm surprised at you, Alan," said Winnie, with sudden stiffness. "After the way you treated Carmela you ought to be ashamed to speak of her."

"Ah, you don't know the reason of my conduct," said Alan grimly.

"Nor does Carmela," retorted his sister.

"She does. Her conscience must have told her."

"Well, it hasn't. I don't care what you say, Alan, or what excuse you have, but you behaved like a brute and a cad to that poor girl. And Ralph thinks the same. Don't you, Ralph?"

Harwood nodded an emphatic assent.

"You don't understand," said Alan, getting up and beginning to march up and down, "and I can't explain. She's married, I suppose?"

"Who?"

"Carmela."

"Married? Why, of course not."

"Not married. Then why isn't she?" demanded Alan, indignantly.

"Probably because the only man she ever loved ran away from her a few weeks before the wedding. And now she's too busy earning her living to think of marriage."

Alan sat down suddenly.

"Working for a living? Carmela? Winnie, what do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Gordon died two years ago, leaving nothing but the house, which was his own property, and a few hundreds in ready money. Carmela let the house to a lady who takes boarders, and boards there herself, but she kept the grounds, and has started a nursery garden, which is just beginning to pay."

"She was always fond of gardening," put in Ralph Harwood.

"Yes," went on his wife. "She and that old gardener of hers were two enthusiasts. Her father used to object to their experiments, and she used to tell me she'd try new ones at Rothbury Hall after her marriage, if only she could persuade Dearlove to leave Hampstead and go with her."

"Persuade *who?*" almost screamed Alan.

"Why, Dearlove, the gardener. What's the matter, Alan?"

"I didn't know that was his name," murmured Alan, faintly.

"Didn't you? You might have heard it often enough, I should think. It's not a very uncommon name, but it's ludicrously inappropriate to that funny old man. How pale you are, Alan!"

"I don't feel well," stammered her brother. "I'll have a turn in the open air. No, don't come, Ralph. I'd rather be alone."

Without conscious volition he found himself presently hastening along the road towards Carmela's house.

"Fool, fool that I was," he muttered to himself, "to rush off in a fury without asking an explanation. Why, of course the poor darling was only trying to persuade the crusty old fellow to follow her to Rothbury Hall.

"Oh, why, *why* has he such an idiotic name? It was that which drove me mad. Her coaxing voice, the endearing names she never used to me. Oh, how it cut me to the heart to hear them lavished, as I thought, on another fellow."

He had reached the gates of "The Elms" now, and stood looking wistfully in, like the Peri at the gates of Paradise. All was unchanged, so far as he could see, except for the board announcing the sale of fruit, flowers, and vegetables within.

Alan could not resist the impulse to enter, and did so just as Carmela turned out of the path by the summer-house, and paused there, talking to the old gardener who followed her. As Alan advanced, she saw him, and her face froze. White to the lips, but dignified as ever, she stood awaiting his approach.

"Dearlove," she said to the gardener, "attend to this gentleman, and learn his business."

With a little frigid bow she turned to go, but Alan caught her hand.

"Carmela, I intreat you, let me speak. I only ask five minutes alone with you. In mercy, in justice, hear me."

Silently she led the way into the summer-house, where, five years ago, she had held that fateful interview with her gardener. Without a word she stood waiting for Alan to speak.

"Carmela, I thought you had betrayed me," he began. "I thought you were unfaithful to me, that is why I deserted you. Five years ago I came down unexpectedly, and heard you talking in this very summer-house with a man whom you were imploring not to desert you, as your marriage would only give you more freedom, and whom you were calling dear love. I thought he was your lover."

"And how have you been undeceived?" she asked, disdainfully, frozen pride on every feature.

"To-night my sister chanced to mention your gardener's name, and it all flashed on me. I know now you were trying to persuade him to follow you to Rothbury Hall, but the words were open to another interpretation, and I was misled by that fatal name."

"And treated me so cruelly that I shall never forgive you," said Carmela, icily.

"I know you can't. But I was mad. I had so often tried to get you to respond to my endearments, to call me "love" or dearest," and you never would. I put it down to reserve, and loved you the more, but now I thought the true explanation was that you did not love me, and had a secret lover."

"You might at least have asked an explanation. I shall never forgive you," the girl repeated.

"I know. I behaved atrociously. I don't expect you to forgive me. I can't forgive myself. But I've suffered, Carmela, I've suffered terribly. I went away loving you; I spent five years loving and longing for you; I've come back loving you more than ever, and knowing that my own hand has shut the gates of Paradise upon me.

"I'll go now, but I had to tell you that I know what a fool and brute I've been, and that—that I love you more than ever now I've lost you, and you hate—hate and despise me. But, oh, Carmela, Carmela——" his voice broke, and he stopped with something very like a sob.

Carmela came a step nearer. The pride and coldness melted out of her face. Her soft crimson lips parted with a smile of exquisite tenderness, her great dark eyes brimmed with tears of loving pity; her hands went out to him in sudden surrender, and as he snatched her to his heart, she murmured, "Alan, dear love!"

Vera Serkoff.

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"An' Go to Yer Gawd Like a Soldier."

—*Kipling.*

The Story of a Man's Self-Sacrifice and a Woman's Love.

THE little frontier town of San Carlos was simmering with excitement, for the threatened invasion of Mexico was to become an accomplished fact. From every township in Texas the hardy adventurers rolled up to the gathering place, until four hundred of the best fighters in the world were waiting the word "advance."

Scallywags and desperados, good men and bad men, all were equally fired by the *Wanderlust* and by the thoughts of the lovely Eldorado away beyond. Only the women repined, as they have always done when fathers and lovers, husbands and brothers, ride away into the unknown.

To Grace Thatcher, the belle of San Carlos, the expedition was a hateful thing. Far and wide the rough frontiersmen owed her allegiance for her beauty and courage, and not a man but would have laid down his life for her. And now, just when she had narrowed her choice of admirers down to two, it was cruelly hard to have to rush a decision upon which so much depended.

William Wallace was the most suitable, of that there was no doubt; but he was forty, and already in his black hair silver streaks showed thick traces of early hardships. Money was his and much cattle, but—his rival was young. All the world loved Len Hurst, a lad of barely twenty, and from whose face the down of boyhood had scarcely passed. They loved him for his pluck and for his merry laugh, which rang out like an inspiriting bugle in the strangest of places.

It was the night before the start of the invaders, and Grace was feeding her chickens just as she had done since she was a child. There was a soft flush on her cheek and a smile of happiness on her face which ought to have warned Wallace, as from the gate he devoured her with his eyes.

Of love hitherto he had been ignorant with the ignorance of the hardy mountaineers, whose life is full from morning until evening, and now every fibre of his body thrilled with passion. He hardly dared to breathe lest she should be startled by his sudden appearance, but her instinct warned her, and she turned and saw him.

A lovely colour stole over her face, a blush the man in his folly thought was for him, and his speech became thick and his tongue dry as he stammered out the burning words. As she listened she grew pale and her eyes filled with tears, for she knew now what mischief she had done, but it was too late!

"Tell me, Grace—I'm a plain man, my dear one—tell me when I come back from this expedition you will be my wife."

He looked down at her from his lofty height, and judged her shrinking demeanour to be but maidenly timidity. His tones were almost triumphant as he exclaimed:

"I won't press you, little girl, for an answer now, but I'm going a happy man."

"Listen," she cried desperately, "it's all a mistake. I'm sorry, but——"

She hesitated, with a half fearful upward glance at his face which grew set and stern.

"But what?" he insisted.

"I'm engaged to another man!"

Her voice could scarcely be heard, for she was sore afraid. She could see the strong man tremble and the sweat stand on his forehead, as he heard his sentence and tried to keep down the storm of fury which ran in his veins like molten lead.

"Who is it?" he muttered.

"Len Hurst," he heard whispered, "and I love him. William Wallace, if anything befalls him I'll never marry anyone—you hear?" she cried, fearful lest his anger, now so sternly repressed, should fall on her young lover. "Why did you love me? Would God I could make you happy, but I can't," she wailed.

Wallace said never a word, but he wrung her hand until she could have screamed, and then turned and tramped off to his hut. All that is bad in man's nature tormented him that night, until with the bugle call came a temporary peace. In the hurry and bustle of that *reveillé* his brain was at rest, and it was not until the straggling column had moved off and was trailing down the road that his anguish returned.

Secure in their dreams of victory the men of Texas marched along without one military precaution, each man in the position that seemed best to him. Day by day Wallace's temptation to put a bullet through his rival became stronger and stronger until it grew insupportable. Now the column had crossed the ill-defined frontier, and no enemy had yet appeared.

Not one of the devoted band realised that along the heights above the crafty Mexican soldiers were stalking their prey, waiting until the ground made their success certain. Had Wallace been himself he would have remedied all this, but his one hope now was revenge.

One night Hurst, who found that his old friend was avoiding him, plucked up courage to make the first advance.

"Will," he said, holding out his hand, "it was the fortune of war that I won her. Don't bear me malice."

"I hate you," said the elder man. "I never loved but her, and now my life is empty. You'll have to fight me for her, though, for by the Eternal I'll not stand by and see you marry her. You must take your rifle directly we come to the camping ground, and at a hundred paces let the best man win. What, are you a coward, too?"

Before the lad could speak a pattering rifle-fire began to search out the unwieldly string of men. They had penetrated into a long defile, and were slouching along at its foot, without an advanced guard or one precaution to prevent a surprise. Nothing but a few puffs of smoke to the right, left, and front betrayed the presence of anything unusual, but the rapidly falling men showed how straight was the aim of the hidden enemy.

The column broke into helpless disorder, for with its head checked and the rear crowding in, the task of defence became absolutely impossible. Firing wildly in every direction, the tried hunters, the trained frontiersmen, yielded to ungovernable panic, and became quite unmanageable. Then, as his comrades fell thick around him, Wallace, who alone kept

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some control over himself, took out his handkerchief, and tying it to his ramrod waved it high above his head. The others saw it and copied his action, at the same time laying down their guns and shouting wildly.

Then from behind every rock and shrub appeared the Mexican troops, and swarmed down amongst the invaders. Helpless and still sick with panic the men allowed their hands to be tied and their weapons removed, whilst with every taunting cry and speech the Mexicans heaped opprobrium upon them.

Sullenly the prisoners were driven from the defile and the dead and dying left to their fate. Wallace, by the accident of chance, followed close behind Hurst, and a grim smile curled his lip as he realised that in all probability the question of right to the girl they both loved had been solved for them.

After a weary tramp of eight miles the dispirited men reached the Mexican camp, and were driven like cattle into a small corral having a low adobe wall, some five feet high, round it.

"Well, Wallace, won't you forgive me now?" said Hurst. "After all, we both love her as true men, don't we?"

The elder tried to turn away, but his heart failed him, and half furtively and wholly ashamed at his weakness, he took the proffered hand.

"I fear, lad, that we'll never leave this pen alive," he said after a bit; "these brutes have no pity. Hullo, what's that?"

As he was speaking a squad of Mexican officers came into the corral, preceded by a soldier carrying an earthen jar, which he deposited upon the wall.

"Now, my friends," said the senior officer, a vicious-looking half-breed, in a shrill, penetrating voice, "you came into our country uninvited, and every fourth man of you must stay in it for ever. I have here in this carafe enough white beans for three out of every four of you, and enough black ones for the others. The men that draw black beans will fall in on the right end of the corral, those that have the luck to draw white ones will go to the left. You understand, dearest friends, that the black bean means death in ten minutes."

A low hum sounded from the crowd, the only sign they gave of tension or of fear. The momentary panic had passed away, and each man was ready to look death in the face without a tremor.

"Fall in!" roared the officer, and silently the invaders fell in, for what was for many their last parade on earth.

Then with fiendish slowness the beans were covered with a cloth, and one or two of the Mexicans tried the fatal lottery, laughing heartily when they drew one of the symbols of death.

"Attention!"

Everyone drew his breath and nerved himself for the ordeal. One by one the men advanced and thrust their hands into the vessel, whilst the officers jeered at any sign of hesitation.

"Take your time, my child; don't hurry yourself, for it really *is* important," laughed the senior officer whenever he thought he saw any of them showing fear. But the natural dread of the drawing once overcome, no tremor disgraced the Texans, and even their enemies grunted their approval. The march to the right was as steady as the march to the left, although Death waited on the one side and Hope on the other.

By a freak of fortune Hurst and Wallace were the last to draw, and it was the youth's turn before his senior. As the man before him took his hand out with a bean of the fatal colour in it he looked stupidly up as though hardly conscious of what he was saying, and cried:

"You brutes, you might have told us that the black bean was bigger than the white."

His words were heard all over the corral, and a lump rose in many a man's throat as he looked over at Hurst's sunny face and head as he stood waiting his turn. Everyone knew that Jake Bennet loved the boy, and had warned him at risk of instant death. They were sorry for Wallace, but his taciturn manner had repelled most of the warm-hearted frontiersmen.

"Strike the cur to the ground!" shouted the officer. "But, no, stop, this is as good as a play," he added, smiling sourly. "See, gentlemen, there are but two beans left, and as my friend who is about to die remarks, the black one *is* the bigger. Now, my dear friends, choose. It is your turn first, my son; pray come and choose."

A low hiss sounded, but the Mexican took no notice, but watched Hurst's face with a cruel smile. All caught their breath, for they saw the lad's cruel dilemma when it was too late. To draw blindly was but the fate of everyone, but to draw knowingly would be sheer murder, and they waited.

Paler and paler grew the youth's face.

"Suppose I do not draw?" he asked.

"Then you both die," was the terse reply.

"Draw my lad!" said Wallace, all his soul up in arms against this treachery. "I freely forgive you. Remember the girl we both love, and draw!"

"Forgive me, Will, but I cannot. I'd rather die with you."

"And Grace?" Wallace whispered.

"Better to die with you than in dishonour after you," Hurst whispered back, and then, without another word, he took his friend by the arm and walked to the right.

No one broke the silence, for even the human wolf in command felt some trace of admiration.

"Clear the corral of the prisoners on the left, and secure them on the other side of the camp!"

The order given was quickly obeyed, and in a few minutes only those doomed to die were left.

Then the shuddering men tethered like sheep away in the Mexican camp heard the sound of volley after volley ringing up from the corral, and they tried in vain to stop their ears to keep out the sound. One thing they knew which was some comfort, however slight, that not a man begged for mercy, but that each one died fronting his foe like a soldier should.

* * * * *

The other day an aged woman, whose calm, peaceful face had brought comfort to many an aching heart, was laid in her grave in San Carlos, and the legend that they carved upon her headstone was a quaint, albeit a sad one.

"Here lies Grace Thatcher, spinster.

"Born—1824. Died Oct. 3rd, 1902.

"She was the affianced wife of Leonard Hurst and the affectionate friend of William Wallace, who were both murdered by the Mexican troops on August 15th, 1842."

Frederick G. Engelbach.

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LAST LIST NEXT WEEK.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." One more list will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

ELEVENTH LIST.

121. AABDLLNORST .....
122. AADEELLNPRSW .....
123. EGHINNOORSST .....
124. ABCDEELLNOP .....
125. AAAEIMNPRSST .....
126. ACEEHNNOOSTW .....
127. ADEFLMORST .....
128. BEEIGLLLLSTU .....
129. BCEEGILOPRS .....
130. AEHHLOSTTWY .....
131. ACEEFGKLNOR .....
132. ADEFIMNOORRU .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODES ONE, TWO, & THREE.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d., and that I was fortunate to have come off so well.

"£11 7s. 10d.!" I almost screamed. "Annabel, you are making a frightful mistake! It isn't possible! I've only played for a penny a game!"

"Penny points, dear. That means a penny for every point, and sometimes you have been hundreds of points below your opponents in one rubber."

"But I've helped to win several rubbers, so I must have cleared on those games what I lost on the others."

"On the contrary, even when you won the rubber, your opponents had big scores above the bridge, which left your score nowhere. But, as I said before, you have lost remarkably little for a novice, and £11 7s. 10d. means very little to you."

"Very little!" I groaned, sinking into the nearest chair, for my limbs were trembling under me, and I felt as if I should faint, so great was my surprise and horror at the information just given me. "Very little. Why, it means ruin!"

EPISODE FOUR.
In an Awkward Fix.

It was astoundingly incredible that I should have gambled and lost to such an extent, and I might well feel overwhelmed at the information which Annabel had given me so smilingly. But my discomfiture only seemed to amaze my friend, who burst into a merry laugh, and exclaimed:

"Good gracious, Olive, one would think a great misfortune had befallen you! Fancy taking a trifling loss like that so much to heart! But I suppose you are not quite used to having plenty of money of your own, or you wouldn't be so afraid of parting with it."

These remarks struck me as being both coarse and unfeeling, and as I felt incapable of bandying words with anybody just then, I turned swiftly away, and ran up to my own room.

There I threw myself on the bed, and gave way to a flood of tears, these being none the less bitter because of the dawning conviction that I had been deliberately deceived concerning the real possibilities of the game I had learnt with such delight.

That there was a vast difference between playing for a penny a game and penny points, I was not too stupid to grasp. But I still could not understand how it was that I could be such a heavy loser when I had been congratulated more than once upon my phenomenal luck in winning so many games, and it suddenly occurred to me that Annabel must have accidentally mixed up my score with somebody else's.

Fired with this idea I looked at my watch and concluded that it was not too late to go downstairs again, and interview Mr. Fisher, whose duty it had been to add up the scores. So in a few minutes, I had bathed my face to remove the traces of tears, smoothed my ruffled hair, and was speeding down to the drawing-room when I met Mr. Taskot.

I must have been terribly upset, for I no sooner saw the look of concern he bent upon me than I was completely overcome, and, bowing my head on my hands, wept in sheer despair.

"My dear Miss Beresford," exclaimed Mr. Taskot. "Whatever is the matter? Have you fallen and sprained your ankle? Or are you ill?"

Hastily brushing the tears from my face, and rising from the stair on which I had sunk in my childish abandon of grief, I tried to summon self-possession to my aid again.

"No, no!" I cried hurriedly. "It is nothing but foolishness on my part."

"And you are not hurt?"

"No."

"Then that is all right. Anything else can be remedied very quickly, I hope. You won't think me impertinent if I ask you to favour me with your confidence?"

This was said so kindly, and with such an entire freedom from the familiarity which I had resented before, that I forgot my previous displeasure and blurted out the truth.

"I am in a serious dilemma," I sobbed. "Those dreadful games of Bridge! I've lost ever so much money over them, and I don't know how I shall pay it."

"Is that all? If I understand aright, your losses only amount to a few pounds, which will really be of no consequence to a young lady of means. But, of course, it is rather annoying to make such a poor show at the game."

"But that isn't it. I am not a young lady of means. I am quite poor, and if anybody has thought differently, it is not my fault. So it is a serious calamity for me."

"And you are not an heiress, as the Vernons have announced? H'm! That alters things a little, and I, for one

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feel ashamed of myself for doing my best to add to your losses. But, look here, won't you let me lend you the money, Miss Beresford? It would mean nothing out of my pocket."

But this apparently simple way out of the difficulty did not appeal to me, after all, for it did not seem nice to put myself under such a great obligation to a man whom I had only known for such a short time, and I stammered out something to that effect, but without disconcerting Mr. Taskot.

"Of course, it wouldn't do," he said, "and it was stupid of me to mention it. But I've a fine plan which will settle the whole affair beautifully, without putting you under an obligation to anybody. In fact, it's as simple as A.B.C."

At this assurance I brightened up considerably, and was thanking Mr. Taskot for his friendliness, when we heard sounds of laughter and closing doors.

"I say," whispered Mr. Taskot, "the others are breaking up for the night, and they might think it odd if they saw us talking together yet. I'll tell you all about my little plan in the morning at half-past seven, where the bluebells grow. Meanwhile, rest comfortably in the conviction that you have been making a mountain out of a molehill, and that the molehill will soon be cleared away."

With these words Mr. Taskot disappeared, and I hastened to reach my own room, before anybody else should see me.

EPISODE FIVE.

A Dangerous Remedy.

In spite of Mr. Taskot's optimistic assurances, I spent an almost sleepless night, and it was a very heavy-eyed girl who took an early matutinal ramble towards the coppice in which the bluebells were still growing, although the season was now late for them.

Half a dozen times had I almost resolved not to risk this meeting. And half a dozen times had I told myself that Mr. Taskot's offer of help was prompted by sheer generosity of heart which would not involve any compromise of principle on my part. But, whatever my variability of mood and opinions had been, the net result was that my hopes rose high as I neared the rendezvous, and I was very glad to see that Mr. Taskot was there before me.

He approached me with an air of deference which he did not show yesterday morning, and all remnants of incipient distrust left me when I looked at the pleasant face he bent towards me.

"It is kind of you to be so punctual," he said smilingly. "I was afraid I had mentioned much too early an hour for you."

"Nay," was my tremulous reply, "it is you who are kind. For is it not to free me from a dilemma that you are out so early yourself?"

"That is only partly true, Miss Beresford, for I am always a sort of hybrid early bird. Sometimes I get up with the lark. Sometimes I go to bed when he rises. Anyhow, he and I see a good deal of each other."

A laugh concluded the sentence, and, somewhat to my own surprise, I found myself laughing merrily in unison.

"And now for the great business which brings us hither," he went on. "Suppose you sit down on this tree stump while you tell me all there is to tell?"

Obedient to the invitation, I used the tree stump for a seat, and, noticing that Mr. Taskot held his cigarette-case in his hand, I suggested that he should indulge in a smoke. He promptly availed himself of the permission to smoke in my company, and now that we were both at our ease, there was no more beating about the bush.

"Now then, Miss Beresford, for the exact amount, please."

"Eleven pounds, seven shillings, and tenpence."

I looked nervously at my interrogator when I answered his question, for, after all, my misfortune might seem ridiculously small considered from his point of view. But, if he thought me stupidly fussy over an insignificant sum, he was very clever at hiding his real feelings, for his demeanour was the essence of respectful sympathy.

"And you don't see your way clear to pay just yet?"

"Not at present, certainly. This debt represents about one third of a quarter's income for me, and I have already nearly exhausted the current quarter's in preparing for this visit, which I thought ——"

"You fancied it was dictated by pure friendship, and you find that your old school-friend merely wanted to fleece you."

"Oh, Mr. Taskot! Surely that is speaking rather too strongly?"

"Not a bit! These people thought you were an heiress, and they actually plume themselves on having let you down lightly, for fear you would run away too soon. Never mind how I know this. Suffice it that it is absolutely true. But they will be hoist by their own petard, and you and I will pay them back in their own coin."

"How?"

"Easily. Last night, after you retired, I was persuaded to try another rubber. Of course I lost, and I believe I am altogether about four hundred pounds out of pocket so far. That, however, does not matter. What I am concerned about is to punish this gang of swindlers. I had already heard something about their methods, and was not prepared to think too highly of any of Mrs. Vernon's bosom friends."

"Then that explains your manner to me yesterday morning."

"If there was anything exceptional in it, perhaps it does. However, to continue. Having, as I have already hinted, some inkling of what to expect, I have been unceasingly on the alert, and I made an important discovery last night."

"Do you mean that the Vernons are not quite honest?"

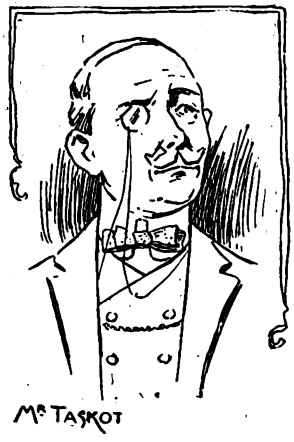
"Don't ask me to particularise too closely. Suffice it that I know how to circumvent them, provided I am assisted by a partner who will second my exertions. I have some loss to make good. So have you. And we are both to be victimised still further, if our hosts can manage it."

"The only safe way to avoid that is to refuse to play again with them."

"On the contrary, the best way to do is to recover our money by using the same tactics that they use, in which case it is fair game either way."

"I cannot in any case risk losing more, when I have not even paid what I have already lost."

"No. You must allow me to disburse the amount for you. You will win it back to-morrow, and will be able to repay me without having to draw upon your own resources."



I demurred to this proposal at first, but eventually, seeing no other immediate way out of my difficulty, I accepted the loan. Then Mr. Taskot confided to me an elaborate series of signals which were to be exchanged between us when next we played against Mr. and Mrs. Vernon, or their friend, Mr. Fisher.

"Of course it is only against those three persons that we will thus defend ourselves," concluded my newly-constituted adviser. "Anybody else who may visit the Towers

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will no doubt play fairly, but nobody would blame us for doing to our opponents exactly what they are doing to us."

When the matter was put like that, it seemed to me that Mr. Taskot's contention was quite right, and that there could be no harm in playing at "Diamond cut Diamond."

Besides, I bore no little resentment towards the woman who had only invited me here to fleece me, and I determined to let her discover that I was not quite so simple as she imagined me to be.

By the time I had arrived at this conclusion the morning was much further advanced, and we began to retrace our steps towards the Towers. I had gathered a few bluebells, partly because I never could resist wild flowers, and partly because they would serve as an excuse for my early ramble if I should chance to meet anybody I knew.

Nevertheless, I had forgotten the likelihood of being seen in Mr. Taskot's company while still so far from the Towers, and I felt my face flush scarlet when we came face to face with Mrs. Grainger, whom I had not credited with energy enough to be out so soon.

"Good morning, both!" she said, and I fancied there was more than the suspicion of a sneer in her voice. "Good morning! Fancy being out before me! I am going to early service, but I suppose it is of no use hoping for company?"

I blushed with mortification at the meaning glance with which Mrs. Grainger pointed the last remark. She meant to imply that Mr. Taskot was an admirer of mine—a favoured one too—whereas it was purely a business matter which had brought us together this morning.

I had intended to traverse the latter half of the homeward way alone. But of course this precaution against gossip was now useless, for Mrs. Grainger was certain to mention the meeting, and I was by no means reassured by the complacent smile with which Mr. Taskot met the situation.

However, the mischief was done now, and I had ample time during the remainder of the day to wonder whether or not I had acted wisely in accepting the help of a comparative stranger.

The Vernons made a great point of going to church in the forenoon. But, later in the day, they did not hesitate to amuse themselves in their usual manner. I was invited a few times to join in a game, but was not to be persuaded to so far forget my training as to gamble on a Sunday.

EPISODE SIX.
The Deed of a Hero.

I was greatly excited at the prospect of the revenge which Mr. Taskot had planned. It seemed such a fair way of recovering our losses, when it was quite evident that what we were going to do was merely a repetition of what our unscrupulous hosts were doing, and I no longer doubted that by the time my visit was ended I should be altogether out of debt. This in itself, to one brought up as I had been, was an enormous consideration. But I had another reason for being glad that I was to have another chance of playing.

The game fascinated me, and if I had been as rich as the other guests at the Towers, I should have wanted to play Bridge all day long, for I still did not realise that Bridge can be a ruinous game even for a millionaire. A run of bad luck, on heavy points, will make an inroad upon any income.

"I wish they were not playing to-day," was my discontented reflection. "It is rightfully tantalising to watch one exciting game after another. I know what I will do; I will go out for a walk, away from it all."

"Too goody-goody to enjoy a harmless game of cards," laughed Annabel, when she saw me dressed ready for outdoors; "but not too goody-goody to have walks with gentlemen on a Sunday! Ah, well! everyone to his own taste! For my own part, give me a quiet rubber, in preference to a promenade in the blazing sun."

I was vexed, horribly vexed at this vulgar sneer. But I did not choose to make matters worse by arguing the point. So I ran hastily through the hall and down the front steps, followed by a merry peal of laughter from the victorious Annabel.

"That hateful Mrs. Grainger has been making the most of what she saw this morning," I told myself. "But I don't care; to-morrow shall see things on a different footing, and when I go home to-morrow night, or Tuesday morning, Annabel shall find that *I* am the one who can most afford to laugh over this business."

I had no inclination to go gathering bluebells again, for, somehow, the neighbourhood in which they grew seemed to be inseparably connected with Mr. Taskot, and I mechanically walked towards a picturesque village which nestled on the hillside to the left of Vernon Towers.

But, somehow, the beauty of Nature had lost its glamour for me, and I could do little else but ponder over Annabel's duplicity, and upon the code of signals which was to help Mr. Taskot and myself to baffle the swindlers.

How long I sauntered aimlessly I cannot say. But my thoughts were suddenly attracted to my surroundings by a most frightful turmoil, which grew louder every moment.

Shouts and shrieks, and the running of many feet, seemed to be the principal elements of the commotion, though I could not see what caused it, for the shady lane which I had entered took a sharp turn a little distance ahead, which completely hid from my view anything that was happening further away.

But I could discern that the disturbance was rapidly coming my way, and it was all so wildly out of keeping with the calmness of a Sabbath afternoon in the heart of the country that I paused in quickly growing alarm.

"Whatever can it be?" was my affrighted thought. "Only something dreadful can account for all that shrieking; and it is coming nearer every second!"

In a perfect panic I looked for a way of escape from the approaching danger, but could see none. The lane was bordered by high banks on either side, both of which were topped by thick thorn fences, and overgrown by prickly furze. The banks were too steep for me to scale quickly. If I ran forward, I should meet the horror; if I tried to run away from it, it would overtake me in two seconds!

The result was that I was stupefied and stood stock still in the middle of the road, being too paralysed with dread to move even when a huge, rabid dog, with bloodshot eyes and lolling tongue, came galloping straight towards me, hounded on by a foolish mob of villagers, armed with sticks, stones, scythes, and anything else that they could use for their own defence if the tortured animal should turn upon them.

But he did not offer to turn upon them. Instead of that he came rushing like the wind to where I stood, unable to move or scream, and I had shut my fainting eyes upon the awful spectacle when I felt myself suddenly grasped by the shoulder from above, and somebody gifted with herculean strength lifted me right up into the midst of the furze bushes, just as the mad dog was within a foot of me.

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"Thank Heaven!" was the exclamation I heard, and, looking up at my preserver, I saw the handsomest young man I had ever seen in my life.

"Oh, however shall I thank you!" I said. "You have saved me from an awful death!"

Both the dog and the crowd were soon out of sight, leaving me shuddering convulsively, and even my preserver was still shaking with excitement. But composure soon returned to him, and after helping me down into the lane again, he suggested that I should permit him to see me home.

"My name is Maurice Ray," he said. "I am staying a short time in the neighbourhood. May I know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"My name is Olive Beresford, and I am staying at Vernon Towers just now."

"Vernon Towers? Oh!"

I felt my face flush scarlet at the emphasis which Mr. Ray put into this exclamation. The Vernons must have a very bad reputation indeed if Mr. Ray's attitude was anything to go by, and I was glad when we reached the Towers, for it was very humiliating to feel that I was being treated to a share of the contempt which was felt for my hosts.

I did not invite Mr. Ray to enter the house with me, for I hardly felt myself justified in doing that. Nor did I think he would have accepted such an invitation. So we parted at the big gates without any prospect of seeing each other again.

Fate, however, had ordained that Maurice Ray was to be a great factor in the moulding of my future destiny, though when I re-entered the house I studiously avoided mentioning him or my adventure, for I guessed that either of them would have afforded food for amusement to Annabel, and I did not want her to have more amusement at my expense than I could help.

On the Monday morning I felt no worse for my exciting adventure, and sat down very cheerfully to take my "revenge," as per Mr. Taskot's arrangement.

Perhaps Annabel, quite pleased, and thoroughly deceived by the readiness and cheerfulnes with which I paid my "debts of honour," would not have smiled so complacently as she did, if she had known of the compact that had been made between my partner and myself.

Yet her awakening was nothing to what lay in store for me. Misled by the specious arguments of an unscrupulous man, and fascinated by the attractions of an exciting game, I had allowed myself to be placed in an equivocal position, and was even now tottering on the brink of moral, physical, and social ruin.

Alas! shall I ever forget the dire results of the play that was to have recovered the money I had already lost!

(A very dramatic situation is described in next Tuesday's instalment.)

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AT ALL BOOKSELLERS

Your Editor Chats.

New readers will be able to pick up the thread of our new serial story, "The Snare of Gold," from the comprehensive summary of the first instalment, which is published on the first page of the paper. I hope that everyone who did not commence this story last week will do so now. The working out of the destiny of a man who is supposed to be dead is an especially attractive subject, and this is the most striking feature of the plot of Mr. Johnson's story.

A further long instalment of "The Bridge of Ruin," or the Confessions of a Girl Gambler, begins on page 208. The writer of the Confessions relates a very thrilling experience this week—an adventure with a mad dog, from which she is rescued just in time. Further developments in the gambling episode also take place, making the instalment one of more than ordinary interest. For the benefit of those readers who did not read last week's instalment a summary containing its most important features is published on page 208.

Next week the twelfth and last list in the Juggled Letters Competition will appear, together with the date by which all the attempts must reach this office.

The following is the order of popularity in which readers regard the stories published in the issue of *Short Stories* dated July 25th: "Red Poppies," "The Face at the Window," "The Making of a Match," "A Horrible Honeymoon," "Nearly a Tragedy," "Barbara's Choice," "A Breach of Confidence," "In the Whispering Gallery," "Metcalf's Boomerang." No reader managed to get the order exactly correct, but the postcard containing the list in the order most nearly approaching the correct one was sent by Mr. W. G. Potter, 57 St. Mary Street, Woolwich, to whom the gold-plated pencil-case offered in this competition has been awarded.

August is hastening on apace, and with it the summer weather is going. There must be many readers who have not yet sent along their contributions to the Fresh Air Fund, and these I would ask to delay no longer before remitting what they can afford.

In case anyone has omitted to read what I have previously written about the good work this fund does, I would say for their benefit that the object of the Fund is to give as many poor children as possible one day in the country every year.

Ninepence is all it costs to give one child a full day's enjoyment, together with a plentiful supply of wholesome food, and I am sure that anyone who realises the good derived from just this one day's outing will waste no more time before sending his or her contribution. Amounts of all sizes will be gratefully accepted, and should be sent to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Your Editor.

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The Cooling.

Telling of How a Blunder Awakened Love.

He was late, as usual. Their appointment was thirty-five minutes overdue when from her look-out at the parlour window she espied him turning into the street from the main road.

She looked in vain for the least sign of hurry on him. Calmly and leisurely, he sauntered up the street, reading the evening paper; with the air of a man who would as lief his destination were farther, and she felt his feet trampling on her heart.

As he neared the door she slipped up to her room, and left the rest of the family, who were taking a rather indignant interest in him just now, to answer his knock. Twenty minutes after she dried her eyes and came down. He was lounging on the sofa, reading his paper.

He looked up casually.

She said: "Oh, don't let me disturb you. I'm sorry to intrude."

He looked at his watch and smiled drily.

"Rather a good job I was a little late."

"Were you? How time flies! I was late home from business, and I've been busy since."

"I've been waiting twenty minutes and a half, and I was thirty-five minutes behind," he said off-handedly.

Not by a second would he add to his waiting, or lessen his dalliance. She had lied that he might lie, but he did not care enough to take the chance. Her hand trembled as she stood at the mirror pinning up a stray lock that she had left loose so that she might seem unready.

"I could have waited until you had finished your toilet," he said.

"I forgot. Of course you want to get on with your reading. But perhaps one paper won't last you the night." She went out and returned with an armful of newspapers, which she slammed down on the table at his elbow. "There!" she said, and vanished.

He read on for five minutes or so, then he put his paper into his pocket and sat thinking in the gathering dusk. He had known Amy Minton four years. In this familiar little room, with her by his side, the happiest hours of his life had been spent. And now—it had come to this.

He did not altogether understand it. She was still young and pretty; men admired her in the street, and he knew she loved him. He supposed the cause was in himself.

He was twenty-three when he fell in love with her. He had changed a good deal in these four years. Many things that interested him then did not interest him now.

A year ago he would have quarrelled with anyone who had told him he would ever break an appointment with her. He had been doing that for months. The press of her fingers, the touch of her lips, thrilled him no more. He came to her with lagging feet; he left her with a sigh of relief. Some day—he would not come. But he did not understand it.

It was almost dark when she came back. She paused for a moment on the threshold of the room, hoping he would call her to him; then she sat down at the piano.

Time was when the commonest barrel organ melody played by her could set his heart throbbing. Now, he observed that her choice of airs was conventional, her playing mechanical and colourless. His indifference choked her. She got up suddenly in the middle of a tune.

"You'd better go," she said.

He went.

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were the nights he visited her. The following Wednesday he did not come. The family made a fuss about it.

"It all comes of leaving you girls to yourselves," said her mother. "In my young days, when parents had a say in their children's affairs, the man was brought to his senses after a year or two's courtship, and the girl was safely married to him before he had time to get tired of her. If my mother hadn't taken your father in hand he'd have hung on till I married someone else out of spite, and left him to die of landladies' cooking."

"If that's what Amy's up to," said Maggie, her elder and plainer sister, "she might let us know, and the fellow too. Save us wasting suppers on him and him useless journeys."

"Don't you make any error," said Samuel Minton, aged eleven. "Our Amy hasn't got any other chap. She's just dotty on Walter. You should see the face on her when he's late getting here. You'd think she was going to be executed."

"If I have no one else," said Amy, for she knew that Maggie knew she had no other sweetheart, "it's because I want no one else, and not for lack of chances."

"Chances are little use when there's no sense to make use of them," returned Maggie, who, after three months' skilful courtship, was about to marry a middle-aged greengrocer.

"There's sense and sense," said Amy quietly.

"Something must certainly be done," decided Mrs. Minton. "Walter's been coming after you four years; you're no nearer the holy altar now than ever you were, and he's backing out."

"He's backing out, is he?" cried sturdy Jack, just home after five years' sailoring and wandering over the earth. "He's throwing over my little Amy, is he? We'll have to show him the way to back in again!" He squared his shoulders and performed significant manœuvres with his fists.

Amy's eyes flashed. "If you dare!" she threatened; for Jack was half as heavy again as her dilatory lover and twice as muscular.

Jack caught his despondent sister round the waist and gave her a smacking kiss.

"There then, naughty Jack sha'n't harm a hair of her darling's head," he assured her, adding, when she had gone up to bed, "But naughty Jack will make a picture of his face!"

"If you take my advice," put in Sam, "you'll let him go, and good riddance to him. He's got dreadfully stingy lately. I haven't seen the colour of his money for three weeks. I wish Amy would hook on to Benny Bingo, the bookmaker. I had it from him personally that he's clean gone on her. There's the fellow for a brother-in-law."

Mrs. Minton cut short a catalogue of Benny Bingo's liberalities by taking Sam by the collar and carrying him off to bed, to his intense indignation.

"You don't mean," she said, coming back and fastening the kitchen door, so that her words would not reach Amy's room, "you don't mean you're going to fight Walter?"

"You've guessed it, mother."

"But, my dear boy, suppose he fights you too?"

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"*Him* fight!" said Maggie contemptuously.

"All the more fun," laughed Jack.

"Leave this little job to me," said Mr. Minton, waking up out of a doze. "I'll reason with the young man. I'll point out to him the injudiciousness of his behaviour. Reason brought me up to the scratch. Why shouldn't it bring him too?"

"Because men are different nowadays," answered Maggie feelingly.

"Mag's right," said Jack. "It takes the young to deal with the young these times. You leave him to me, dad. It isn't reasoning he's in need of. He wants waking up; he's taking us too casually. Next time he calls get Amy out of the way and leave me to settle with him. Seems to me I've just come home in time."

"What if he doesn't mean to come again?" suggested Maggie.

"Oh, then I'll begin calling on *him*."

The next night, Walter, strolling homewards, found himself in the neighbourhood of the Minton's house. He loitered awhile at the end of the street considering. He had sometimes found more pleasure in visiting Amy on surprise occasions than on the evenings when he was expected. The uncertainty of finding her in had sharpened the edge of anticipation. Without any definite intention he turned his steps towards her door.

The parlour was alight, and the blinds drawn. The piano was tinkling; a voice—her voice—was singing "Annie Laurie." The moving strains beat appealingly against Walter's heart, but it was closed against them.

The embers of his romance, which anticipation had warmed for a moment, grew cold again in her presence. The certainty that he had only to knock at the door to meet the same tentative smile with which she always greeted his unannounced visits, only to remain silent for a minute in her company to see the smile give way to the usual pout, oppressed him with the burden of disillusionment.

In there she sat, her arms ready for his embrace, her lips pleading for his kisses; and he stayed outside. But he was not happy.

He was turning away when a man's voice joined in the song. A heavy baritone, not without a musical ring, but in its bounding, unmodulated strength more suited to a rollicking sea-song than a pathetic ballad.

Walter paused, wondering who the man could be. Evidently a friend of some intimacy to be shut up in the parlour with her. And why not? She was young and good-looking, he was cooling; what more likely than that she should seek a livelier companion?

He grew hot at the question. Then he laughed with a sense of relief. Of course the Mintons were holding one of their frequent parties. Amy was singing with one of the company for the entertainment of the rest. Presently there would be applause.

The singing ceased, but there was no applause. Listening at the window, Walter noticed a gap in the venetian blind, through which a narrow space of the lamp-lit room was visible. This narrow space was occupied by part of the keyboard of the piano, a book of music standing above, Amy's profile and a large brown hand resting on her shoulder.

As Walter peered in the brown hand moved forward to turn the leaves of the music book, met Amy's white one outstretched on the same errand, and squeezed it; and the next moment a man's brown face came into view and kissed her full on the mouth.

Walter stared hard, but a mist blotted the scene from his gaze.

When it cleared away the man's head had disappeared, though his hand still remained on Amy's shoulder, and the loving pair were singing the opening bars of "Tom Bowling."

A blind rage took hold of Walter. Passionate jealousy, to which he had long been a stranger, swept over his heart as a flood, reminding him in a flash of the old days before he was sure of her favour, when he cherished black hate for every man her wayward lips smiled on.

The harmony of the blending voices maddened his nerves. He wrenched his eyes from the window, strode awkwardly to the step, and had taken the knocker in his hand, when the door, which was slightly ajar, swung wide at his touch.

He rushed along the passage and into the parlour, and seizing Amy's companion by the collar, struck him a sounding blow on the cheek-bone.

Jack Minton—for the unknown rival was he—jerked his neck free and returned the blow with interest. With loud breathings and flaming faces the two men closed in combat and went lurching about the room, hitting now at each other, now the unsatisfactory air, and all in deadly silence.

Amy shrank trembling into a corner as they stumbled towards her, then indignation against her brother got the better of her. She sprang between them.

"Jack, for shame! Come away this minute. How dare you strike him!"

The men fell apart, glaring.

"Why shouldn't I?" growled Jack. "He hit me first."

She looked wonderingly at Walter.

"You hit him first?"

"Yes," he said.

"Why?"

"He—he kissed you."

"He kissed me! Of course he kissed me." Then her heart leapt at the blunder; the dear, delightful blunder that had shown her he would fight for her, dawned on her. "I

"Jack, for shame. How dare you strike him!"

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forgot," she said, smiling on them both, "you have never met Jack, this is Walter; Walter, this is my brother Jack."

"Your brother!" said Walter slowly, thinking it out. He offered his hand to Jack. "Then I apologise."

"I'm dashed if I do!" said Jack. "So you're Walter, are you? You're the gentleman who's been having a game with my sister?" He advanced threateningly. "We've finished too soon. I've been saving up a licking for you. Better get the job over."

"Yes, we'd better get the job over," said Walter, putting up his fists.

Amy gave Jack a push towards the door. "Go and find room in the kitchen, you great silly," she said, kissing him. "And if ever you lay a finger on Walter again, I'll fall out with you."

Walter followed Jack, and held out his hand again. "Shake hands, old chap. You owed me a licking, and you've given me one, I owe you—well, never mind what I owe you. Shake hands, anyway."

Jack, slower than his sister to grasp the meaning of Walter's "He kissed you!" took his hand dubiously. "Well," he said, "I don't mind telling you that this just about gets over me. Here I come home from the other side of the world, find you two at loggerheads, and promise myself I'm going to show you how to appreciate a girl like Amy with the business end of my knuckles.

"I do so"—he inspected Walter's black eye with critical satisfaction, then felt his own bruised cheek tenderly—"we both do so. And now you're old-chapping me, Amy's chucking me out, and the pair of you seem to have become as big friends as ever without giving me the wink as to how you've managed it."

Walter shook his hand warmly. "Perhaps some other time I'll give you—the wink."

"Walter," said Amy, when her brother had gone, "what is it you owe Jack?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her in the old sweet way.

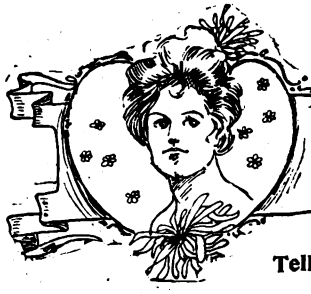
"I owe him you," he said. "I was losing you, my darling, letting you go, wilfully; though I was miserable, and did not want to. I was too sure of you, took you too much for granted. I had forgotten that I loved you. Something had to happen to remind me. Jack happened."

"But," she protested slyly, "it was only Jack after all. Are you sure you won't be sorry you put yourself to the inconvenience of calling, and—er—got your eye blacked, for a mere brother?"

"Sorry!" he cried. "Dear old Jack has been the salvation of me; but for him I would have driven you to warmer arms. My love for you had gone asleep; he awakened it. When I left you last night I did not intend to come back. Now I have come back for ever; I mean, for as long as I am welcome."

"It's all the same," she said, laying her head on his shoulder.

William James.



A LUCKY BLUNDER.

Telling of How the Mixing of Two Letters Won a Man his Wife.

The postman tossed a half dozen letters on Russell Webster's desk and passed along. Russell dropped the morning paper and picked up the letters. He hurried through the inclosures until he reached the last one. Then he raised the heavy white envelope and looked hard at the dainty address.

He was still staring at it as he ripped off the end of the envelope and drew out the sheet within. Half a moment later he softly whistled. The letter began—

"Sir,—*Your extraordinary communication is to hand. I can think of no reason that could possibly prompt the declaration you have made. I do not look upon you even as a friend. What you ask is simply impossible, and I beg you will never allude to the matter again. Yours very truly,*

"Cicely Hammond."

A smile suddenly spread across the attractive face of the reader.

"Well," he murmured, "that's a decidedly peculiar way in which to answer a simple offer for a piece of property. Hanged if it isn't serious enough to be the refusal of a proposal of marriage. By Jove, that's exactly what it is! Is anything the matter with me? Have I been proposing to some indignant maiden unawares? Where's my letter-book?" He found the volume and turned back the flimsy pages. "Here it is," he murmured, and read the copy aloud—

"*Miss Cicely Hammond.*

"Dear Madam,—*I am authorised to offer you two thousand pounds for your lot at corner of Hayes Avenue and Milburn Street, cash payment in full to be made at time of transfer. An early reply will oblige yours very truly,*

"Russell Webster."

He held the book away from him and stared hard at the copy. Then he laughed.

"The most anxious old maid that ever longed to change her name couldn't mistake that for a proposal," he chuckled. "No, there's some blunder, but it isn't mine. I'll go up there at once and see the lady and tell her about it. It's the gentlemanly thing to do. I can easily see that it's no joke from her point of view."

A little later, as he sat back in a forward corner of the electric car, he tried to recall all he had heard about the lady. She had very lately taken up her residence in one of the fashionable suburbs. She had come into possession of the property of a deceased citizen, and was reputed very wealthy.

He pictured her as a woman of mature age, of presumable intelligence and refinement, and with a distaste for the demands of active society. And while he was still busy with his imaginary portrait, he reached the street where the lady resided.

His ring at the door was answered by a young woman—a young woman who wore a light stuff gown and a neat white apron. Russell looked at this sudden vision admiringly.

"Is Miss Hammond at home?" he asked.

"Have you an appointment?" inquired the young woman, and Russell was much pleased with the mellow resonance of her tones. He had a theory that the feminine voice was an excellent guide to the feminine character.

"No," replied Russell, "but my business is of a somewhat urgent as well as personal nature."

The young woman looked at him a little doubtfully.

"Come in," she said, and ushered him into a handsome apartment that seemed to combine the purposes of both office and library. She motioned Russell to a chair and paused beside the large writing-table in the centre of the roomy

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apartment, as if waiting for the caller to announce his business.

"My card," said Russell.

The young woman glanced at the pasteboard.

"The answer," said Russell, with a little catch in his voice, "was not entirely satisfactory, and I felt it would be better for all concerned to ask for a—a clearer reply from Miss Hammond herself."

The young woman opened her eyes.

"I can't see how it could be made any clearer," she said.

"It depends on the point of view," said Russell. He looked about him as if for possible listeners, and lowered his voice. "Are you Miss Hammond's secretary?" he asked.

"I do her writing," replied the young woman.

"Then," said Russell, "I think it would be fair to show you this extraordinary letter before Miss Hammond sees it." And he placed the document in her hand.

"Thank you for your consideration," she said, and unfolded the letter.

Suddenly a pink flush stole across her rounded cheek. Then she smiled. Then both flush and smile deepened and she suddenly sank into the desk chair, and dropping her head on the table laughed and laughed.

"I am glad you find it amusing," said Russell. "Do you think Miss Hammond will consider it equally funny?"

The young woman looked up at him with swimming eyes.

"Sir," she said, "I must ask you to pardon me, but if I were certain I would receive my discharge the next minute I couldn't help laughing." And she laughed again.

"As I have said," remarked Russell, "I am very glad you can take it this way. It struck me as having an amusing side. Yet at the same time I can't help feeling a little anxious about the other fellow."

At this the young woman suddenly stopped laughing and opened her eyes very wide indeed. Then she hastily hurried to the most distant window and stared out for several moments. And Russell felt sure she was laughing again. When she looked round her eyes were still wet.

"I beg your pardon for being so hysterical," she said. "But you see I really couldn't help it. That last remark of yours quite capped the climax."

"Then am I to understand that Miss Hammond's answer to my offer was also in the nature of a refusal?" said Russell.

"It was," the young woman replied with a quick catch in her voice.

"Would it be asking too much if I requested to know the exact wording of Miss Hammond's letter to me?" Russell asked.

The young woman hesitated.

"Circumstances have somewhat altered the situation," she said, "and yet I think it is your right to receive what was originally intended for you."

"I agree with you," said Russell. "But of course the original cannot be recalled. It may be possible, however, that the receiver will come here just as I have done to find out what it all means."

The girl shook her head.

"No," she said, "he will do nothing of the sort. I think you will understand why when you see a copy of the letter that was intended for you. Here it is."

She opened a book lying on the table and turned back a few pages. Russell came forward.

"It is just the pencilled draft," she said, "but it was copied word for word."

Russell read it aloud.

"*Your communication with offer is at hand. At present I have no intention of letting any of my property pass out of my hands. Very truly yours.*"

Russell looked round at the young woman.

"Can you blame me for laughing?" she said. "Isn't that about the curtest thing you ever saw in the way of a refusal of a marriage offer?"

Russell nodded.

"And—and, does it fit the case?" he asked.

"Exactly," replied the young woman. "And it fits all the closer because it was done unconsciously."

"And the man will not suspect that a mistake has been made?"

"Not for a moment."

Russell shook his head ruefully.

"I'd awfully hate to deserve a reply like that," he said. "I don't believe I could." He looked at the young woman sharply. "I beg your pardon," he added, "but it appears to me that you are on extremely confidential terms with Miss Hammond."

"That is true," said the young woman.

"I wasn't aware that answers to offers of marriage were usually left in the hands of secretaries," Russell went on.

The young woman laughed.

"There is no sentiment about offers of this sort," she said. "They are simply unimportant business details."

Russell laughed as much at the way in which the young woman said this as he did at the idea.

"Then if I made a proposal of marriage to Miss Hammond," he went on, "I could expect that you would answer it?"

"Most assuredly," replied the young woman. "That is, unless it went by mistake to some puzzled dealer in property."

"Well, there is no immediate danger," said Russell. "But this brings me back to business. Of course I am to understand that my offer for the lot is rejected?"

"Of course," said the young woman. "You know the lot is worth much more," she said.

"Yes," he replied, "it is worth more. You understand that I was simply the agent of other parties."

"No doubt you thought that here was a chance to obtain a bargain from a simple and quite unsophisticated woman, who might be glad to jump at the chance of securing such a sum it cash."

"No," said Russell, "I didn't think anything of the kind. I simply tried to execute the commission that was given me. I would do the same if you intrusted me with a similar piece of business."

"Very well," said the young woman. "As a proof of your good faith you may take that same lot of land and let us see how good a price you can get for it."

"Does Miss Hammond authorise this?" Russell inquired.

"If the price is right," said the young woman, "she can be persuaded."

Russell took his hat.

"I will report in a few days," he said. He hesitated. "As I am, apparently, to transact this business with you, would it be a presumption to ask your name?"

"Not at all," replied the young woman. "I am Miss Vane."

"Good morning, Miss Vane," said Russell, and was gone.

He smiled over his singular adventure all the way back to the office. What a bright and charming girl that Miss Vane was. He wasn't quite sure that he had ever heard a woman's unrestrained laughter that was at all pleasant before. She must be a delightful companion, no matter how crotchety her old maid employer might be. He would show her

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what he could do with that corner lot. He would convince her of his honesty and energy.

Four days later he again greeted Miss Vane. He fancied she seemed pleased to see him.

"I have been quite fortunate," he said; "I found an out-of-town purchaser for the lot."

"And the price?"

"Three thousand pounds, cash down, and it is a very good price, too."

"I trust," said Miss Vane, "that you have used no irregular means."

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't work on his sympathies, did you? You didn't tell him that Miss Hammond sorely needed the money? You didn't add she was a crochety old maid and as stubborn as an army mule, did you?"

She said this with such an innocent air that Russell couldn't feel offended.

"Sentiment would be of no earthly use with this man," he said. "He's as hard as nails. He knew all about the lot. He wants it and he's willing to give a fancy price for it. As for using Miss Hammond's personal peculiarities as an aid in the transaction, I couldn't well do that, because I never saw her."

"Very true," said Miss Vane. She hesitated a moment. "The price is satisfactory," she said. "Miss Hammond would have taken nothing less. Here are her deed and the abstract. Will you kindly prepare the papers and arrange all the details?"

The transfer was completed a few days later when Russell handed Miss Vane a cheque for the amount.

"And how much does Miss Hammond owe you for your services?" she asked.

"The regular commission charged is two per cent.," he replied.

She unlocked a drawer of the table and drew out a package of bank notes and counted off the amount.

"There is sixty pounds, I think," she said. "Please run it over."

Russell deftly ran through the pile and nodded, and then he counted off a certain amount and placed it on the table before the young woman.

"What's this?" she demanded.

"That's your share," he said. "Half and half, you know. I am perfectly well aware that without your aid I couldn't have touched a penny of this sum. Don't look like that. You've earned it all right."

"B—but I can't take it," protested Miss Vane.

"Of course you can take it," said Russell. "You must take it. This isn't a gift. It's a cold-blooded business transaction. I fancy you'll know what to do with it. I'm quite sure that little windfalls of this sort never come amiss to me."

Miss Vane was about to speak, but Russell looked so determined that she changed her mind and gathered up the notes.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm quite sure I never earned so much money at one time before—if I earned it."

"You did," laughed Russell, as he rose.

"One moment," said Miss Vane. "Miss Hammond has been making inquiries about you. They are quite satisfactory. She wants a man of business. Someone who can attend to the details of the management of her estate. She favours you. It will not take all your time at present. Later on she may require more from you. If you take the place you will report to me here twice a week. The salary can be arranged later when the duties of the place are fully determined, but I think you will find Miss Hammond a person of liberal views on this point. What do you say?"

Russell looked at her with an air of indecision.

"What would you advise?" he asked. "I certainly would want to earn my money."

"There'll be no fear about that," laughed Miss Vane, and her smile was very attractive.

"Convey my thanks to Miss Hammond," he said, "and tell her I am pleased to accept her offer."

The oftener Russell met Miss Vane the more charmed he was with her. At the seventh meeting he was convinced he had loved her from the very start. At the eighth meeting he was fully satisfied that life would be a dismal wilderness without her.

At the ninth meeting he had the courage to say:

"I suppose Miss Hammond would miss you greatly if you left her?"

"She couldn't do without me," said Miss Vane.

"Who could blame her?" murmured Russell, and then was instantly convinced that he had said something inexcusably bold. But he quickly rallied and remarked that it was strange he hadn't met Miss Hammond yet.

"Not at all," said Miss Vane, "she does not care to meet strangers."

"But I am not exactly a stranger," said Russell.

"You will see her some day," said Miss Vane. "At present she is interested in settling her affairs and superintending certain improvements. When she returns from the Continent she will open up her house and try to become acquainted with her new neighbours."

"The Continent?" repeated Russell. "And do you go, too?"

"Yes," replied Miss Vane.

"And how long do you—I mean Miss Hammond, intend to stay?"

"Six months, I believe."

Russell went back to his office with a heavy heart. Could he endure it to forego seeing that charming face for six months?

He didn't think he could.

Then he plucked up his courage and sat down and wrote Miss Vane a love letter that was also an offer of marriage. It was a long letter. He told her about himself, his plans, his hopes, his present standing. He told her how she had come into his life like a ray of sunshine, and how his admiration and respect and gratitude had all merged into love. Theirs was a brief acquaintance, he admitted, but they were both free and independent, and had but themselves to please.

It was a nice letter, a tender, earnest letter, yet Russell dropped it in the letter-box with fear and trembling, and how eagerly he seized his post the next morning and ran through the letters.

There was just the briefest note in the familiar handwriting—

"*To avoid any possibility of further mistakes, will Mr. Webster call in person for a reply to his proposition?*"

There was no name signed to this and Russell turned it over blankly. Then he took his hat and started out to learn his fate.

Miss Vane received him with grave courtesy, which was quite unlike her usual manner. He noticed that her cheeks were a little flushed and that there was a rose in her pretty hair.

"Sit down, Mr. Webster," she said, and fixed her gentle eyes upon him. "Miss Hammond," she began with a little hesitation, "was much pleased with your letter."

"Miss Hammond?"

"She liked its manly ring, and, of course, was highly gratified by the compliment it paid her."

"Miss Hammond, did you say?"

Miss Vane took no notice of the interruption but went on speaking.

"She was even inclined to look upon your offer with favour, but wanted first to secure a personal interview."

Russell looked about him in an agony of apprehension.

"Miss Hammond!" he murmured. "Heavens, has there been another blunder?"

His troubled glance fell upon Miss Vane. She was silently laughing, and her eyes were moist as they met Russell's.

"No," she softly said, "there is no mistake this time, dear friend. Cicely Vane Hammond—Cicely Vane, until, at her uncle's last request, she took the name of Hammond—approves in person of your latest and best effort to advance her dearest interest."

And with a tender smile she extended both her hands.

W. R. Rose.

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On One Condition.

Poet: "I have here, sir, my last effusion." Editor: "If I were quite sure of that, I'd buy it."

Her Feet Weren't Small.

Mattie: "I want you to know I don't stand on trifles." Helen (glancing at her feet): "No, dear, I see you don't."

He Couldn't Do It.

She: "I don't understand you quite." He: "Well, I can't supply you with intelligence." She: "No; you have none to spare."

He Took the Hint.

He: "May I kiss your hand?" She: "Certainly. But if you had intimated that you preferred hands I would not have removed my veil."

Jack Liked Laps.

Jack: "Madge, I think you would make an excellent pedestrian." Madge: "Why, Jack?" Jack: "Because you can cover so many laps in so short a time."

Not Very Complimentary.

He: "What lovely flowers. Do you know, they remind me of you?" She: "They are artificial flowers." He: "Yes, I know; but it requires close examination to detect it."

Laughter Turned to Tears.

"Did you ever laugh until you cried, Tommy? "Yes, only this morning." "What at?" "Well, pa stepped on a tack and I laughed; then pa caught me laughing and I cried."

Taking Him Down.

Jack (fond of putting it on a bit): "I dined at my friend, the Duchess of Pudboro's, last week, and, would you believe it, we had no fish." Nellie: "Ah, well, I suppose they ate it all upstairs."

An Early Rise Guaranteed.

Applicant: "Of course I don't ask for a partnership yet, but give me a position in which I will be sure of an early rise." Employer: "All right; I'll make you caretaker of the building. You will open the doors at 4 a.m."

Better Value for Money.

Mr. Newrich (to artist): "I think, on the whole, I won't take the picture. I prefer spending my cash in statues rather than in pictures; because you see more than one side of a statue, and get your money's worth better."

The Old Lady Didn't Approve.

A Scottish preacher once said: "But, my brethren, I will not dwell longer on this subject," only to hear a shrill voice from the gallery, from a woman who did not approve of written sermons: "Ye canna, for your paper's rin out."

Used for the Proper Purpose.

Mrs. Billus (after the company had gone): "Johnny, you shouldn't have eaten those preserved fruits. They are not intended to be eaten. They were put on the table to fill up." Johnny Billus: "Well, that's what I used 'em for, mamma."

Very Particular.

"Your friend, Miss Blank, seems a very strict teetotaler," said a man, commenting on a girl who had refused to eat plum-pudding with brandy sauce. "Strict doesn't express it," replied the girl's friend. "Why, don't you know she's so particular she won't heat her curling-tongs over a spirit lamp."

He was Too Flippant.

Mr. Lawhead: "Why do you treat me so coldly? Why didn't you answer the note I wrote you last Thursday?" Miss Brushley: "Sir, I don't wish to have anything more to say to you. You began your note by saying you 'thought you would drop me a line.' I want you to understand that I'm not a fish."

Couldn't Say the Right Thing.

"It's no use!" exclaimed Willie Wishington, "I never can learn to say the right thing at the right time. I told Miss Slimmins that her eyes shone on me like the stars above." "That's old, but pretty," answered Miss Cayenne. "Yes. But she is one of those remarkably tall girls who resent any references to their height."

Only Wanted the Hand.

Old Crusty: "You ask for my daughter? Why, young man, at your present salary you couldn't even dress her." Suitor: "Oh, yes, sir! I could keep her in gloves." Old Crusty: "Gloves! Do you mean to insinuate that my daughter would wear only gloves?" Suitor: "Pardon me, sir; I only asked for her hand."

Glad She Refused Him.

"Clara—Miss Simpkins," he murmured, as he reached for his hat after her disinclination, "when you think of a little road where we used to wander in the happy month of July, beneath the branches of the green trees, I pray you think of me. For I am like that little road—a lover slain;" and so he passed out of sight. And then she was glad she had answered him no.

Gave it to the Calves.

He was a cyclist, and called at a farmhouse for a glass of water, but the farmer's pretty daughter offered him a glass of milk instead. "Won't you have another glass?" she asked, as he drained the tumbler. "You are very good," he said, "but I am afraid I shall rob you." "Oh, no! We have so much more than we can use ourselves that we always give it to the calves."

It Couldn't be Becoming.

Mrs. Fashionplate: "Now, John, I want you to leave this bonnet at the milliner's, and tell her that it is not at all becoming to me, and I don't want it." Mr. Fashionplate: "Why, I thought I heard Mrs. Gadabout tell you yesterday that you looked charming in it?" Mrs. Fashionplate: "Yes, that's the reason I'm returning it. I'm sure now it must be a perfect fright."

A Tongue-Twister.

"George!" she screamed, "my neck!" "What's the matter?" "There's a pillacatter——" "A what?" "A taperkiller——" "What in the world do you mean?" "Oh, dear!" she moaned, as she clutched him frantically, "A kitterpaller! You know, George! A patterkiller!" "Oh!" said George, with evident relief, and he proceeded to brush the caterpillar away.

Healthy for the Brother.

"Wilfred is a perfect dear," cried a gushing young lady to a cynical friend. "He's going to learn to smoke straight away, just to please me." "How clever of you to persuade him," sneered the cynical friend. "A *fiancé* who doesn't smoke, I suppose, is too effeminate to be worth having?" "You mistake my motive, dear. You see Wilfred has a birthday once a year." "You don't say so!" "And he has the masculine weakness for receiving presents on that auspicious occasion." "Yes?" "And my good, kind-hearted, generous brother Jack has just opened a tobacco shop!"

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

His Crown of Sorrow.

"Miss Lodge, tell me! Why am I kept here; and why do you walk so softly about the room? I have been wondering for a long time what that shadow was that passed and repassed before my eyes, like a memory of long ago."

"Dear Mr. Vivyan, please don't excite yourself! The doctor told me to keep you very quiet, and not to let you talk," said the low, gentle voice of the girl who was known in the "Retreat" as Mr. Vivyan's secretary, but who for a week had also been his devoted nurse.

The man moved his head restlessly upon his pillows. It was the first time since he had left the "Retreat" that night to meet the unknown friend who was to have given him the tokens of his dead wife and child, that he had opened his eyes; and, as he gazed languidly round the room at the familiar landmarks, he wondered whether, after all, he had not been dreaming that he had lain a long time in a place where he had listened to the rush and roar of many waters! Perhaps they had been the waves of the waters of death that had lapped his brow with cold, damp fingers.

He beckoned the girl to him—the girl with the face and voice of one who rose before him ever as a ghost from the past, that cruel past that had closed the doors of joy on him for ever!

"Tell me, child," he said. "I have forgotten something. I went out—but how did I return?"

Ivy bent over him with a troubled face. She knew that he ought not to talk, yet she hardly liked to refuse to answer his question, for to do so might bring on the fever again, and she dreaded those long hours again, listening to the incoherent ramblings of a man in delirium—a man who seemed to have suffered in some strange way, almost more than she had herself.

"I will answer you just that one question," she replied gently; "then will leave you unless you try to go to sleep."

He nodded. "Just this one question, 'Nurse Lodge,'" he said, with a faint smile; "then I will be good."

"Well," she murmured softly; "you were brought back to the 'Retreat' the next evening. I had been, oh, so fearfully anxious about you, and Mrs. Riley also; we sat up all night. The men who came with you in a cab said they had rescued you from drowning. They picked you up off—Rotherhithe—I think was the name of the place.

"You had been struck on the head and were unconscious when they took you from the cold river on to their barge. Then"—she started, as a sudden gleam of memory flickered into the eyes of the man on the bed. "Then they looked in your coat, and found a card with your name on it, in an inner pocket; so they brought you back to the 'Retreat' ill, unconscious, but safe!" and her eyes welled with a flood of tears.

"Ah!" he breathed deeply; "was it Providence, I wonder, that intervened for me? An unusual courtesy on my behalf! I begin to think that I must be changing the luck that has been so long against me!" He started up in bed and seized her arm. "Miss Lodge! they deceived me. I remember now; I went to get the photo they promised me of my wife—my dear Margaret. It was a lie—a foul plot to get rid of me; but I don't know who it was."

"But you will know when you are better," she murmured soothingly; "for then you will be able to trace your enemies, or whoever it was who threw you into the river."

He looked at her dully. "Tell me, when shall I be out of this bed? My work keeps calling me, and I shall go mad if I am kept here much longer. There is so much to do—so little time to do it in!"

Her hand touched the burning one of the man on the bed. Her tender, sympathetic heart had gone out to the weary, tempest-tossed soul who had depended upon her nursing to bring him back to life.

"In a few days now," she murmured softly, "you will be able to move about the house; then into the garden for a short stroll; and, lastly, into our workroom! But you must not worry or think too much about these cowardly ruffians who flung you into the river! They will be punished soon enough!"

His fingers closed on hers for a second, and the keen desire for revenge that had seized him passed out of his eyes.

"I am afraid I am a bad patient," he said with a faint smile; "but you will forgive me, Miss Lodge, when I tell you that I have a mission to accomplish before I die; and I am fearful that I may go without fulfilling it!"

Her eyes filled with a sudden mist. "Don't talk about dying, dear Mr. Vivyan! It hurts me to hear you speak so sadly! Leave your mission to a higher vengeance than you can bestow, and just think of nothing but getting better! Remember, I want you, too!"

"You want me, too?" he murmured dreamily. "How lovely it is to hear those words, Miss Lodge! It is many years since anyone wanted me! Many years!"

"Indeed, I need you very much," she replied softly. "For I should be homeless and penniless should you not require me at the dear old 'Retreat'! So get better, for my sake!"

"For your sake," he murmured; "yes, Miss Lodge, I will get better, and we will finish 'Canker' together! Then, perhaps, we will go abroad for a change!"

She held a cup of beef tea to his lips, and after seeing him fall into a natural slumber, left the room.

Outside, Mrs. Riley, the kind, motherly housekeeper, met her, and took her into the breakfast-room where lunch was laid.

"Now you must eat, my dear," said the motherly old woman, "or what will the master do if his nurse falls ill? And you are growing thinner every day. There'll be nothing left of you soon but a shadow!"

The girl smiled, wearily. "A very substantial shadow, Mrs. Riley! In fact, I never felt stronger."

The woman smiled. "Anyway, I'm not going to let you go wearing yourself out, Miss Lodge. It isn't fair that you should do all the hard work; and that's why I'm particularly glad that a friend of mine—a trained nurse—is coming to see me, and will be able to let you have a rest sometimes. She has just left her case up in the country."

Ivy smiled silently. She was glad that there would be a woman of experience on the spot, for she felt that her knowledge was inadequate to compete with Mr. Vivyan's nervous temperament when he was convalescent. He required someone stronger of will than herself and less interested. Once during lunch she crept inside the room where the patient lay and caught him sitting up in bed.

"I only want to read, or look at pictures," he said, in answer

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to her protestation; "I can't sleep; and turning over the leaves of something may keep me from thinking."

Putting some periodicals on a table beside him, she gazed at him wistfully.

"Don't look too long, then. You will grow very weary, and your brains will, perhaps, be too much excited to sleep. Promise me, dear Mr. Vivyan, that you will stop when you feel tired!"

He smiled at her pale, flower-like face and soft, earnest eyes.

"You seem almost concerned about me, dear little girl!" he murmured. "It is long, long years since I heard a woman's voice so tenderly pleading! I am provoked to be disobedient, just to hear you scold me again. But run away now," he went on kindly; "you need a rest more than I; you should have a trained nurse to help you."

"Mrs. Riley has a friend who has been a nurse coming to see her to-day," she replied; "so I shall have the benefit of her knowledge. But I have been so glad to have been of some use to you," she went on softly. "You came into my life when it was at a very low ebb, and saved me from something worse than death!"

Before he could question her she had slipped from the room, and Vernon Vivyan turned over the leaves of the books with thoughtful eyes. Presently he tired of the sameness of the magazines, with their highly-coloured pictures, and gazed round the room in search of something else. On a table near the side of the bed there was a little leather case, with the word "Photographs" written across it in gold letters.

"I suppose that belongs to my little secretary and nurse!" he mused thoughtfully; "a photo. of her sweetheart, and the dead mother, and all the usual links that a fair, beautiful creature like that should possess, though she appears to be strangely lonely now. A lover's quarrel, perhaps," he sighed. "God grant it may only be a *quarrel!*"

He looked at the case again. It fascinated him peculiarly, and he felt a longing to see the face of the boy who had won the love of the girl who reminded him so poignantly of the past.

He stretched out his hand to the table, and drew the book towards him.

Innocent Ivy! She had not acquired the cunning of the criminal, and burnt or done away with the photographs that would most assuredly have betrayed her had they been seen by anyone from Melton. She had not been able to resist bringing her few prized treasures with her—the faces of those who had become so closely knit by links of memory, both dear and painful.

One by one the man in the bed gazed at them, smiling at the frank, boyish face of Jack Maitland that flashed with a gleam of youth into his own from the cardboard. He knew that it was the sweetheart of the girl who had nursed him so devotedly back to life; and, gazing with interest upon the spoilt, petulant child, Woolf, standing with his hand on the collar of a Great Dane; the roguish, laughing face of Muriel warmed his heart with a glow of youth.

"I wonder who they are?" he murmured. "Brothers and sisters, I suppose; with the exception of the photo. that has the inscription, 'Yours ever, Jack,' on it. *He* is no brother! Ah!"—turning over another—"this is the dead father. Looks like an old squire; and this"—taking up the last in the case with idle fingers—"this, of course, is the once mother of the family."

He looked at the photo. indifferently at first; he was beginning to feel sleepy; but, as his eyes fell upon the radiant, audacious beauty of the woman who gazed up at him with a laugh lurking in the depths of her great eyes, and a mocking smile of bewildering charm on her parted lips, the ex-convict and famous author uttered a low cry of fear and startled wonder.

"No, no!" he said aloud, speaking in a low, tense voice; "this woman is rich, the jewels on her neck, hair, and arms prove that! She can have nothing to do with the ghost of my poor lost Margaret. Yet it is the image of her, or what she would have been had Fate allowed her to grow into mature womanhood! *He* told me she was dead," he went on with increasing excitement, and sitting straight up in the bed; "he said she had died—with the child!"

A curious expression stole into his burning eyes, a bright hectic spot flamed on either cheek, as a thought sprang forward to sicken and horrify him in sheer terror of a worse calamity than death having befallen the one star in the blackness of his firmament.

"I believed him!" he laughed bitterly; "I took what the liar and perjurer flung at me in mockery as gospel truth! How do I know that he spoke the truth? How do I know that Fate has not dealt more cruelly by her in letting her believe *me* dead? My Margaret! My Pearl of great price, if this picture is not that of a double, then God help us both! It were better that I had indeed perished at the hands of my enemies than you should learn the awful truth!"

He scanned the photo. again, and something in the laughing, joyous face told him that here was no woman living in durance vile, whose heart was buried in the grave of a dead child, but a woman who took all that life had to offer, with open hands, and gave little in return.

"She looks happy!" he muttered. "If memory lingers behind that smooth, low brow, it does so callously. She is radiant and contented; time has only touched her to enhance her beauty; while I——" he struck the photo. with a sudden rage—"while I have had the burden of a life's wrong to whiten my hair and sear my face!"

He hastily put the photos into the case, then fell back upon the pillows with a harsh laugh.

"I will know the worst! And when I know—when my doubts are convinced of the truth—I will get back a little of what that black-hearted villain has dealt me! Our score will be a heavy one to settle!"

He laughed again, and flung his arms above his head in a paroxysm of helpless rage.

"Oh, God! grant that she is dead! Better to mourn her dead than revile her living!"

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Father and Daughter.

Immediately after lunch Ivy went to her room for a few seconds before returning to her charge. She had listened at the door of the sick room on her way upstairs, and as everything was still quiet, had breathed a sigh of relief and passed on.

Since that night when her hands had suddenly been so full with the master of the house, she had not been able to dwell much upon the events of the past. She had insisted on keeping within the "Retreat" in spite of Mrs. Riley's attempts to make her go for a walk.

As each day dawned and set, she knew that for one day more she was safe from those who were searching for the runaway from Melton—the girl whom they imagined had been concerned in the death of a man! If they only knew the relationship between herself and the tramp in the spinny they would not have suspected her of such a cruel deed!

But now she felt that she had successfully evaded all those that searched for her, even to her arch-enemy, Digby Scarlett, whom she had feared even more than the police!

She sighed wearily as she compared her present secret existence with that of the year before. Then, she had been happy in the love of the man for whom she had cared above all others; and now, a hunted, desperate creature, she had only the memory of a past happiness to console her for the loss of her lover and her peace of mind. She wondered what was happening at Maitland Manor, and whether her ladyship ever gave her a thought, now that she was gone.

She roused herself with a sigh, and shook off the memories of the past, as she rose from the chair into which she had flung herself, and brushed her ruffled hair before the glass. At least there was one person to whom she was of some use; one human soul who was as lonely as herself!

As she stood before the window, a cab drew up at the gate of the "Retreat," and she looked curiously to see the friend of whom Mrs. Riley had spoken earlier in the day.

A dark, insignificant-looking woman stepped from the cab,

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but she was wrapped in shawls, and the gloom of the late afternoon concealed her face from the wistful eyes of the girl gazing through the window. Later, when she slipped from her room, she met Mrs. Riley on the stairs.

"Now, my dear," that kindly woman said, "I am going into the master, to sit with him while you talk to my friend the trained nurse. I have told her all about you, Miss—if you will excuse the liberty—and she is only too glad to be of any use to you that she can. If you will go into my sitting-room you will find her there, Miss, having a cup of tea. I will give master the beef tea and all, until you, or my friend, come upstairs."

Ivy, smiling slightly, passed on, glad that the nurse had taken over the responsibility of her highly-strung charge, and yet regretting a little the loss of her supremacy in the sick room.

As she turned the handle of the door, a woman rose from a chair with its back to the light, and she could only distinguish the faint outline of a black bonnet and draped figure.

"Mrs. Riley told me you would assist me in nursing Mr. Vivyan," Ivy began courteously. "I shall be very glad of your experience, Mrs.—" She paused politely, waiting for the silent woman to speak.

Slowly and deliberately the nurse moved forward, gazing with wide, terror-stricken eyes at the white, fragile face of Mr. Vivyan's secretary.

"Don't you know me, Miss?" she whispered cautiously.

Ivy took a step back, her suspicions aroused by the woman's agitation, and a strange feeling that she had heard that voice somewhere else, making her dread discovery at the eleventh hour!

"Who—who are you?" she answered, with trembling lips. "I don't remember you. My name is Lodge!"

She flung her head back defiantly, and waited for the stranger to speak.

The nurse put her hands out intreatingly, and the words that fell from her lips were like unto a cry of pain.

"Miss! Miss! Don't deny who you are! I know your secret better than you do yourself. You are the runaway wanted by the police, and the daughter of——"

"Stop!" The girl's desperate, hunted eyes flashed into those of the woman who had torn her disguise from her. "I remember you! You are nurse Beaumont—*his* nurse! You won't betray me, will you? I admit that I am Ivy Strange, but no more. I did not commit that—that crime! Let me stay here in peace; I am doing no harm, no wrong; only trying to be of some use in the world, now that *he* is dead!"—and her voice broke into a storm of tears, as she clutched the cloak of the nurse to whom she prayed for mercy.

"Hush, dearie! Hush!" said the older woman, tenderly, her own eyes welling with sympathy, as her fingers caught those of the girl; "I'd sooner die than let them know where you are; and I don't believe for one moment that you did it, in spite of your running away so strange, Miss," then, correcting herself, she added, tentatively: "I should say ma'am now, I suppose?"

Ivy looked up in surprise. "Why, ma'am?" she said, puzzled.

The woman glanced at the third finger of her left hand. It was ringless, and she uttered an exclamation of relief.

"I was afraid, dearie," she answered, "that you had been led into marrying that—that Mr. Scarlett. And if you had done so"—she shivered—"you would have regretted it all the days of your life!"

Ivy glanced at her in astonishment. "You know that he met me, and tried to make me promise to marry him?" she said slowly. "I—I—nearly did so, when he told me that my darling Jack was dead!" And her lip quivered painfully.

"What did you say, Miss?" Nurse Beaumont grasped her quickly. "Did that villain tell you such a cruel lie as that? Why, Mr. Maitland is alive, and, what's more, he's going to help you, and fight for you! The first thing he called for was 'Ivy,' as soon as he grew better!"

"Jack alive!" Ivy cried—the great spirit of hope once more springing into her heart—"then I'm willing to face anything so long as he believes in me!"

She buried her face in her hands, and for a moment the tears of the woman and the girl mingled.

Suddenly Ivy rose; her face had clouded, and her eyes had again become troubled.

"I forgot, nurse," she said slowly. "Though I am thankful and rejoice in his not being dead, there is a barrier between him and myself that is even greater than death. It can never be bridged over but must always stand between us!"

Nurse Beaumont looked at her strangely. "A barrier stronger than death, child! Why, you have nothing to be ashamed of, I'll swear!" She stopped abruptly, and, leaning forward, said impressively: "Has the barrier anything to do with—a broad arrow?"

The effect of her words was not unexpected. The girl flushed deeply, and, recoiling from her questioner, said hoarsely: "What do you mean? What do you know?"

Nurse Beaumont hesitated, then answered quickly: "I will tell you another time, miss. Only bear up, and try to forget that broad arrow. The dead should be forgiven their sins!"

"Forgiven!" said the girl bitterly. "I forgive the dead freely, but—but I cannot forget that he had no mercy on me when alive!"

The woman was about to answer her when the door opened, and Mrs. Riley came in. She looked worried and pale.

"Is Mr. Vivyan asleep?" Ivy said quickly; her truant thoughts flying back to the kind man whose house had been a refuge to her in her hour of need.

"No," the housekeeper answered slowly; "I can't make it out at all. He was doing so nicely this morning, and now the fever seems to be returning, and he's muttering and going on something awful! I shall be glad when the doctor comes again."

Nurse Beaumont hastily removed her cloak and bonnet.

"I'll go up and attend to him," she said calmly. "It is better for as few people as possible to be in a sick room; and if I want anything, Miss—Miss Lodge," she said quickly, "I will ask you to help me."

She went into the room where the master of the "Retreat" lay, with his eyes turned to the ceiling, and the long, nervous hands plucking at the bedclothes. Approaching softly, she leant over him and gazed with a long, intent look into his face. Something—the contour of the finely-chiselled features, and the fixed intensity of the dark eyes—reminded her vaguely of a man whose face she had remembered after long years.

"What a silly I am!" she murmured, "to let that man haunt me, now, when the poor chap's been dead this many a year!"

She turned softly from his bed, when suddenly the man lying there, spoke. "Is that you, Margaret! My little Margaret? How I love you; and now you are dead, dear one, and I have no time to tell you that I was innocent! The charge was false—false as the blackguard who invented it!

"Margaret! I dreamt last night that you had married again! It is not true, my love? Tell me that during all the years I have languished you have not spent them with another! Do you hear? Margaret! Speak!"

He raised himself in the bed with an effort, and stared before him with unseeing eyes.

Nurse Beaumont was seized with one of those flashes of inspiration that come but rarely into a life's experience.

"She will be here soon, sir!" she whispered soothingly, while her breath fluttered to her lips in unequal pants; "don't fret—Mr. Grant—she is not far off now!"

He moved his head restlessly. "Grant! Grant! It is a long time since I heard that name with the prefix! Not since the day they took me away from you, Margaret!" He sat up stiffly in the bed, and clinging to the counterpane as though gripping the rail of the dock, said loudly and in a clear, ringing voice:

"Not guilty, my lord! Not—guilty!" Then his voice broke into a wail that made the blood of the listening woman run cold in her veins.

"You haven't come yet, Margaret! Be quick, dear one, and we'll go together—together"—he laughed softly—"and they tell me there was a baby, Margaret! Bring it with you, too—our baby!"

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Hot, blinding tears ran down the face of the woman who saw for a second time the tragedy of a life enacted by the unconscious victim whom she had long since counted among the dead!

What was the end to be now? Nurse Beaumont thought, with a shiver. How was the secret to be kept?

A noise at the door disturbed her, and at the same time roused the patient from his momentary lethargy.

"Can I help you?" Ivy asked, softly, coming forward into the light.

Vernon Vivyan laughed harshly. "So you have come back at last, Margaret! You have not changed since the day we married! Come here; I want to look at you! To see the woman who deserted me in my extremity! Come here!"

She went forward quickly; his delirious words raising no resentment in her tender heart, only a great pity for the strong man in his weakness.

"Yes," she said gently, touching one hot hand with her own cool one; "I have come at last!"

He clutched her hand savagely in his; Nurse Beaumont, watching with suspended breath the faces of the man and girl, each, though neither knew it, knit by ties of blood!

"So you have left him!" he went on. "He has sent you to laugh over my downfall, perhaps, to tell him what I suffer!"

"Ask him whom he means, Miss," whispered the nurse in her ear; and, obeying blindly, Ivy said softly:

"Whom is it you think I have left?"

"My enemy!" went on the thick voice of the unconscious man; "the man who crushed me!"

"His name—ask the name, Miss," panted the woman by her side; and, wonderingly the girl murmured:

"Won't you tell me the name of this enemy?"

"Yes—yes—his name!" he muttered wildly. "It is written across my heart in blood! His name is Digby Scarlett!"

Ivy sprang back with a cry of horror. "Digby Scarlett!" she exclaimed; "he wronged you too!"

"Ah!" he said exultingly; "so you remember him, do you? The man you forgot me for! But now I will wipe out one at least of my wrongs!"

He snatched suddenly at her throat, and drew her down to him, his hand tightening round it like a fine cord.

As one roused from a dreadful nightmare, Nurse Beaumont sprang forward and caught his arm.

"Sir! sir!" she panted, drawing the half-unconscious girl towards her; "for the love of Heaven, stop! You are killing your own daughter!"

THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER.
A Duel of Wits.

"It is only a question of days! He may live longer, but if he does, it will only be to end his life in a madhouse!"

The doctor had spoken plainly, almost brutally, to the beautiful woman who questioned him, standing with a white face and great violet eyes, waiting to hear the verdict the consultation had brought forth.

"A question of days?" she murmured with a shiver. "You mean he may die?"

Dr. Grey shrugged his shoulders. It had struck him that this perfect type of woman had not been sufficiently upset at the sudden collapse of his old friend, Sir Trevor Maitland, and he resented as a personal affront the calm, ice-like manner she had of repeating his words.

"Yes, Lady Maitland," he said brusquely, "I mean what I say; Sir Trevor has had a shock that has struck at the very root of his being. This paralysis is only the beginning of the end."

When the doctor had left and the nurse was in possession of the sick room, Lady Maitland went to her boudoir—the room where the tragedy of her life had taken place.

But it was not of those things that she was thinking now.

Of the man upstairs she only thought once, and that was that it was his awkward entrance into the room that had flung

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

AND OINTMENT

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her into her present unenviable position. She had never loved Sir Trevor, but he had always been kind to her, and, above everything, he was the father of her boy, Woolf. She feared that he might die before she knew precisely the wording of the will, and the position of the child she loved.

Of the contempt and loathing Heriot North must have felt for her at the exposure of her double lying to him, by Digby Scarlett, she cared but little. All was swamped in the one desire to known how her boy stood in his father's will—the boy for whose sake she had jeopardised her future!

"If I could find out!" she murmured. "He might perhaps imply in some way that Woolf had been properly provided for. His other children are already in possession of their mother's money; but I will not stand by and see my boy neglected."

She opened the window and let the room fill with the soft, mild air. Suddenly, a low murmur of voices reached her, and the words fell on her ear before she realised their import:

"Yes," said the voice of Agnes Maitland; "the strange illness of my father had sent every other thought out of my mind, and I quite forgot to write and ask you to postpone your visit. But since you are here, and have come all this way, you will stay to lunch, and meet my step-mother? She is almost as anxious to meet you as you were to meet her!"

"It's very good of you, Miss Maitland," said a masculine voice; "I ought really to have notified when I was coming, but I took your invitation to be a general one, and postponed coming up until I remembered that I had work in London that needed my attention almost immediately, so I left Brighton, where I had been with a friend for some days, and came straight on here."

They moved on, and the woman in the room turned away with a set mouth and cold eyes. She was glad she had overheard the conversation. It had served as a preventive to surprise. And at lunch she would be prepared to meet her guest, Ernest Heath, outwardly calm, at least.

As her maid assisted her into a black, clinging robe, a whimsical fancy seized her to slightly powder her hair, and brush it in straight lines back from her forehead, giving her a wearied, almost middle-aged appearance that completely changed her from the brilliant, radiant woman of a few days ago.

On the stairs she met Woolf, looking excited and frightened.

"Oh, mummie!" he cried, clinging to her, "what do you think? 'The Hollies' has been burnt to the ground, and they say that poor Mr. North has been burnt too!"

Lady Maitland caught her breath with a sudden gasp!

"Let us hope it is not so bad as that, dear," she said soothingly. "Now you must be quiet and come down to lunch with me!"

When she and her son entered the dining-room, the man standing by the fireplace with Agnes Maitland, saw a tall, grave-looking woman with severely-dressed hair slightly grey, and a motherly smile on her face as she brought forward her boy.

"How do you do, Mr. Heath?" she said calmly, holding her hand out to the middle-aged, kindly-looking man who eyed her with scarcely concealed astonishment in his humorous blue eyes; "I have heard so much about you from Agnes, that I seem to know you already!"

"Is my step-mother at all like your cousin, Margaret Heath?" said Agnes sharply.

She saw the change in her father's wife, and knew that she had done it purposely. But how could she have guessed that Mr. Heath was coming to-day?

"No! Lady Maitland is not like my cousin, or even the photo. you showed me," he replied with emphasis.

Lady Maitland laughed. "I fear I always disappoint people who expect to find me like my photograph. I am really such a placid, ordinary person."

"I should hardly say that!" he replied courteously. "But I did see in London a girl the living image of my cousin."

"How strange!" said Agnes, watching her step-mother's flush, and the sparkle of satisfaction in her eyes.

"Yes," he continued, "she is secretary to the author, Vernon Vivyan, a great friend of mine. Her name is Ivy Lodge."

"How odd!" exclaimed Agnes, while her step-mother bit her lip with a sudden spasm. "*Ivy* is the name of the missing girl who is wanted by the police—Ivy Strange! What is she like?"

"Slim, with a perfect oval face," said Ernest Heath slowly; "large sad violet eyes; an aquiline nose; a beautiful brow, with a mass of copper-coloured hair growing low on it, and a red, tender mouth."

"That must be the same girl!" cried Agnes in delight. "Now she will be in the hands of the police very soon!"

"I hope not," murmured Heath.

"Excuse me, sir," said a stern, official voice in the open doorway; "I must ask you for the address of that young lady!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Ernest Heath hotly, as they sprang to their feet, Lady Maitland only remaining seated, with a white face.

"We have the warrant for her arrest, sir," replied Gilbert Chase, respectfully; "you are compelled to give it in the name of the law!"

"Don't!" breathed a low, intense voice at his elbow; and the guest saw her ladyship rise with quiet dignity, as she said to the detective:

"Mr. Chase, this is not a fit occasion for an argument of this nature to take place. If you go to the library, Mr. Heath will follow you with me, and there supply you with the address of the girl you think the missing Ivy Strange."

The detective bowed coldly. An unaccountable aversion had crept over him towards her ladyship.

He went to the library, and immediately the dining-room was emptied of its curious crowd, Lady Maitland turned to the man at her side.

"Mr. Heath! For my sake—for the sake of my poor husband! Go now, without giving the detective the address of that—girl! There is a train leaving Melton in ten minutes for London. The carriage is at the door for me, you take it and drive to the station."

"Why do you ask me? And if I go, what excuse will you make?"

She smiled. "I ask you in the name of mercy to leave! I will know how to deal with the detective!"

A few moments later, Gilbert Chase, pacing the library impatiently, saw the neat closed brougham going at a smart rate down the drive. "The doctor, I suppose," he muttered Then the handle of the door turned, and he raised his eyes expectantly. "Now to get that address and snare my bird!"

Lady Maitland smiled apologetically as she came forward. "So sorry, Mr. Chase, but Mr. Heath was obliged to go without seeing you!"

An ugly look crossed the detective's face as he realised how the beautiful woman facing him had, for her own purposes, outwitted him.

"Gone!" he said slowly. "It occurs to me, madam, that you sent him away because you were afraid! But I heard the name of the author, Mr. Vivyan, so only a little time is lost!"

She turned to go, but the detective with a swift gesture, put his hand on the door.

"One word, your ladyship," he said coolly; "I want to ask you a few questions."

She drew herself up haughtily. "You forget yourself, my man! You heard all I could tell you long ago. Let me pass!"

He smiled. "I am afraid it is another subject, your ladyship. Do you remember a photograph about eighteen years ago being left at a Mrs. Phillpot's, in Ennismore Gardens, London, by a *Mrs. Margaret Grant, the wife of the convicted felon, Vernon Grant?*"

Watching her keenly, he saw her eyes dilate suddenly, while her short upper lip quivered. She opened her mouth to speak, but a momentary dryness of her throat tied her tongue. Then, above the beating of her heart, the triumphant voice of Agnes Maitland rang out clearly:

"Ask her to explain the existence of the paper informing her that 'V.G. died a year after his release!'"

(To be concluded shortly.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Agreed to Differ.

"I have been very intimate with a young man for two years," writes "S. E.," "but we have lately quarrelled. We decided that each of us got on better with somebody else. Accordingly he has taken up with another girl, I with another man. Now in my heart of hearts, I miss him very much, and am quite sure I really love him better than the other. I believe, too, that he feels the same. But how are we to explain matters to our new lovers?"

* * * * *

By all means go back to each other, if you feel as you say. Be quite candid about it to your new lovers. Any deception will be fatal to all parties.

Outside or Inside a 'Bus?

"Edie" travels by omnibus a great deal. The other day she learnt that there was only one remaining seat outside, and a gentleman had boarded the 'bus directly after her. Should she take the seat or surrender it to him?

* * * * *

I think it would be graceful for you to allow the man to take the outside seat, and go inside yourself. It would be a return courtesy for that he would show you were it a wet day and you struggling against him for the seat inside. Besides, it is not really warmer inside a 'bus than outside in summer, from a girl's point of view. The scorching sun is far worse for the complexion and general comfort in town than the stuffiness of the inside. I believe that a girl should get as much open air and sun as possible, but not by clambering in front of men on to the tops of omnibuses.

Tracking a Vanished Lover.

"Helen" writes: "A few months ago I was suddenly taken ill, and had to be removed for change of air. While away a friend called to see me and my mother told him she could not give my new address as I was to be kept quiet. Since I have returned I have made inquiries and find that my visitor—of whom I am really very fond—has opened a business as a dairyman, I believe somewhere in the Blackfriars district. Now I want to find him, but how am I do so? At present I have no clue."

* * * * *

Well, "Helen," if he is fond of you, he will no doubt take another opportunity of finding you. Do you not know his late address, from which you could get his present whereabouts? As he has only just moved, the directory would not give his address, but I think you might find out by inquiries at the district post office, which would have been notified of the new arrival. As a new tradesman, he would be more easily found than a private residence. No doubt in a week or two you will be able to trace him. If not, as a last resort, try the personal columns of one of the dailies.

Speaking of "The Wife."

"In speaking of my wife," writes "V. B." "to strangers or guests, how should I designate her—Mrs. Dash, or by her Christian name?"

* * * * *

To strangers or guests you do not know very well, certainly use your surname and "Mrs." To people with whom you are very intimate, you could use the Christian name.

Accepting Theatre Invitations.

"Is it right for a girl to go to the theatre with a man to whom she is not engaged?" asks "G. S." "I am constantly being invited to do so by certain young men, but have always refused so far."

* * * * *

These things are decided largely by the parties themselves. If a girl is used to going about, and is able to meet men without compromising herself with neighbours and kind friends, she can accept a theatre invitation without fear. A great many girls in London Society go out unchaperoned nowadays; that is to say, girls who are not very young.

* * * * *

However, if a girl lives in a very quiet place, and is not in the habit of going to places of amusement, and has neighbours and friends likely to be shocked by such things, she might best consult her interests by refusing invitations unless accompanied by a parent or relation.

Reading a Love Letter.

"Flora's" lover was staying at her home recently, and in putting his room straight, "Flora" picked up a letter addressed to him, and signed "yours always." She could not help reading it, and discovered that it was from another girl, and quite recently written. Was she wrong to read it, and if so, how can she act?

* * * * *

It was, of course, wrong to read it, but I am afraid not one girl in a hundred would have done other than you have. I should hand it back to him, and warn him against leaving letters about which might be read by others. You need not say you have read it, but leave it to him to offer any explanations. His future actions will show you whether you are to continue trusting him, or whether he is deceiving you. For all you know, the letter may be written in a strain which is distasteful to him. That is for him to explain. Above all, don't be too suspicious.

The First Wedding Ring Question.

"A Reader" is kind enough to give his opinion on the question of disposing of the first wedding-ring, dealt with by me recently. "I am in a similar position to 'One in Doubt,'" he says; "my wife wears an engagement ring given her by her first lover, who died suddenly, and could not redeem his pledge. Though I am only too glad to have taken his place, I do not object to this.

* * * * *

"I think your correspondent who is about to be married for the second time, and does not know how to dispose of her first wedding-ring, should lay the matter before her *fiancé*. If he really loves her, he would not insist on anything which would hurt her feelings. If she loved her dead husband then she ought to keep this memory of him. However, she might have a small stone inserted in the ring, which would change the nature of the article to the outside world. If, of course, she did not think pleasantly of her late husband, the ring could be removed."

Cynthia.

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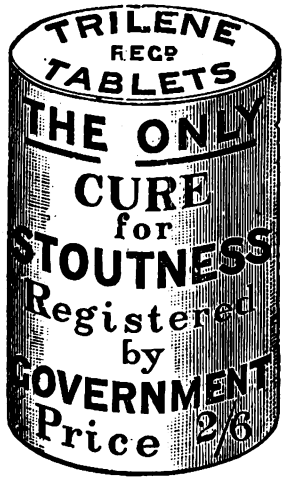

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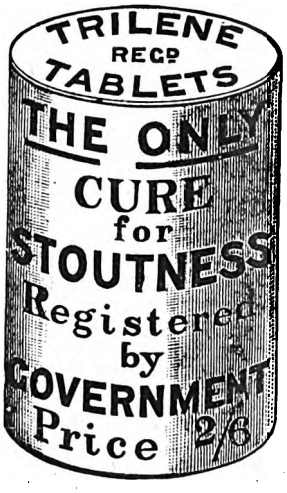

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

MISS NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

MR. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

MR. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

MRS. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

MRS. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, write Nov. 22nd, 1896: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MRS. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone fro[illegible] taking your Tablets."

MRS. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have don world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

MRS. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 39 inches. I hope soon to be 38. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

MRS. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 5lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

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"Go out and enjoy my cycle rides."

"I consulted no fewer than five doctors, and attended the Dispensary at Hull. I consumed large quantities of medicine, which only made my teeth rot, and my gums very soft. The last doctor I consulted advised me to get a bicycle. I did so, but I had not the strength and energy to ride it. He also told me to go and reside in the country (at this time I was living in Hull) away from the smoke and dust, for if I did not I should be dead in a few weeks. I followed out his advice, but no benefit resulted from the change.

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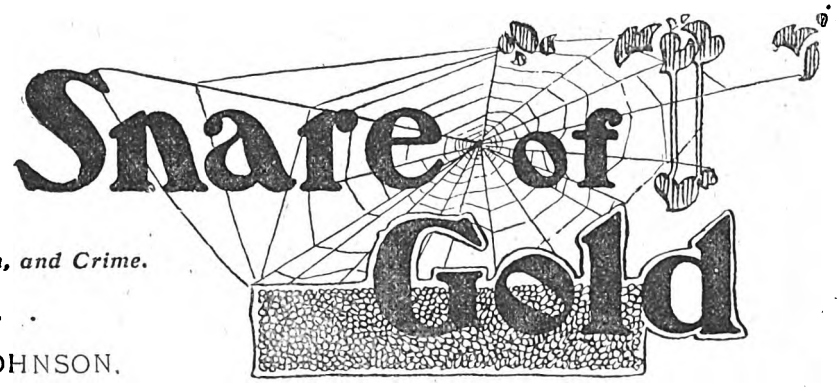

A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees, what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con. (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and wanders aimlessly along the streets, feeling very bitter with everyone.

The sound of galloping horses reaches his ears—they are runaways dragging a brougham after them. As they near him, Ronald, quick as thought, tears off his overcoat and flings it full at the heads of the maddened steeds. They swerve and Ronald seizes the bridle of one of them, only to be trampled underfoot; but the momentary check has given others an opportunity of coming to his assistance, and the horses are stopped.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter.

The premises Geldart occupied consisted of one barely-furnished room on the second floor of 14a Crosby Square, with the Taga-Taga Wool and Hide Agency unassumingly lettered on the unassuming door.

The floor beneath was occupied, indeed monopolised by, the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, whose title was displayed as frequently as possible on many glass doors and several brass-plates upon the landing and the staircase, with an extra special announcement on an extra imposing plate on each of the lintels of the portals of the house.

To several of such announcements there was appended in italics within brackets the name, Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Managing Director.

The office of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, Ltd., was as abundant of bustle as the one on the floor above it was destitute. Between its plate-glass swing doors footsteps were hurrying to and fro from ten till five, and the air within its partitions resounded and vibrated with the thrill of electric bells, telephonic conversations, the click-click of tape machines, and the "clackitty-clack" of typewriters.

And every morning punctually at 10.30 Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, descending from his smart dog-cart, handed the reins to his immaculate tiger, and bustling through the central gorgeous plate-glass swing-door, infused galvanic influence into the whole.

For Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, as a matter of fact, was the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, Ltd., what Mr. Scrimshaw was not was a more difficult matter to decide.

Some twelve years previously he had made his *debut* in the City as a very short youth, perched on a very high stool, in a stockbroker's office.

At an age when most boys in the intervals of football and marbles were making their heads ache working out the complications of imaginary accounts in respect of imaginary goods between imaginary customers, little Sampson was figuring out real transactions between real people, and acquiring real knowledge and experience, with the trifling difference that whereas the mental fagging of the other boys was entailing considerable expense upon their parents, little Sampson's acquisition of knowledge, instead of entailing expense, paid his expenses.

Mid-day in his teens he commenced to speculate in a small way on his own account, displaying even in those petty transactions, which were his beginnings, the shrewdness and foresight which later in life distinguished larger ones.

Even in those days many of those around him, with the gambling taint in their blood, noting the success of his ventures more than the qualities insuring their successes, looked upon him as a mascotte, so that when the word went round the office that little Sampson was doing a flutter in this stock or that, his colleagues, his superiors, even his employers, on the ground that he was such a lucky little chap, went for his particular fancy stock with the result of sometimes hedging a bad speculation, and at others even bringing off a coup.

They called it Sampson's luck, but Sampson never gambled; he formed his opinions carefully, then went for them strenuously, winning his way by what many called happy chance, but which he knew to be sound judgment.

By-and-bye his operations expanded. Before he was out of his teens he was lending money at interest, finding capital for big concerns, earning thereby snug commissions, forming syndicates that bought patents, stock, plant, and good wills for songs and sold them to trustees for companies about to form for fortunes.

A firm believer in the power of the press, at twenty-one he was the proprietor of a newspaper devoted to finance and the drama, and particularly the booming of his investments and ventures, financial and theatrical, for amongst other things he ran a theatre in London and several touring companies. For although Sampson had little leaning to literature, he recognised its commercial value, though scarcely himself a man of soul he trafficked advantageously with such as were.

To Sampson Scrimshaw the old gentleman on the floor above was a problem. There was a mystery about the man, and Mr. Scrimshaw had an aversion to mysteries.

Had he known the nature of the taciturn, solitary old man's business, the man and his business would have ceased to interest him, but as he could learn nothing about either, he began to wonder a deal, and wondering led to worrying.

What if the man were a spy? Mr. Scrimshaw's own transactions were of so varied and peculiar a character as to render that theory uncomfortably plausible.

So Mr. Scrimshaw endeavoured to gather from Frederick Stanyer's post the nature of Mr. Frederick Stanyer's business, but, unfortunately for the success of this idea, Mr. Stanyer had no post to be inspected.

He then took to wishing Old Mystery good morning, as he toiled up the stairs, and to volunteering remarks upon the weather, courtesies and remarks to which Old Mystery responded as tersely as possible.

There were occasions when Scrimshaw worked late, remaining in his office long after his smart clerks and smarter typewriters had bustled away from it, and there were other occasions when he returned to it, unattended, at strangely unofficial hours, even when midnight reigned over the City, and the asphalted streets gleamed bare and destitute of traffic, vehicular or pedestrian.

At such times letting himself, often in evening dress, in with a pass key and switching on the electric light, he would remain in his own room poring over the contents of his private safe, at others flitting around his offices, peering into this pigeon-hole and that, this or that desk or drawer. For it was Scrimshaw's principle to take nothing for granted.

One night, seated alone poring over the contents of a cash-box crammed with crisp bank notes, cheques, drafts, and coupons of many shapes and colours, he all of a sudden startled—at a sound.

Convulsively, with one hand he crammed a crisp heap back into the box, slid the other hand inside an open drawer beside him, and gripped a glittering deadly toy lying there.

Again he heard the sound, the sound of a footstep, quietly closed the box, clicked the key in its lock, placed it in the open drawer, taking therefrom in exchange a silver-mounted revolver, and threaded his way on tiptoe towards the main door of his offices.

Pat-a-pat—closer came the descending footsteps, and suddenly switching on the electric light, he shoved outwards and stood there on the landing face to face with—Old Mystery. And the two men, the old and the young, facing each other, with every nerve strained to utmost tension, exclaimed, swiftly and simultaneously:

"What are you doing here?"

Old Mystery answered brusquely:

"I'm minding my business."

"But what is your business? To mind other people's? By the Lord Harry, old man, if you're spying on mine you're playing a dangerous game!" And he withdrew from his dress jacket pocket his right hand, clenching the deadly toy.

"Put that thing away," said Old Mystery, for George Geldart was in no hurry to return towards that brink he had just in time returned from, "whatever your business may be, straight or crooked, it is nothing to me."

"You're sure of that? Then what are you doing here in the heart of the city in the heart of the night?"

"What's that to you? Suppose I ask you the same question?"

The other, muttering, returned within his swinging plate-glass door and Old Mystery was about to continue his downstair journey when suddenly he paused, his eye attracted by something which had fallen from Scrimshaw's pocket as he withdrew that revolver.

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Picking it up, he tapped the swing door, but there was no response. He tapped again with a like result, he pushed it and, Scrimshaw in his excitement, having omitted to fasten it, Old Mystery entered, peeped along the corridor at the end of which there gleamed the ground-glass door panel of a lighted room.

With an exclamation of impatience he walked down the corridor. As he did so, Scrimshaw, listening to the advancing footsteps, rose from his chair, muttering, "The old liar! He is spying! I'll watch his little game," and, withdrawing within the shadow of the safe, he waited.

There was a tap-tap at the door and, there being no answer, Old Mystery softly entered. With an annoyed glance around he exclaimed:

"Confound the fellow! he's not here!"

And Scrimshaw, emerging from behind the safe and covering him with his revolver, said, in a hard, deliberate voice:

"You're wrong, my friend, he is here, and before you leave this room he means to know your little game." And suddenly his pistol hand was seized, gripped as in a vice and twisted.

"Drop that fool of a toy or else I'll knock you down!" exclaimed Old Mystery, and the revolver rattled on to the floor.

"You old ruffian!" said the younger man, "I don't want to struggle with a man of your years, let go my wrist or I'll call the police and give you into custody, and before you leave this room I will know what brought you here."

"If you weren't such a nervous, excitable idiot I was going to tell you at once," exclaimed old Mystery. "You let this fall from your pocket on the landing," and he laid upon the desk writing-table the £1,000 Bank of England note.

"Bless my soul!" cried Scrimshaw, clapping his hand in his breast pocket, "so I did, I say! I'm awfully sorry. The fact is, I'm a bit excited, I've been dining out to-night, and I've one or two very worrying things on my mind. Will you accept my apology?"

"Yes," grunted Old Mystery, "on condition that you keep those things out of sight when you meet me on the stairs in future."

"Oh, yes," said Scrimshaw hastily, "only somehow it gave me an awful turn—made me feel a bit creepy, you know, you loafing about the place at this time of night, like a ghost."

"It is as late for you as for me," said the other.

"Oh, yes, I know, only you see you're a bit of a mystery. Anyway, you're evidently a very honest man, and, look here, the man who voluntarily restores a thousand pounds deserves a substantial reward. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't have missed this for months, thinking I'd put it in this cash box. Now suppose I give you a ten pound note for yourself?"

"No, thanks," the other snapped out, "I don't want a reward for not being a thief."

Scrimshaw stared at him curiously.

"One moment, my friend," he said, "you're not pressed for time; will you smoke a cigar and drink a drop of whisky? I'd like to have a chat with you."

"I certainly wouldn't mind a drop of whisky and I'm partial to a good cigar," said the strange visitor, taking one from the open box and eyeing and handling it with the method of a connoisseur.

"Look here," said Scrimshaw, "you've interested me, first because you're a bit of a mystery, secondly, because it's pretty clear you're straight. Now, Mr——" He paused.

"Perhaps you had better call me Old Mystery."

Scrimshaw keenly scanned his visitor.

"Yes, you are a bit of a mystery, and I suppose you've got a bit of a life story: seen better days, eh?"

The other nodded.

Scrimshaw laughed contentedly.

"I haven't, but I'm hoping to, that's the difference between us."

"Quite so, your present times are the best you've ever had and you've the prospect of better, if you play your cards carefully."

"How do you know?" asked the other sharply.

"That doesn't matter. I do know, perhaps I know more than you think."

"Oh, lots of people know more than I do," laughed Scrimshaw, "at the clubs and houses I frequent I find no end of people who know more than I shall ever learn or ever want to about any number of things, except one, money-making, and, like you, they'll give me best at that."

"If they're like me, they won't."

"What!" exclaimed Scrimshaw, sitting up, "you haven't done much in that line?"

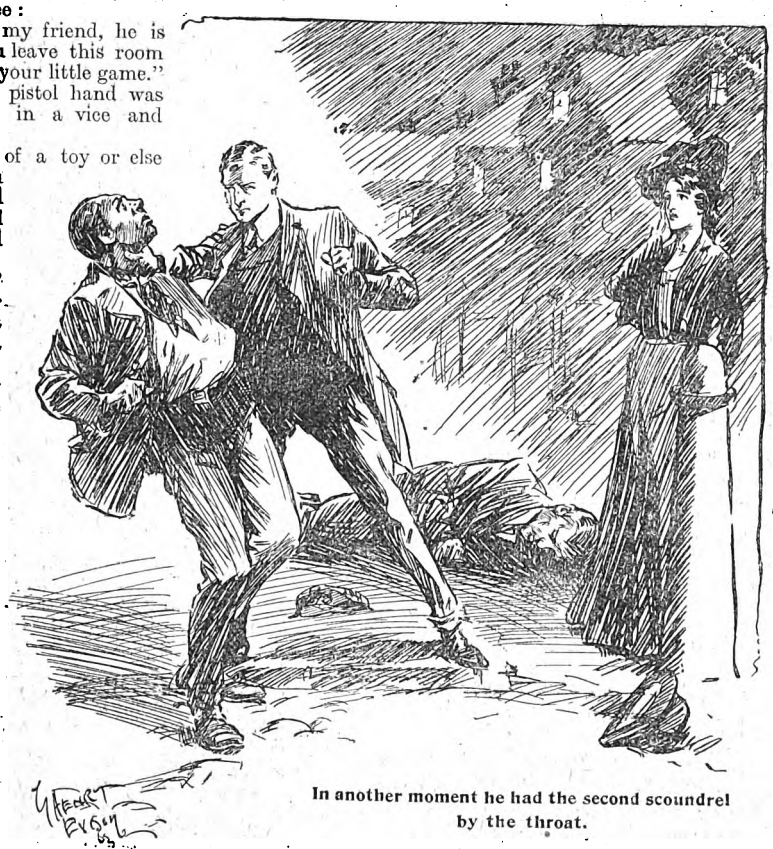
"That's more than you know."

"Well, yes, when I come to think of it, I should think you are a man who's capable of making money, the man who could hand over a thousand pounds that wouldn't have been missed must have a mind capable of dealing with big figures, and if it's true that every man has his price, and it seems to be, your price must be a very respectable one. And, tell me, after making money, how did you come to lose it?"

"Who said I did lose it?"

"But you haven't got much, eh? Excuse me being so personal, I'm getting more and more interested in you, Mr. Mystery. You know I'm a bit of a student of human nature, that is incidentally, my chief study is building a pile and I think I'm a bit of an honest man in that branch."

"Yes," said Old Mystery, "my friend, you think you know



In another moment he had the second scoundrel by the throat.

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all that is to be learnt, whereas, you've only just grasped the rudiments."

"I've done better than,you apparently."

"Apparently, perhaps, but smart men don't judge by smart appearances."

Scrimshaw for a moment mused, then in the most off-handed, casual manner he gave a Masonic sign. A mutual smile flitted over the faces of the men as it was returned.

"Now, look here, Mr. Mystery," said Scrimshaw sharply. "What do you know of business?"

"Not much! but ten times more than you do."

"Tut! tut! you've had your innings, what you've done has been done on the old methods, I'm the pioneer of the new."

"That's quite true, I've never worked on the new methods, though I've studied them. I did too well by the old, but I often felt inclined to try them, only the chains of environment held me down."

"And they don't now?"

"No, these chains are broken."

Scrimshaw rose from his chair, plunged his hands in his pockets, and paced his office in his favourite manner, that of a caged tiger, glancing ever and anon, furtively, at the visitor to his den.

"I can't make you out," he said, "though I've half a dozen theories about you. You've been a gentleman, you've held a good position, you may have made mistakes, don't be offended, you may have done time, no! I don't think that," for he noted that Old Mystery never blanched at that shot, and again he observed the smoothness of the fingertips of the white hand.

"You may have plunged and got out of your depth and found it better to drop out, or, perhaps, there was a lady in the case, you're just about at the susceptible age. Anyway, it's clear that for some reason or other you have chosen to efface an interesting individuality, and to lie low.

"Now a man who is clever, who is absolutely straight and who is content to lie low is worth to me—oh, a regiment of the crowd I see out there"—and he pointed to the untenanted desks and stools of his general office. "People who don't understand me would say that what I'm saying now isn't like me, but that's just because it doesn't suit me for everybody to understand me. You see, I'm a financier, and a financier's got to be a bit of a philosopher."

"I think you're a bit of a poet as well," said the other; "certainly your whisky and cigars are worthy of one. Only one more word, I can't work in a small way, I can't do small things."

"That's because," said Scrimshaw, "you're not a small man—and that's where you and I shall hit it."

Then they came to terms.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Ronald to the Rescue.

It was hardly to be supposed that a young fellow in Ronald's position could move to and fro in the Metropolis without occasionally encountering friends of former days, although he did his best to avoid such encounters, they being invariably calculated to revive unpleasant memories; but having been for the most part educated in Heidelberg, and having spent most of his vacations and leisure time in continental wanderings he had few acquaintances and fewer friends in England, scarcely any in London.

One morning it was Jim Redfern, newly called to the Bar, who, meeting him in the Strand, returned Ronald's instinctive nod of greeting with the most frigid of "How do you do's," and an immediate stare in an opposite direction. Evidently he had heard Eric's version of the story.

And on another occasion it was Tom Lorrimer, his old school fellow, who accosted him with a hearty:

"Hallo, Geldart, old chap, how are you bucking up? How goes it? I say, I hear you've lost your governor, read synopsis of his probate in the *Illustrated London News*. By Jove, old chap cut up pretty well, but what thundering hard lines to leave you entirely out of it. What on earth was the old boy's reason?"

Evidently Tom had not heard Eric's version.

"Well, what are you doing, old chap? Trying to get literary work, eh?" with a drop of the countenance. "Well, wish you luck, old man! I say, of course we're old pals, and if a fiver's any use to you—What? No thanks! Well, anyway, here's my card, and if I can do any good, don't forget. Good-bye, so long!"

But Ronald had made up his mind neither to beg nor borrow. He had set his mind upon his course, he knew the one walk in life he was fitted to tread, knew that once in the swim he could get his living honourably, fairly easily. He would do his best and strongest.

If that walk were shut to him, very well, then he was young and strong, he would work with his hands, there was the dock quay, there was the forge, and last—and, perhaps, best of all—there was the barrack square.

He had packed his traps, paid his bill, giving up his rooms at that expensive hotel. And now he was walking the streets of London—homeless, where the few people who knew him believed him to be a thief, the people he never wanted to meet again until his name was cleared, as cleared he swore it should be.

Till then he would avoid them. How best to do that? Should he leave London? He thought things over, and that his thoughts might be undisturbed by the roar of the traffic he turned into a narrow, quiet street.

A girl hurried past him, crossing over the road. He was so absorbed in his reflections that he noticed neither that she was trimly built, neatly and tastefully dressed and extremely pretty, nor that she was hurrying along, casting every now and then apprehensive glances behind her.

Neither did he observe that some ten seconds later she was followed by a couple of low-browed, evil-looking men. The shades of evening were falling, dusk was deepening into a premature darkness accelerated by a heavy, drizzling mist. And Ronald's thoughts were concentrated upon one question. Where was he to sleep that night?

Suddenly he was startled by the sound of a scream, from around a corner ahead across the road, the scream of a frightened girl. He quickened his steps. Again the scream arose on the murky, moistened air. He broke into a run, dashed across the road and round the opposite corner.

"Oh, don't—don't! You are choking me!" a girl's wailing voice, and in answer a hoarse, guttural oath followed by, "Let go the chain, then, or I'll choke you!"

"Now then, Mickey, land her a thick 'un and stop her screeching!"

"Can't! Ugh!" and the ruffian went down in a muddled heap, stunned by a crashing left-hander from Ronald, who, in another moment had the second scoundrel by the throat and dragging him away from the trembling, half-fainting girl, flung him across the dark and narrow slum, then snatching from the ground at her feet a watch and broken neck-chain, and with the other arm supporting the almost swooning girl, Ronald said hastily:

"Here, take your watch and chain! Don't move away, but scream for the police while I collar these villains!" And as the second man came for him again, with a swift, swinging right-hander full between the eyes, he felled him.

"Jimmy, got your knife? Slip it into 'im!" the brute rolling over and scrambling up shouted. But the other in a hoarse whisper exclaimed:

"No, no, he's too thick, cheese it and cut, the slops are comin'!" And taking to their heels they disappeared in the darkness, leaving Ronald supporting in his arms the sobbing, trembling girl.

"Stay here while I follow and catch them!" he exclaimed. But clinging to him she cried:

"Oh, no, no! Please don't leave me, sir, or I shall die of terror. They followed me for ever so far. I knew it, and I guessed they were in league, though they pretended to be apart, this neighbourhood's infested with them, please don't leave me!"

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"Very well," said Ronald, who was the soul of good temper and tenderness to women, young or old, "only, leave off crying, it's all right now, and your watch is safe. Have they taking anything else?"

"No, sir, I slipped my purse in my bosom."

"Have they hurt you?"

"They've bruised my neck and twisted my arm. Oh, if you hadn't come to my rescue! How can I thank you?"

"I haven't done much, except, I am happy to say, given a couple of rascals two of the heaviest blows I ever hit in my life. Now, shall I walk a little way home with you, or shall we find the police and describe these Thugs?"

"I think I'll get home if you don't mind walking a little way with me; I couldn't describe them, I am in such a nervous state."

"Well, anyway, one of them will have two black eyes," said Ronald complacently. "Come along, then, I'll walk with you. Take my arm."

"Thank you a thousand times," said the girl, and as she walked along clinging to her protector's arm she thought what different types of men seemed to make up even the little world in which she lived her humble life.

They passed along into wider, cleaner, better lighted streets, then, stopping at one door, she said, "I live here, sir, let me thank you once again."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Ronald. "You're heartily welcome, my only regret is that I hadn't the satisfaction of handing these Mohocks over to the police. Good night!"

"Good night, sir," said the girl, "and thanks again. My name's Phyllis Daventry," and she paused inquiringly.

"What a pretty name, very suitable to so charming a young lady! Good night!" Raising his hat he was gone, leaving her standing at her door, her question not answered.

But she murmured as she watched his disappearing form:

"Whatever his name may be, and whatever his station, he's a thorough gentleman, and a dear good fellow."

* * * * *

Ronald, strolling along, carefully wiping with his handkerchief from his knuckles the traces of his encounter, suddenly paused before the railings of a clean-looking, almost drearily respectable and sober-looking house, his eye caught by a placard in the front window, "Paying Guests Received."

Ascending the steps he complied with the request upon the brass plate to knock and ring, and a diminutive servant wearing a white cap, and bib apron, and a black smudge at the end of a tip-tilted nose, more or less like the petals of a flower, inquired, "Who might he want?"

He explained a desire to interview the lady of the house, whereupon the diminutive domestic disappeared, leaving him in the hall after a momentary undecided look at an array of coats, hats, and umbrellas, and a reassuring survey of the caller.

A few moments later a portly lady of somewhat severe aspect, her hands folded across her ample bosom, sailed into the hall remarking:

"I am the lady of the house, but I think you have the advantage of me."

"I observe," said Ronald smiling, "that you take in paying guests."

"I receive paying guests," the lady replied somewhat frigidly, as though suspecting an aspersion in the challenge, "and my name is Mrs. Skimper. May I ask yours?"

For a moment he reflected. He had cast off the old life, had decided to let the old name go. What name henceforth should he bear? He thought of his second Christian name and of the third that had been the dear dead mother's maiden name and he answered, "My name is Harvey Bligh," whereupon he was requested to step into the drawing-room.

And so it happened that when next morning Mrs. Skimper took her accustomed seat at the head of the breakfast-table her paying guests were morally convinced that something unexpected and as pleasant as unexpected had happened.

As to the nature of the event they were not quite certain. Perhaps Mr. Springle had ceased to unsettle their hostess and had settled her bill. Possibly Arethusa, the slave of the myriad bells, had risen at the third, even the second, but no, not the first time of asking, that required too great a stretch of imagination.

Could it be—oh, joyful thought, that the drawing-room piano had been seized for over-due instalments, and that Miss Amaranth's performances thereon were to be numbered with the terrors of the past? Or possibly Mr. Grimmage, whose incessant sneers and growls were the bane of Mrs. Skimper's existence, had carried out at last his daily threat and definitely given notice, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

For Mrs. Skimper beamed on all and sundry, even including Mr. Springle in the radiance of her smile. But speculation was put at rest by the worthy lady's own announcement that the circle for whom she provided home comforts was about to be enlarged by a new arrival.

"A Mr. Harvey Bligh," she added, whereat the radiance of her own features communicated itself to those of Miss Amaranth, a young lady who made eyes at every new male arrival from a time whereof the memory of Mrs. Skimper's paying guests ran not to the contrary. "Isn't it charming?"

"Don't see where the charm comes in," said Mr. Grimmage, "it simply means so far as we are concerned the increase of the divisor of the sum total of the commissariat, and the reduction of the fraction." And Mrs. Skimper, while not comprehending Mr. Grimmage's meaning, realised thas his intention was to be nasty from the callous laughter it evoked, and as usual revenged herself upon the hapless Springle for the vengeful thrust of the more unpleasant, but infinitely more, punctually paying guest.

That evening Miss Amaranth came down to dinner in a new blouse, Mr. Grimmage trotted out a new grievance, and Mr. Horace Springle brought to Bloomsbury Square a new excuse for the non-payment of his bill.

Miss Amaranth, it should be mentioned, represented music in the Skimperian temple, and punished the strings of Mrs. Skimper's piano, and the nerves of Mrs. Skimper's paying guests from early morn to dewy eve.

She was a little dot of a body with a romantic disposition

"I'm told her Royal Highness is most domesticated—makes steak and kidney puddings with her own hands."

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and an aggravatingly red nose, entirely out of harmony with the poetical aspirations of her nature. But she was a good little soul, and once away from the piano as harmless as a child, indeed considerably more so.

Mr. Grimmage was understood to be connected with the Civil Service, a circumstance which perhaps accounted for the incivility of his manner; he passed his days in bullying solicitors' office boys across a brass wire grating, and his evenings in more or less withering Mrs. Skimper and her paying guests with sarcasm, which, if not particularly original, was at all events invested with the dignity of labour.

Mr. Springle's leading features were a loud manner and louder waistcoats, an abnormally high collar and low breeding. He was understood to be something in the City; no one knew quite what, but the consensus of opinion was that it was not much.

He was generally understood to be in the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, but in what capacity no one at Mrs. Skimper's was perfectly sure, the guesses ranging from managing director to messenger. His ideals were the leading comedians of the variety stage and the Hebes of the bars.

Miss Amaranth was in the seventh heaven, for she found herself seated beside a good-looking, good-tempered youngster with the manners of a gentleman—a somewhat novel experience at Mrs. Skimper's—and one who extended the little courtesies of the dinner-table so gracefully that she longed for more condiments to be asked for.

Even with the soup stage Ronald had unconsciously made an impression; before the exit of the fish and the advent of the roast it had deepened into a conquest, greatly to the indignation of both Messrs. Grimmage and Springle, who were so accustomed to snubbing the harmless, amiable and lonely little old maid, that they conceived a resentment against the newcomer who so presumptuously set them an example of gentlemanly behaviour.

There was also present a Mrs. Marwell, who wore a black lace cap with ribbons, and regaled the company from time to time with scraps of information from the *Court Circular* regarding the movements of their Majesties and the Royal Family, and, seated opposite her a Mr. Dodgerson, a portly, florid-faced elderly gentleman, whose principal characteristic was being at times aggravatingly hard of hearing, and at other times still more aggravatingly acute in that faculty, both the times and the other times being generally inconvenient.

"Oh, thank you so much," said Miss Amaranth, taking the pepper from Ronald's hand with a contact with her own intended to be thrilling, and a glance designed to be more so. "Do you believe in the occult?"

"I can't say I'm very much interested in it," he replied.

"Aren't you? I think it delightful; I think everything delightful that you don't understand; things that one understands are generally so uninteresting. Do you know, I'm a palmist; I wish you'd let me read your hand."

"I see the King has brought a new motor-car," said Mrs. Marwell, "and the Duchess of Argyle is going to open a soup kitchen at Poplar."

"Rot!" said Mr. Dodgerson.

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Marwell, with a glare.

"Allow me to tell you, madam, that such sentiments are very unbecoming."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Sauce tureen? Certainly. Madam, allow me to remark when you declare his gracious Majesty to be unpopular you're talking nonsense!"

"I never said anything of the kind," remarked Mrs. Marwell.

"Oh, never mind him, he's a deaf old josser!" observed Mr. Springle reassuringly.

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Mr. Dodgerson, "if you don't apologise for that remark, as soon as the ladies have gone through that door I'll send you through that window," and while Mr. Springle was hastily explaining that he had said nothing of the kind, Miss Amaranth went on, scanning Ronald's hand.

"Ah, this is a most interesting line of life; when you were very young you had an illness."

"Yes—measles at five, I've been told."

"I knew it!" she went on triumphantly; "your path was rosy till you reached sixteen and then," she sighed, "a great calamity befell you."

"Really!" he exclaimed, anxious for information.

"Yes, you conceived a romantic but, alas! a hopeless attachment."

"I'm afraid you're a little wrong in the dates," said Ronald, conscious of at that age cherishing two objects in life, cricket and "footer," to the exclusion of any heart affection.

"But," she went on, "consolation awaits you, soon, ah! sooner perhaps than you anticipate you will meet with one who will console you for the blighting of your boyhood's dream."

"I'm told her Royal Highness is most domesticated, makes steak and kidney puddings with her own hands."

"Perhaps that accounts for the rumours of a separation," said Mr. Grimmage.

"Ha! ha! that ain't half bad!" laughed Springle; "that reminds me of Billy Blarer's new song:

"'*To be my lawful missus*
I did Jemima take;
What broke our happy home up
Was Jemima's home-made cake.'"

"What did you say, sir?" cried Mr. Dodgerson wrathfully, "I'm a bit of a rake; how dare——"

In the course of the repudiation and explanation the ladies rose, and Miss Amaranth whispered: "When you come into the drawing-room I'll sing; mind, I shall be singing it for you, my new song, 'For Years I've Yearned for Thee.'"

"I say, you are a-going it!" exclaimed Mr. Springle, addressing Ronald after exchanging a wink with Mr. Grimmage.

Ronald, uncertain whether the impertinence was meant for him, went on lighting a cigarette; and Springle, imagining he had found a smart butt, went on, "I told her lots of times she'd only got to wait long enough for a flat to come along; but, I say! if you're after the shekels she's only got £75 a year, and it dies with her, and she can't touch it."

"Have you been addressing me all this time?" asked Ronald, and Mr. Springle replied:

"Of course I have; what do *you* think?"

"I think," said Ronald, "you're an impertinent young puppy!"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Springle, endeavouring to work up an explosion.

"I also think," said Ronald, leisurely walking round to Mr. Springle's side of the table, "that I shall pull your nose!" Whereupon seizing Mr. Springle's collar with his left hand, with his right he suited the action to the word. He then quietly walked out of the room amid a dead silence, for even Mr. Grimmage felt that on the new arrival sarcasm was thrown away.

Forgetting, perhaps oblivious of Miss Amaranth's promise, he went to his room and occupied himself till bed-time with the advertisement-sheet of a daily paper answering the likeliest of the innumerable "Wanted's" crowding its columns.

For although he had confidently determined to fight and win life's battle under the banner of Captain Pen he recognised that inclination was not the only qualification for enlistment in those ranks; knew that while the grass was growing Pegasus might starve if no other fodder were forthcoming, therefore he set out in quest of a "work by the way."

The next evening he was similarly employed, and the next, and then ensued a period of weary waiting in vain, watching every post that came his hopes raised to a height of expectancy that made the fall all the more crushing.

Many of the advertisements invited personal application, and Ronald spent his days in answering these, taking his

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place at the end of a weary, dreary queue of applicants, only to find that he had passed the best years of his youth acquiring a deal of knowledge but apparently nothing that would enable him to get his bread.

And Ronald by degrees arrived at the conclusion that a man requires to work harder and know a great deal more to earn seventy-five pounds a year than seven hundred, and that it is far easier for labouring men, hewers of wood and drawers of water, to obtain employment at from twenty-five to thirty shillings a week than for the possessor of a classical education and a couple of modern languages.

He thought of the stage and made sundry calls at sundry stage-doors, inquiring of stage-door keepers, invariably grumpy and invariably engaged in meals, for managers who were invariably out or busily engaged, while ladies of abnormally yellow hair measured him with supercilious glances up and down, and blue-shaven gentlemen scowled at him suspiciously.

On such rare occasions as Ronald managed to catch the ear of some deputy-assistant acting manager, or other official, he was impressively and emphatically assured that of all the overcrowded professions and callings in overcrowded London town, *the* profession was the most overcrowded; it occurring to Ronald that possibly the reason of so much talent being crowded out lay in so much incompetency being crowded in.

He had rather fancied himself as an amateur actor, and as such had been greatly in request, but he reluctantly came to the conclusion that theatrical London had no need of him, and so he resumed the dreary task of seeking in the advertisements some "wanted" that he could supply.

And it was while waiting for his turn at one of these heart-sickening levees that Ronald was recognised by Mr. Springle, who still deeply resented his fellow-guest having not only put his nose out of joint metaphorically, but having literally pulled it.

Accordingly Mr. Springle took the earliest opportunity on the evening following his meeting Mr. Harvey Bligh, to give Ronald the name he had adopted, of publishing that circumstance at Mrs. Skimper's dinner-table.

"Get the berth, Mr. Bligh?" he inquired in a strident tone; and "Mr. Bligh" coloured to his temples, as, with a curt negative, he engaged in conversation with Miss Amaranth on his left.

But Mr. Springle was not to be baffled.

"Thought you wouldn't," he went on, "it was five-and-twenty against you in numbers, and some of them chaps carried more guns than you, not that you lost much; I've heard that firm sweats their invoice clerks horrid, and the billet was only five-and-twenty bob a week."

Mrs. Skimper pricked up her ears. Could it be possible that this Mr. Bligh was a mere invoice clerk and out of employment at that?

Why, she angrily reflected, he had been obtaining, if not goods, politeness under false pretences, and while she remembered with thankfulness that Mr. Bligh had paid her first week's bill without querying a single extra, she began to tremble for her second.

Mr. Grimmage audibly sniggered, and launched into a dissertation on the competition in the cheap clerk market, seizing on the opportunity of retaliating on the newcomer, who had dared a few minutes earlier to severely snub him for studied rudeness to Miss Amaranth.

That evening Ronald found himself distinctly left in the cold by Mrs. Skimper and her paying-guests, and he was conscious of, and to some extent amused by, under the cover of Miss Amaranth's piano-playing, a running fire of undertoned comment, the import of which he gathered more by instinct than hearing.

"I thought he was a real swell!" chuckled Mr. Springle, "from the way he's togged out, and the airs he gave himself—I tell you you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw him standing in line with that down-at-heel lot. As Charlie Cheesit says in his latest:

"'*It ain't the sealskin coat as makes the lady,*
It ain't the clobber makes the millionaire,
A chap who's broke may wear a shiny cadey;
You should never judge your pals by what they wear.'"

Partly amused, partly nettled by the frigidity of his social atmosphere, Ronald, throwing himself into a chair carelessly took up the first periodical that came to hand and for a while turned over its leaves.

It happened to be the current week's *M.A.P.*, and at last his eyes rested upon an autographical article under the heading "In the Days of My Youth," contributed by an author whose works had always interested him, and Ronald, who was somewhat of a voracious reader, speedily found himself interested in his reading matter, and oblivious to not only the manner, but the very existence of those around him.

It was the story of a strenuous battle, for not only fame and fortune, but, in its earlier stages, the very means of livelihood, and Ronald, with a keen and sympathetic interest, read how the man whose works were read throughout the civilised world, whose editions were snapped up by a clamouring and insensate public as fast as they appeared, had in earlier years, footsore and disheartened, tramped Fleet Street and the Strand, with his heart as heavy as his pockets were light, and his unsaleable scripts beneath his arm.

And now it made a man's mouth water to read how fortune deluged him with her favours, the prices he received per page, per column, per line! Why to that man every blank sheet of paper, given a pen and ink, was a bank note. The work, by the way, was not for him. He would press forward to his desired goal blind to all byways.

Among his traps there was a trunk filled with a medley of manuscripts, product of idle hours, and that night before retiring, he rummaged through the collection, selecting such wares as he deemed fittest for the market, and on the morrow he set out upon his mission. It was his forlorn hope, but it is the forlorn hope that wins the Victoria Cross!

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

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An Evil Benefactor.

Telling of a Jealous Man's Scheme of Revenge.

. . *Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.* .

MONA BARRON lay back in the comfortable deck-chair of the *Salva*, Mr. David Gretton's yacht, and closed her eyes dreamily. The air on shore was hot and stifling; it would be quite a delight to have a run in the open for a few miles, catching the breezes which flecked the waves half a mile out!

How good Mr. Gretton had been, and still was, to her and her mother. He had been an artist friend of her father, whose career was commercial.

The friendship appeared to have originated just before Mr. Barron met his future wife; it ripened as time went on, although Mrs. Barron had had an idea that Gretton became more distant in his manner for a time just prior to the marriage. When Mr. Barron met with his misfortune in business and died, leaving his wife and child in very poor circumstances, Gretton had delicately assisted them.

"He must have been much attached to father!" thought the girl, unconscious that Gretton was watching her keenly. "Perhaps father did him a good turn, saved his life or something. I declare that I have never once thought of asking mamma! His guardianship, if I may call it so, was self-constituted, and I have grown up to regard it as the most natural thing in the world. But, of course, these things do not happen of their own sweet will. He might have been my father!"

Mona was awaking to a better knowledge of certain facts, evidently, for the last thought made her open her eyes and look about for Gretton; he was at that moment standing with his back to her. The yacht was just getting clear of the shallow water, and the gentle rolling soothed the girl and made her close her eyes again. She was a good sailor.

"Now, that's strange," she mused. "I have always looked upon him as old, and it never occurred to me till this minute that he is not. I am twenty-one, and I don't believe that he is over forty! Anyhow, in looks he doesn't seem to be more than thirty-five. He was younger than father; I should say that he is mother's age. It really appears out-of-place to regard him as old, now I think of it."

Mona enjoyed the rocking of the yacht; it lulled her almost into a doze. Her thoughts ran on lazily.

"He paid for my schooling and he helped ever so much, for the sake of old times, he says; he is a lonely man without others to think about, so he thinks of us. I am sorry that mamma could not come with us on this trip—and I hope that we shall be back by the time Cyril arrives. Still, foolish boy, he couldn't be jealous of Mr. Gretton."

The idea of her lover, Cyril Thornton, being jealous of David Gretton, amused her; she allowed a ripple of laughter to escape from the rosy lips. At that instant something came between her and the refreshing breeze, and she looked up to see Gretton gazing at her with an expression of mingled gravity and enjoyment.

"Mr. Gretton," said Mona idly, "you really shouldn't. It isn't fair to stop the free passage of the cooling breeze."

"I beg your pardon, Mona," he said quickly, moving aside. He had called her Mona since childhood. "Do you like it? You ought to get up and walk about now; we are getting nicely outside, and you will like it all the better."

"I am just a little doubtful of that," she replied nonchalantly. "At any rate, I shall stay here for a while. Don't you think it would be a charitable thing to do, to sit down here and tell me—oh, anything you like by way of killing time?"

There was an attractiveness in the girl's manner that most men found to be irresistible. To absolute strangers, meeting her for the first time, it might have seemed flippant, but to those who knew Mona it was quite otherwise. It was simple trustfulness; she was free from worldliness, and imputed nothing but good intentions to other people.

David Gretton drew a chair close to hers and seated himself with suppressed eagerness. "It is good to be near you!" he said significantly.

Mona was surprised and just a trifle confused, as a slight flush testified. Those were the very words used by Cyril, on the occasion of their last meeting—the never-to-be-forgotten occasion when he asked her if she would wear a ring for his sake. Why had Mr. Gretton said the same? She felt an inward agitation and she refrained from looking at him. Yet it was absurd to connect the two things!

"It is very good to be where there is some air to breathe," she replied lightly, with a desire to turn the conversation. "How far do you propose to run out?"

"I do not know," was the evasive answer. "Are you anxious to get back by a certain time?"

"Yes," said Mona, without reflection. "That is," she added quickly, "I wish to be on shore when—I mean, I ought not to leave mamma alone too long, ought I?"

There was no answer to her question, which disturbed Mona; she turned her head just enough to enable her to see David Gretton from the corner of her eye, and she was startled by the eager, yearning expression; and, included in that expression was a something indefinable, a something wolfish. The situation was mystifying.

"I think I will take your advice now and walk up and down," she remarked, with pretended ease, as she sprang lightly to her feet. "Will you not be wanted to help in sailing the yacht?"

"Not for a few moments. Are you anxious to get rid of me?"

"Oh, no," cried Mona in distress. She did not wish to hurt his feelings, but she was sorry that his assistance was not needed.

"What is it?" she thought. "I—almost wish—that I hadn't come. He has never been like this before; I wonder—— It is so strange; I might be inclined to think that he was going to make love to me, but that seems absurd."

The yacht was going along steadily. The man at the wheel had an easy time, but he kept casting anxious glances at the sky. Gretton went over to him, leaving Mona for

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a couple of minutes, during which time he exchanged some earnest words with his subordinate.

"Let us go below," said Gretton, a few minutes later. "the breeze is stiffening, and we shall be blown about up here. It will be cool enough in the cabin, and I have something to tell you."

With a vague misgiving, Mona acceded silently to the proposal; Gretton led the way, and, on reaching the small but comfortably-furnished cabin, he placed her on the lounge and took a seat by her side.

She dared not look at his face. She heard his deep and laboured breathing, which indicated that he was at that moment a prey to strong emotion, and she felt herself trembling.

The ring on the third finger of her left hand seemed to be burning her, as if to remind her that she had plighted her troth to a good man and true, and that she must be faithful to him. "Never fear, Cyril," the thought flashed through her mind; "I will be as true to you as the sun is to the heavenly bodies which depend upon it."

"Mona, I want you."

The words were full of suppressed passion. Mona's trembling ceased; the hour of trial was at hand, and her courage increased with the demand made upon it.

"I do not quite understand you, Mr. Gretton," she said slowly, turning her beautiful eyes upon him and repressing the start which his appearance engendered. "What do you mean?"

There was really no need to ask that question; his sentence, the fierce light in his eyes, the quivering of his whole frame indicated that he was madly in love with her.

"You do not *quite* understand?" he cried, echoing her words. "Then you *do* understand. But I will tell you plainly what I mean. It is pleasing to a woman to hear a man say that he loves her, and why should I ask you, whom I adore and who are dearer to me than all else—why should I ask you to forego the sweetness of that blissful experience by assuming that you know what I am about to say?

"Mona, I love you," he seized her hand; his fingers tightened in a nervous grip about her fingers and pressed Cyril's ring against the flesh till her imagination made it feel as if it were burning her, and she longed to shriek aloud with the pain. "Mona, I love you, wholly, passionately! My love is consuming me, and you must promise to be my wife before we go ashore again."

He sank on his knees before her; he poured out his soul to her in burning words, which at first appeared to scorch her ears and her brain, but afterwards fell dully, unintelligibly upon her because she was dazed by them.

She felt powerless to stem the flood of barely coherent outpourings, but as he raised himself to draw her nearer to him, that he might kiss the pallid cheek—so strangely unlike his own flushed face—she shook herself free from his grasp and stood erect.

"Mr. Gretton," she cried haughtily. "You forget. Even if you had not known that Cyril Thornton and I were affianced, this ring"—pointing to the golden circlet—"should have commanded your respect."

He also had risen to his feet. He laughed mockingly as she held her left hand slightly raised in order to make the ring more visible.

"*That!*" he sneered. "A boy's gift! What does he know of love? And you—you think you love him, but it is nothing. *I* will teach you what love is, and you will be happy above all others."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Gretton," she replied coldly. "I am sorry for this, but we can forget it. I wish to go back at once. Please have the yacht's course altered and let us go back to shore."

The quiet determination in her tone could not be mistaken; Gretton noticed it, and it evidently came as a shock to him. He seated himself on the couch and gazed steadily at the girl, whose haughtiness of manner made her more beautiful.

"You refuse me?" he asked in a tone that indicated that he was not able to realise the fact. "Have I heard aright? Have you fully considered?"

"Yes," she said more gently. She felt sorry for him. "I regret that this incident has taken place; I am sorry that you have made a mistake. I love Cyril Thornton!"

All doubt on his part was swept aside by the manner in which she made that last statement.

As she watched him, she saw a peculiar change come over his features. His cheeks lost their flush, the expression of the eyes altered from one of passionate longing to that of a man who is bent on calmly crushing some victim of his hatred, while the lips parted in an evil smile.

"I see that I may take your decision as final!" he said with a bow. "Good! Then I fall back on my original scheme, the one which I have cherished and worked for during all these years! Sit here and listen to the story I have to tell you, and then I will show you some pictures with the drawing and painting of which I have amused myself on and off for the last two years!"

Fascinated by the cold glitter of his eyes, Mona obeyed him mechanically. She sat down at the head of the couch; he took a sketch-book from a drawer and placed it on his knees, ready to be opened at the right moment.

He spoke in measured tones, without a trace of emotion; it was a striking contrast to his outburst of a few minutes previous, yet the very coldness of his voice and manner impressed her more than his fiery declaration of love had done.

"I have been good to your mother and you ever since you were a baby; you both say so, and it is true!" he began. "People say that I was your father's friend, hence my benevolence. They speak falsely! I was your father's enemy!

"Ha! It surprises you? Yet it is true! He upset a scheme on which I had staked a good deal! He knew what he was doing and he thought it right to do it, but he did not know that I was the prime mover in it."

"I know what that was!" the girl burst forth. "He upset a villainous plot for the promotion of a company and he saved the small fortunes and the savings of thousands. They never realised how much they owed to him, and so they did not help him in his own trouble, but I am proud of his memory!"

"Just so!" said Gretton sarcastically. "Well, I was the prime mover in the plot and I vowed a fearful revenge! I was the man in the background, so your father did not suspect me, and it was easy for me to make his acquaintance and become friendly with him in the execution of my plan of revenge. Your father also did me a wrong in another way; I had fallen secretly in love with a woman, and—he proposed to her and was accepted! That is your mother!"

"A wrong!" cried the girl scornfully.

"That is what *I* call it!" replied Gretton coolly, "and it is on that assumption that I have worked. I have won, so far! But listen!

"I brought ruin on your father! Ha, my story is beginning to have an effect! I saw him die in anguish at the thought that he was leaving his wife and child to the mercies of a cruel, ungrateful world, and I did nothing to ease him."

"Fiend!" gasped the girl, a pain contracting her heart.

"You may call me names if it pleases you!" retorted Gretton. "After his death, I became benevolent!" He laughed in his enjoyment. "I took care of both of you; I helped you. But all the while, now and then, I have (through the agency of friends) made your mother feel the disgrace which has rested on your father's name by reason of his failure. She does not believe the rumour which others accepted so readily, that the failure was a disgraceful one, but she has to bear the stigma, and I take care that she shall feel it from time to time! Of course it was I who originated the rumour!"

Nothing could equal the callous cruelty of the man who was thus torturing the girl to whom he had made violent love only a few short minutes ago. It was one of those freaks of human nature which, unhappily, are not so rare as one would be glad to think!

"Well," he continued, "I cherished the hope of one day dealing her a crushing blow. I made up my mind that, when you were old enough to have an idea of what life is and

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when she was doting upon you, I would kill you!" Mona was too horrified to utter even an exclamation of dismay. "I have drawn and painted scenes of various ways in which I would kill you!" continued the wretch. "You must look at them! They are all well executed, and you form the central figure in all! The last one is the method I have chosen!"

Was this man mad? No, Mona could not say that he was, terrible as it was to suppose that he was deliberately saying this with the full knowledge of what he was doing!

She saw the pictures as he turned them over, one by one; she was obliged to look at them, she could not take her eyes from them. They were masterly paintings. In each one she saw herself suffering death in some form or other. The last one she recognised as that appropriate to the circumstances of the moment.

"There!" he cried, shutting up the book. "When I had finally decided, a strange thing happened; I fell in love with my victim! My love increased; I tried to fight against it, but it mastered me. Then I heard of your engagement, but I said to myself that I should conquer! If you had said 'Yes!' you would have saved your life and spared your mother the agony that awaits her! Will you change your mind?"

"I cannot!" cried Mona, springing up. "Help! Help! The two men will assist me!"

"They are in my pay!" hissed Gretton, grasping her wrists. We can easily arrange to save ourselves! A storm is arising; the yacht will sink, but we shall not pull out the plugs from the holes made in the bottom till we are near a vessel. It will be an ordinary wreck, and no suspicion will fall upon us!"

She struggled to wrench herself free, but he held her tightly while he told her of the grief of mother and lover. Then he forced her back suddenly and placed something against her nostrils, and all was blank.

A dash of something cold on her face was her next sensation. Mona had no need to open her eyes in order to comprehend her position. She had seen it in the picture which, with incredible refinement of cruelty, Gretton had painted and shown to her.

She was tied to a piece of timber which she had seen on the deck of the yacht, the cords were passed round her body and ankles, her arms hanging loosely, her hair was flowing in the wind.

She was being tossed about on the water, the sport of the waves, first on the crest of a billow and then in the trough of the sea. She could tell that the wind had risen and was blowing half a gale; the sky was overcast, a storm was imminent. No friendly vessel was near; alone on the wide sea her fate was a matter of merely a brief space of time!

Her own fate did not trouble her; the terror of it had passed away in the thought of the agony of her lover and mother when her lifeless and bruised body should be found and carried to them!

The words of Gretton came back to her with fearful vividness, he had intended that they should! He had given her a word-picture of the scene that would follow, and Mona cried aloud in bitterness of spirit that the dear ones might be spared this blow!

Suddenly a great squall of wind swept over the sea and for a moment she was submerged. It came just as she was asking aloud why the perpetrators of this crime should escape. Mona knew it not, but that squall caught the yacht unprepared for a sudden veering of the wind, and it heeled her over like a toy, without warning.

One man was below and he was drowned in the vessel; Gretton and the other man found themselves in the water, clinging to a plank. They held on to their frail raft like grim death, but presently, as a wave took them, they saw a heavy piece of timber, with a white-robed figure bound to it, being hurled towards them in the choppy sea.

With a cry of dismay they tried to push their plank out of its course, but it struck them violently, and when it had passed over them and they rose to the surface they were incapable of further mischief! It was a just and appropriate punishment; they had been sent to their long account by the intermediary of the instrument which had been utilised for the sacrifice of Mona!

The squall subsided as suddenly as it had arisen and the sea became calm; it reminded old sailors of the time when the ill-fated training ship *Eurydice* went down in the Channel. Mona's beam rested on the surface and the water rippled against it almost playfully.

The coastguard had noted the disappearance of the yacht, and a lifeboat was sent out to save the crew if they were floating on the waves. To their intense astonishment, they found Mona, and, cutting her free, they took her into the boat and brought her unconscious to shore.

The home-coming of Mona was sad, but not the misfortune that Gretton had designed. Mrs. Barron was unaware of what had happened till two hours later, by which time Mona had been restored to life. Cyril Thornton, having been delayed, did not arrive till evening and was spared much of the pain that would otherwise have fallen to his lot.

Mona did not relate all the details of the short cruise in the *Salva*, but she had to explain that Gretton had tied her to the timber and sent her adrift out of revenge.

The statement was disbelieved at first, but it was so evident that the yacht was overturned too suddenly to give anyone time to do such a thing merely as a measure of safety, that people were forced to believe it. They concluded that Gretton had gone mad, but Mona knew better, although she did not contradict the report.

The severe nervous shock, occasioned by the terrible ordeal through which she had passed, necessitated a prolonged stay abroad and a complete change of scene. Mrs. Barron, having lost her vengeful benefactor, had scarcely any resources to fall back on, so Cyril Thornton came to the rescue. Mrs. Barron objected at first, declaring that it was not fair to him.

"I can work," she said with calm dignity, "and I would have worn my fingers to the bone and have brought Mona up to work in a factory for her living rather than have touched a farthing of that money! No, Mr. Thornton, I cannot accept!"

"Mona is to be my wife," urged the young man, "and I want her to be strong. So she must go away, and you must go with her to take care of her, because I insist! I have the right to insist, have I not, dearest?" he added to his future wife.

So Mrs. Barron yielded. And, just as misfortunes do not always come singly, so does it occasionally happen that strokes of good fortune tread quickly on one another. On the very wedding-day Mrs. Barron received from Gretton's solicitor some notes found in his late client's private drawer, and those notes exculpated her husband and vindicated her own steadfast belief in his integrity!

George Day.

"What do you consider the hardest problem of a man's existence?" "Getting his own consent to crawl out of bed in the morning."

Thirteen young women died last year on the day named for their wedding. And yet young ladies continue to run the risk of meeting a similar fate.

"How in the world, Mrs. Wisely, do you manage to have all of your three daughters in so early when they spend the evening out?" "The last one home has to get breakfast next morning."

Alice: "Marie was so annoyed. She heard that a certain concern was using her photograph as an advertisement——" Grace: "You don't mean it!" Alice: "Yes, and when she investigated the matter she found it wasn't her photograph at all."

"I think, Charlie," said Mrs. Smallface to her hopeful, "that I shall put you into long trousers very soon." "But not until after Christmas, ma?" "Why not?" "Oh, because you know, ma, I shall have to go into short stockings, and they don't hold much."

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A Story which Proves that Eavesdropping Does Not Pay.

Miss Eva Braxton was nervously happy, and the cause of this peculiar state of mind was very simple. Mr. John Morgan had proposed on the previous evening and had intimated his intention of calling to see Mr. Braxton on the following afternoon and formally asking his consent to the marriage.

In ordinary circumstances, the lady would naturally feel both happy and nervous during the time that her lover was interviewing his prospective father-in-law, even although she might feel quite positive that father would raise no objection. In this instance, however, the nervousness was due to a double cause.

Miss Braxton had begun by feeling nervous in the usual way, but all at once a thought struck her and increased the feeling.

Why was he so long in returning to her in the drawing-room? It surely could not be that papa had raised any objection? Then it must be that John was discussing this transaction as he did almost every other. It seemed absurd, but she was bound to admit that it would be just like him!

This is how it was. Mr. Braxton and John Morgan had become great friends during the past twelve months or so. They lived near to one another; their business brought them frequently together in the City, and in spite of the difference of fifteen years in age, they suited each other admirably. The friendship had grown to such an extent that the one would scarcely take any step without consulting the other.

For these reasons it seemed that the marriage was most desirable; it would be a source of happiness to Mr. Braxton as well as to the young people. John Morgan was only thirty-two—seven years older than Eva. He would welcome the proposal warmly. But it was just there that the vexatious thought came in.

"John is so accustomed to discuss everything with father that it is more than probable that he will actually ask father some questions about my personal qualifications!" said Eva. "I don't think it would strike either of them as out-of-the-way; they are used to it.

"Father would naturally think a great deal of me, but he is such a strange man, and has been away so much, that he does not know me so well as some people, and he would honestly discuss me.

"I am not angry at the idea that he would say anything against me, because I know he wouldn't and couldn't!" (This last word very emphatically.) "But it is the idea of being overhauled that vexes me!"

Then Miss Eva Braxton smiled and shook herself, figuratively. What nonsense was this? She was foolish!

She tried to dismiss the subject and make herself easy with a book for a few minutes longer; but it was too difficult a task, and the thought came back and settled on her like a nightmare.

She was apt to be quick to take offence and just as quick to be sorry for the outburst. The long absence of her lover—he had been gone quite twenty minutes—irritated her.

"I'll go after him!" she decided.

And she lost no more time. Passing from the drawing-room in the front to the apartment behind it, where she expected to find her father and her lover, she saw the door standing open and one glance showed her that the room was empty. Where were they?

The blinds were down, for the sun streamed through the windows into that room during the afternoon and made it unbearably warm. She was about to pass on when the sound of voices came to her ears. The windows were open, to let in such air as might be puffing lazily about, and it was through the open French window that the sound of voices came to her.

"They are outside," murmured Eva. "I'll go to them."

She crossed the apartment, her feet making no noise on the soft carpet, and stood behind the blinds.

Just as she was about to pull the blind aside and pass through the window, the old notion came back to her with greater force, and she resolved to wait a minute and listen.

"I usually ask you for your opinion on anything that interests me," Tom was saying, "and this is a matter that affects you more than most transactions. Then you think she really will suit?"

"Well, John, I do not know that I can be so positive as that," said Mr. Braxton deprecatingly. "In giving my opinion, I have, it is true, spoken from my experience, but at the same time I have borne in mind what others have said. I cannot, as you will understand, give so reliable a verdict as others."

"Then he *is* talking me over, and, worse than all, my father is speaking diffidently about his daughter!"

Eva's face reddened with anger; she was wrathful enough to have confronted them on the spot and put them both to shame, but her curiosity got the better of her annoyance, and she decided to listen to a few more of their choice observations concerning herself.

Her father refrained from giving a decisive opinion because he had been abroad and he left it to others, to strangers, to give a correct verdict! As if their opinions would not be biassed by jealousy!

"You see, she must have a gentle disposition or she won't be manageable if anything happens to disturb her ordinary running," said John, in a grave tone. "I've heard that she can show temper, and a good deal of it, at times, and that's what makes me nervous about her. I heard that only this morning, and it worried me, because, you see, I have as good

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as settled the affair! I absolutely must have one with a quiet disposition!"

"A quiet disposition!" murmured Eva sneeringly. "I suppose I must be as meek as a lamb, not daring to open my mouth under any provocation, while you, the lord and master, can throw the things about and 'say things,' as you slangily put it! Worried, oh? Because you have as good as settled the affair? Oh, you can be released at once!"

"—— worry about that!" were the next words heard by the irate young lady behind the blind. They were spoken by her father.

"No," said John reflectively. "I suppose I could cry off by paying a small forfeit! Otherwise she is not a bad creature. A little too thin, perhaps, occasionally throws her legs out too much in running—not so graceful as she might be, but I can wink at that."

"Oh, that isn't much to grumble about in the circumstances, because she is for everyday use, so to say. She wouldn't make any show at all among the more aristocratic creatures in the Row; but you don't want her for that or I would say 'Don't have her!' You want one that is quiet, easy to drive, and not likely to make a fuss!"

"Exactly!" agreed John. "But I'm disturbed about what I heard this morning, and I won't absolutely clinch the bargain till I've found out more about her!"

"I don't blame you, and I am sorry that I cannot help you much this time. I share your views entirely!"

"All right!" said John. "I'll let you know as soon as I find out. I say"—looking at his watch and rising hurriedly—"I must get back to Eva! Whatever will she think I've been up to? I want to keep it dark from her!"

Eva drew aside the blind and stepped out, confronting the two men with flashing eyes.

"There is no need to hurry yourself about coming back to me, Mr. Morgan!" she said sarcastically. "As it happens, I have heard a good deal of your interesting conversation! I can quite understand that you wish to keep it dark. I also comprehend your anxiety at the prospect of having a wife with some spirit in her. You men always prefer a woman who will meekly submit to everything and walk about the house like a tame bird, afraid to—to—— "

She stopped; her anger would not permit her to continue. She turned to her father and blazed forth at him.

"I never thought that *you*, my dear father, would talk like that about me! Oh, it is too bad!"

"My dear Eva, I——" began Mr. Braxton, his voice betraying the utmost bewilderment.

But Eva turned from him to John Morgan.

"You need make no payment in order to be rid of so undesirable a wife as I should make! Perhaps I have a temper. I will relieve you from the necessity of making inquiries—I *have* a temper. I will release you. There is your ring!" (Taking it off and throwing it at his feet.) "I don't want to see you again; I despise you! Oh, to think that you should both talk about me as if I were a horse or a dog, or——Thin, am I?"

"My dear Eva," expostulated her father, "I was talking about a horse!"

"A—horse?" gasped Eva, brought to her senses by her father's look and his emphatic statement. "What——"

"I was thinking of buying a horse suitable for my wife to ride and I consulted my old friend," declared John coldly. "However, there will be no need to trouble further! I am not likely to marry, for, although I do not object to spirit, I do not relish the notion of being spied on and it would be a sad thing for a woman to marry a man whom she despises and whom she actually thinks could be guilty of such manners as you credit me with! I do not ask for meekness, but I want a fairly gentle disposition. Good afternoon!"

She wanted to hold out her hands to him and ask for forgiveness but her pride held her back till it was too late. He was gone and she had lost her lover.

She waited for him to come again, but he had gone to Australia; he decided to go to the Antipodes in furtherance of his business. She waited for some sign from him after his return, but none came. Then she humbled herself and wrote to him.

"I am obliged for your note," he wrote back, "and I am ready to forgive, but it is difficult to forget. Besides, I have come to the conclusion that I should not run well in double harness."

Miss Eva Braxton burnt the note sorrowfully and registered a vow to remain single.

H. Bramley.

PETER'S PATRON.

Telling of a Rivalry Between Poetry and Love.

Peter Griffin was a poet and poor. This in itself is not a wonderful thing, but Peter was by no means blest in the knowledge that many other followers of the muse were similarly circumstanced.

He had longings—a "soul" some call it. But such sordid details of everyday life as bread and cheese, to say nothing of a little butter upon the bread, perpetually interfered with his inspirations. Even poets must live!

He was not a prig, nor was he conceited. He did not believe that he ought to be Poet Laureate instead of Alfred Austin. In fact, I do not think he envied that personage in the least.

He had written some fairly successful songs, for which he received the usual modest remuneration; he had contributed poems and verses to magazines and newspapers, and in some cases the editors thereof had imitated Oliver Twist, and asked for "more."

He did not affect long hair, nor did he wear a shabby velvet coat. He was just twenty-six, had a berth in the City; but he carefully concealed from his fellow clerks the fact of his poetic capabilities, and was simply an ordinary young man of the day, both in appearance and conversation.

It was a dreary winter evening, and Peter had been "touching up" some new poems before sending them to an editor. He sat in his somewhat dingy bed-sitting room in the suburbs, and dreamt he was famous.

He had been reading, a short while previously, I think it was Walter Besant's "Chaplain of the Fleet," and he mentally compared himself to poor Solomon Stallabrass, the starveling poet in that story.

Why did not rich men and women become patrons of the poetic muse in these times? he wondered.

Was there not one soul in all London who admired the art

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sufficiently to endow the poet with such pecuniary means as would stimulate him to write an epic, instead of having to scribble verses to bring him bread and cheese ?

Peter felt in his heart that if such a one would but come forward, be his patron, and free him from dire necessity by making him comparatively independent, he could produce a noble, even a great poem.

But, cramped by uncongenial surroundings, the dull daily routine of an office, and the sheer need of having to write that which was saleable, he had the desire to do greater things without the possibility of doing them.

Such a patron as he dreamt of would not only enable him to write at ease, but would insure to the world a work that should hand the name "Paul Lawrence," Peter's *nom de plume*, down to posterity, and do incalculable good to the cause of art.

His musings were interrupted by the postman's knock. A few moments later the grimy maid of all work brought him a letter. It bore the imprint of the publishers of a magazine to which he had frequently contributed verses of a somewhat higher class than usual.

He tore it open, to find it contained an inclosure, a crested envelope, addressed to him, care of the editor. He opened this and read :

"520, *Eaton Square, S.W.*

"*Lady Anstruther, having greatly admired the poems signed 'Paul Lawrence,' would be glad and honored if their author would kindly call upon her.*"

Peter's heart gave a great thump and then stood still. A patron at last ! He rubbed his eyes, and read the letter again. Was it a hoax ? No, it could not be ; no one who would be likely to play such a joke upon him knew his poetic proclivities.

None of his colleagues at the office, from manager—nay, from principal even—to office boy, knew of his other name and existence.

He looked at his watch. It was Saturday, on which day he cast off the trammels of the City and put on the toga of the poet—only in a metaphorical sense, of course—at two o'clock. It was now six. He would don his best and call upon Lady Anstruther that very evening.

Never in all his six-and-twenty years of life had Peter dressed himself with more care and thought. He discarded tie after tie in his anxiety to look his best. Even when he finally decided which one to wear, he was doubtful whether his first choice was not better taste.

At last he drew on a new pair of gloves and set out, after a lengthened survey of himself in the cheap looking-glass.

To make assurance doubly sure, he stopped on his way at a stationer's, and, referring to a London Directory, found that Lady Anstruther did live at 520, Eaton Square.

It was with a beating heart that he arrived at that house, and summoned up his courage to give a correct rat-tat ! with the knocker.

The door was opened by a footman gorgeous in red coat, white stockings, knee breeches and powdered hair. Her ladyship was in, said this being condescendingly, and Peter was ushered in a languid manner into a morning room. He had not waited, with a certain feeling of trepidation, more than two minutes when her ladyship rushed—literally rushed into the room.

She was a short, stout, white-haired lady, of some sixty years, with a benevolent countenance and a gushing manner. She grasped our poet with both hands.

"Welcome !" she cried enthusiastically. "How very good of you to come so soon ! But, oh, you do not look in the least like a poet ! I feel quite disappointed !"

"I am very sorry !" was all that Peter could stammer out.

"No matter ; it is not the man but the mind that we measure."

Poor Peter could not but feel this remark was somewhat unflattering.

"Please be seated, and let me tell you why I so wished to see you. You must know that I am an intense admirer of the muse of poetry. And your poems are so truly beautiful, so high in aim, so perfect in every respect, that I wanted to meet you, to help you, to spur you on to far greater things, to nobler aspirations, to be your—your what is it ?"

"Patron," suggested Peter boldly.

"That is the word—your patron ; and when you are great and famous—a Byron, a Tennyson, nay, a Shakespeare perhaps, who can say—the world will speak your name and say : 'Louisa Lady Anstruther was his friend, his patron, his discoverer. To her we owe him !'"

Her ladyship paused, partly for effect, and partly from want of breath.

"You are too good !" murmured Peter.

"Not a word. Do not deprecate yourself. By so doing you question my good taste, Mr. Lawrence."

She looked at him so closely and steadily that Peter began to feel a trifle uncomfortable.

"You are good-looking and young. You have the world before you. With my aid and influence it will be at your feet in a few years' time. Tell me about yourself."

Peter told her. She nodded, interpolating "Yes," "Excellent," "Capital," here and there.

"You will leave the City, of course," she said when Peter had finished. "I am glad you have no relatives. I shall of course adopt you. I have no children ; you will be my son. I shall make you a handsome allowance to enable you to write in comfort. You will go into Society—the best—with me, and you will commence at once. Now, if you will."

Her volubility took away Peter's breath.

"I shall allow you——" She named a sum beyond his wildest dreams. "You must have a valet. He will teach you how to dress. That tie, for instance, is atrocious ! You could not wear that in my house."

Poor Peter !

"Where do you live ?"

Peter told her.

"You will dine with me to-night. I have a few friends to whom I shall introduce you. You will drop your own name. I will order the carriage to take you back to your—your home, where you can dress and return here. The carriage will wait for you. We do not dine until nine."

Her enthusiasm bewildered Peter, swept him off his feet. But he contrived to murmur what he meant to be thanks.

Her ladyship rang the bell and ordered the carriage imperiously. When it was announced, she gave him her hand, saying : "*Au revoir*," and, seized by a sudden happy impulse, Peter stooped and kissed it.

"Very pretty !" said her ladyship, to whom all flattery was honey, "but not quite so gracefully done as it could be. However, you will learn. Stay, have you money ?"

"Enough," stammered our poet.

"Pay your landlady, or whatever you call the person, out of this."

She handed him a pleasantly plump purse, which Peter was too bewildered to refuse.

Was he dreaming ? Was he on his head or his heels ? Was he going mad ? Peter wondered, as the carriage bore him back to his dingy suburban lodgings. How lucky, thought he, that he possessed a dress suit ! Then for the first time since he had read Lady Anstruther's letter he remembered something that he had not spoken of or thought about.

Nellie ! Nellie, his simple, humble little sweetheart ! Poor Nellie—loving, trusting, tender-hearted, curly-haired Nellie !

Peter's heart gave him a twinge of pain. This would part them for ever. He knew that Nellie and his new patron were as wide apart, socially, as the Poles. Poor Nellie !

Her sweet little face with the soft, pitiful eyes came before him as he packed up his belongings and put on his dress clothes. Already she seemed a part of some other existence he had once led. He must write to her, do something for her, help her—but he could never marry her. To his credit let it be recorded that Peter felt despicably mean.

He tried to dismiss her from his thoughts that evening, driving back to Eaton Square, during dinner, and afterwards. But ever and again her face came before him with tearful,

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reproachful, yet tender eyes, and he was anything but happy.

He got through dinner successfully, being fairly apt, and, though not quite at ease, quick-witted enough not to betray himself. His patron was delighted with her *protégé*. From that night Peter Griffin died and Paul Lawrence took his place.

Was he happy? He did not know—he could not say. The life was a dream of ease and luxury. A study was fitted up for him, with creamy, hand-made notepaper to write upon and an expensive gold-mounted fountain pen to inspire him. Here he sat when not driving or visiting with Lady Anstruther.

But he wrote nothing. New clothes poured in upon him. He was made much of by the ladies, flattered and flirted with. He wrote to Nellie, and now and then in some lovely drawing-room, surrounded by charming women and in an atmosphere of ease and cultured leisure, her sorrowful face would arise, not to reproach him, but to remind him of the time when it had seemed to him the very sweetest in the world.

Poor Nellie! She would forget him in time. He must marry well. His patron said so.

But he wrote nothing. One day he sat down intending to commence a great epic. He sat for an hour without result. He did not write a single line. He could not!

Then the horror of the thing suddenly fastened upon him. Suppose he could not write any more! The blood in his veins tingled at the thought; his hands grew clammy, his head swam giddily. The fear drove him frantic. He turned again to his table and picked up his pen. He wrote furiously, feverishly.

Rubbish—utter silly jingle, with halting metre and not a poetic idea in it!

He threw down his pen and went for a long walk. When on his return, he tried again, the result was the same. Failure! He could not write a line!

Then he realised that the muse had forsaken him. It was no avail to hope the morrow would bring her back. He knew it would not; nor would a hundred to-morrows. He was as certain as that he was living that he would never write again. Poet he was, but now he was an impostor, a fraud, a lie.

His brain throbbed at the thought. The happy, tender ideas and fancies that had thrilled him in his dingy room, here, amid comfort, wealth, and luxury, would not come. And he knew that they never would come, too; knew it without hope of doubt.

His whirling thoughts returned to Nellie. How her tender face and simple, loving ways would have comforted him! But he had cut himself adrift from her for ever by his choice. And this—this was his punishment.

His patron found Paul Lawrence strangely absent at dinner that night.

There was a large and fashionable party, and those who expected something poetic from him must have gone, so far as that was concerned, empty away. It is to be trusted that they consoled themselves with the reflection that poets, of all men, shine least in society.

Lady Anstruther quietly rallied him, and hinted that he was thinking out an epic. Poor Paul! He gave a sickly smile, and made an apology that he did not mean. So soon did he begin to play the hypocrite. But for how long?

Those terse, pregnant words haunted him for long after. For how long could he keep up?

He knew—none better—that he would never write even so much as a quatrain or a rondeau in the lap of luxury, much less the great epic his patron expected of him.

How he bore the next week—fortnight—month, Paul Lawrence never knew. Every day he tried to write—it was a waste of beautiful paper and the best ink money could buy. Yet in his dingy, dirty garret, he could scribble without ceasing, ideas flowed, thoughts came to him; though the paper on which he wrote was bought by the pound, cheaply, and his inkstand was—a penny ink bottle! And he's patron!

Ah, that was the point. Even the most complaisant of patrons are anxious to see the results of their patronage.

To Lady Anstruther's surprise, then disappointment, and at the last annoyance, there were no results.

This story is not a tragedy, though to poor Peter it began to assume almost those dimensions. He tried to avoid Lady Anstruther, but he could not. He began to fear she was growing suspicious.

He was not far wrong. And all the while he had to play the liar and the hypocrite, while he knew very well in his heart the lap of luxury was not the place in which to write poems, or, indeed, to do any kind of work worthy of the world for which it is written. He knew his brain was dulled by the artificiality of the life he led. He knew it.

But he thought of Nellie. Where was she? Was she breaking her heart because he, as others had done before him, had chosen luxury rather than love? And she had loved him, with tender eyes, clinging soft hands, and tears of admiration in the former which were a million times more eloquent than all the fulsome praises of his patron's friends.

He thought of Nellie—his old sweetheart. But even thinking of her could not bring him back his lost gift.

One very wet night Lady Anstruther went out to dine without him. He had pleaded that he wanted to "think out" some work; but even then he fancied he saw something like contempt in his patron's eyes. Was he right? he wondered.

True, the poem he had shown her the day before was a poor effort. But—it was the best he could do.

When alone he made no attempt to write. He put on a macintosh and went out. Miserable at heart, through the rainy, miserable streets he went, whither he hardly knew.

It was an absolute relief to be free. He suddenly felt hunger. He went into a restaurant and had a chop from the grill, and he enjoyed it more than a ten course dinner!

He went out, after paying his modest bill, with a queer feeling throbbing at his heart. He looked round him dazedly. The part to which he had wandered seemed strangely familiar. He looked again; he was in the very same suburban street in which he used to meet Nellie! And there she stood, under the gas-lamp—a little white-faced, pathetic figure, with oh, so sad eyes. She ran to meet him with a cry.

"Oh, dear, dear love, I knew you would come back to me!" And the poet could not speak, so he simply took her in his arms under that twinkling, unconscious gas-lamp and kissed her.

How she clung to him, how her soft eyes filled with tears, how she held his hand in her cold fingers!

With a mad impulse her lover—he was that still—tore off his gloves, threw his silk hat into the roadway, where a passing cab promptly converted it into unrecognisability, and took her again into his arms. Ah, there are some things words cannot express.

"Forgive me!" he said.

"What have I to forgive, love?" was all Nellie replied.

Was it all a dream? thought Peter. Yet no! There were his hat and gloves—his patron's gift; he was bareheaded, in the rain, under a gas-lamp, with Nellie's arms about him. Thank God, it was not a dream.

* * * * * * *

That was how Peter never went back again to Eaton Square; how Lady Anstruther had occasion to bemoan the "ingratitude of the poetic temperament," and how Nellie found her lover.

But the world did not lose a poet, because Peter's patron frequently sees and hears the name of Paul Lawrence, though she never speaks of him, nor will ever meet him again.

He is successful, happy, contented; and he has Nellie. And he knows that the poet's patron is not luxury, but—Love.

Clifton Bingham.

"Don't you want to leave footprints on the sands of time?" asked the mentor. "No," answered the young man, who is ambitious but lazy, "I'd rather leave carriage ruts."

He (reading item in newspaper): "It is estimated that in a few thousand years the human race will have become entirely destitute of teeth." She: "And yet you want Tommy to be a dentist."

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CLOSING DATE: AUGUST 27TH.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and fasten it to the other eleven lists, in order of date, then post them all in an envelope addressed to The Editor, "SHORT STORIES," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., so as to arrive not later than by first post on Thursday, August 27th. Put the words "Juggled Letters" on the top left-hand corner of the envelope.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

TWELFTH LIST.

133. CEEFKLLLORSU	**139. ADDEIIKLNOST** .....
134. ACEFOOPRV	**140. ABCEKLLMNOÓP** .....
135. AACCHIILNRRT	**141. ACEFGHILNO** .....
136. BEGLOOPRSS	**142. ADEGHLORTUY** .....
137. AACILLLMNOR	**143. AAACGHILLNNPR** .....
138. ACIKRWW	**144. ABCEEFNORT** .....

I agree to abide by the Editor's decision in this Competition.

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

THE FIRST SIX EPISODES.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d.

This sum meant a great deal to me, and I wondered how I was ever to pay it. I made friends with Mr. Taskot, and learnt from him that I was supposed to be an heiress. When I told him how matters really stood he promised to help me.

We met the following morning, Sunday, before breakfast at the spot where we had previously encountered one another. Mr. Taskot told me that I had only been asked to Vernon Towers that my friends, as I thought them, might fleece me. He promised to lend me the £11 7s. 10d., and we fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Grainger, on her way to early service at church, saw us together. I then knew that I should hear more of the meeting.

In the afternoon, while the other members of the party occupied themselves with cards, I went for a walk, during which I was rescued from a mad dog by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who gave vent to an expression almost of surprise when he learnt where I was staying.

On the Monday I sat down to the card-table with delight, looking forward to having my revenge.

EPISODE SEVEN.

Fluctuating Resolutions.

Our scheme worked admirably at first, and I became so excited at winning one game after another, that I was in danger of being too careless in exploiting the code of signals agreed upon. Being now better acquainted with the ramifications of Bridge, I was not misled by apparent success, but paid very particular attention to the honours scores, and knew how the games were really going.

"Our luck is good to-day, eh?" smiled Mr. Taskot. "But that must not tempt us into playing carelessly."

The last word was accompanied by a warning glance which had its intended effect, and I curbed the exuberance of spirit I had begun to show.

The Vernons looked thoroughly mystified, and the growing frown on Annabel's face indicated the vexation of spirit which her unusual losses were occasioning her.

Mr. Fisher was also surprised, for it must have seemed astonishing for his accustomed methods of card manipulation to have no better result than to make his losses greater.

Mrs. Grainger had a headache, she said, and preferred not to play until evening, but I think the true reason of her abstinence was to be found in the fact that she was an invariable loser, and wished to impose some kind of limit to her disbursements.

Harry and Annabel Vernon took turns at making a fourth, and I think nobody but Mr. Taskot and I was sorry when luncheon time put a stop to play for the time being.

On second thoughts, I am not sure I wasn't glad myself, for Mr. Fisher was beginning to make me feel rather uncomfortable by his curious glances. He was watching me very keenly, and, towards the last, I became almost afraid to pursue the tactics which had answered so well up to then.

So, upon the whole, it was just as well that we ceased playing, and I'm sure I enjoyed my lunch all the better for knowing that I was now a good many pounds into pocket. I had not stopped to argue that I had no business to indulge in the scheme of retaliation after I had recouped the losses which I had just cause to resent. It was enough for me that Mr. Taskot considered it quite fair to fight our tricky entertainers with their own weapons.

To tell the truth, the glamour of gambling already had me in its grip, and when, early in the afternoon, there was made a perfunctory suggestion that we should have a game of tennis, I was one of the first to negative it.

"Considering you are such a novice, you have made astonishing havoc with other people's pockets," observed Mr. Fisher, with a benevolent smile, which seemed to indicate that he did not mind having lost a trifle himself. "If ever anybody else wants lessons from me, I think I shall cite you as the most prodigiously clever pupil I have ever coached."

"Thank you," I laughed. "You are pleased to flatter me. But perhaps my luck may change this afternoon."

"A change of partners might easily influence your luck."

I gave an involuntary start of alarm at this remark. Was it possible that Mr. Fisher suspected what was really happening, and that Mr. Taskot's clever code of signals had not proved subtle enough to avoid detection? And, if so, was the remark about a change of partners intended as a hint to that effect?

The idea gave me such a shock that I resolved not to handle another card except in scrupulously fair play, for I had become suddenly alive to the folly and wickedness of what I had

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been persuaded by Mr. Taskot's specious arguments to do. But another glance at Mr. Fisher's guileless face convinced me that my fleeting suspicion was nothing more than the outcome of an accusing conscience, and I breathed freely once more.

Mrs. Grainger found it impossible to resist playing till evening, especially after it transpired that a table had been fixed in the verandah, where we could indulge in our fascinating amusement without losing the benefit of fresh air and sunshine. But Harry Vernon said that he had some business to attend to, and Mr. Fisher announced his intention of devoting a couple of hours to his arrears of correspondence.

This left but four of us for Bridge, and Mr. Taskot, who was to be my partner again, asked me to have a short promenade with him on the terrace until our opponents were ready to play.

"I have something important to say to you," he observed, as soon as we were out of hearing of everybody else. "Do you know, Miss Beresford, that you forfeited a big winning by not giving me the signals in the last game?"

"I know," was my murmured reply. "But we had got our losses back before then, and I was nervous too. I fancied that both Mr. Fisher and Mr. Vernon were suspicious, and dared not go on."

"If that is all, you may rest assured that you were mistaken. I am positive that our secret is safe."

Our secret is safe!

The phrase jarred on me. I had been easily persuaded to do a foolish thing. But I had not contemplated making common cause with a man who would allude to the transaction as "our secret," and my eyes flashed with vexation.

"There is all the more reason then," I said sharply, "that the matter shall go no further. I am sorry I gave any signals at all."

"You will be more sorry, if you do not give a succession of them."

"How so?"

"Well, thereby hangs a tale. I told you before that I had detected the Vernons and Fisher in sharp practice?"

"Yes."

"And I also told you that the only way to fight them was by using 'counter irritants,' as the doctors say. At present, you and I stand to be slightly into pocket, so far as to-day's play is concerned. But, while I was smoking a cigarette on the verandah, just beneath the window of Harry Vernon's own den, I heard him and Mr. Fisher drilling a new scheme of spoliation into Mrs. Vernon, by which our pockets are to be practically turned inside out.

"Now I have an objection to be swindled. I have also an objection to creating a scene, and it will please me to leave here without giving the slightest indication that I have fathomed the rascality which is going on. So I think we had better adopt defensive measures again, and it will be Mrs. Vernon's own fault if her fresh attempt at roguery is a failure. And be sure you still let them think that you are an heiress."

Mr. Taskot's statements made me feel very angry, and, in spite of previous resolutions, I agreed once more to defend myself as he wished, particularly after he hinted at the pleasure it might give me to use my winnings in buying a present for Annabel, which would more than pay for the selfish hospitality that had been tendered to me.

EPISODE EIGHT.

A Thunderbolt.

I sat down to the game in a curious mood. Of course the best way to avoid being fleeced again would have been to refrain from playing. But I was fascinated to such an extent that I could not resist the opportunity of trying my hand at it once more. After this visit was ended, I was not likely to have many chances of playing Bridge again, and I wanted to make the most of what time remained to me for the thrilling pleasure.

Besides, it would do the Vernons good to meet with their match, and I owed them a bitter grudge, not only for what they had done, but for what they intended to do.

Mrs. Grainger was exceedingly pleased to have Annabel for her partner, for the latter was spoken of as a sort of mascot, to whom luck showed himself a staunch attendant, and in whose company, therefore, it was more than probable that former losses would be won back.

Annabel's mood puzzled me a little until I recollected that her taciturnity was probably caused by the close attention she was paying to the new scheme of fleecing into which she had recently been drilled by her husband and Mr. Fisher.

The same idea evidently struck Mr. Taskot, for he smiled meaningly at me, and I nodded back, just to show him that I did not mean to allow myself to be swindled.

For awhile my partner and I had no difficulty in winning, and I looked in vain for the tactics which I had been warned to expect. However, I reflected that we were only being allowed to forge ahead in the game for a couple of small score rubbers to lull our suspicions, and at the first indication of a change of luck, I brought my defensive measures into operation.

Once, when Annabel was dealing, I distinctly saw her slip two cards up her sleeve, while she was pretending to bend down for one that had dropped by design, of course.

"So," I thought, "that is how you manage to have such good trumps, milady! You secure a couple of leading cards, probably both of the same suit, and then you choose your trumps to fit in with the honours cards you have secreted! But what becomes of the surplus cards?"

Very critical observation convinced me of two things. Annabel had not hampered herself with extra cards to get rid of, but had selected a couple while shuffling, and had dealt the rest out so dexterously that only a suspicious observer could detect any sharp practice on her part.

Mr. Taskot had not missed what was going on. But he shot me a warning glance, which I interpreted as a hint not to betray the discovery I had made, and, in necessary self-defence, we both pursued our own little arrangement, confident that neither Annabel nor Mrs. Grainger could guess any ulterior motive in certain gestures by which we told each other what cards we had in our hand.

For instance, if I found it necessary to raise my hand to the right side of my head and toy with the tortoise-shell comb which held some of my hair in due bounds, hearts were the cards of which I had most in stock, and if any of them were honours, I indicated their exact value by the finger which pushed the comb into place.

The thumb meant the ace, the first finger the king, and so on. The left side of my head helped to indicate diamonds. A touch of my neck brooch served for clubs; and spades, the lowest in value, were cleverly served

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by the knot of black velvet which added smartness to my cream lace coffee coat.

Mr. Taskot's code of signals was slightly different. But it was equally unobtrusive and ingenious, and we presently began to win at such a rate that our opponents were "staggered," to quote one of Annabel's favourite verbs.

"Upon my word," grumbled Mrs. Grainger, "I never saw anything like it! Here am I, quite an old stager at cards, yet I lose all the time, no matter with whom I play. Even Mrs. Vernon cannot change my luck! Yet two people of little or no experience with cards, can win all before them! It is absolutely astonishing!"

"It is more than astonishing," was Annabel's venomous comment. "It's *peculiar*, more peculiar than anything I have seen for a long time."

What could she mean by the stress she laid on the adjective? Was it possible that she had noticed what we had been doing, just as we had fathomed her trickeries without much difficulty?

I was frightened at the bare thought, but soon put it aside. It had been easy us to for detect her malpractices because we were on the look-out for them. But she had no reason to suspect that we were prepared to guard our interests in the way we were doing, and, of course, it was peculiar, that, even by cheating, she should have none of her usual luck.

"Don't you think we had better cease playing now?" I asked, after being made quite dizzy with excitement by the reckoning up of the score, which showed me to have won over a hundred pounds during the afternoon.

"Give over now?" sneered Annabel. "You forget that you are the victor, and that it is the privilege of the vanquished to prolong the game."

"All the same, I won't play any more this afternoon," was Mrs. Grainger's decision. "Perhaps my luck will turn, if I break off for a while. I ought to have stuck to my resolve not to play at all till evening."

"I am sure Miss Beresford and I will be happy to give you your revenge whenever you like," said Mr. Taskot, "especially as Mrs. Vernon has been so unusually unlucky. But very likely she will have *all* the winning cards up her sleeve next time, and will leave her antagonists without a rap to bless themselves with."

Annabel turned quite pale at this exceedingly broad rub. But Mr. Taskot's face looked so innocently pleasant, and so absolutely unconscious of guile, that the keen home thrust was dismissed as an oddly coincidental figure of speech, and the appearance of two maids, who were bringing tea to the verandah, was the signal for putting the cards away for the time being.

I was thankful for this, for though I did not mean to profit by what I was winning, I was extremely uneasy.

"Never mind," I thought, "after I have bought some handsome presents for Mrs. Grainger and Annabel, with the money I have won from them, my conscience will be at ease again. As Mr. Taskot put it, my treacherous hostess will have been hoist by her own petard, and I will take good care never to do any more signalling after I leave Vernon Towers."

Annabel's tea equipage was the daintiest I had ever seen, and she made a charming picture herself as she gracefully handled the Queen Anne teapot.

Mr. Taskot immediately began to carry the cake-stand towards Mrs. Grainger and myself, but was gently called to order by our hostess.

"We can't begin without Mr. Fisher and Harry," she said plaintively. "I do wish they would remember that tea should never be kept waiting a minute."

"Perhaps they are out in the grounds, and did not hear the bell," suggested Mr. Taskot.

But one of the maids corrected this impression by saying: "The master says he will be here directly. He and Mr. Fisher have been taking some snapshots, he says, and are just finishing them off."

A sudden smile illumined Annabel's face, and if there had been anything to be triumphant about, I should almost have fancied it was a smile of triumph. Mr. Taskot saw it, and looked rather puzzled. But in another second the two dilatory gentlemen put in an appearance, and everything proceeded very merrily for the next half hour, when the first faint indications of the coming storm made themselves felt.

"Taskot," said Mr. Fisher, taking out his cigarette case, "can you spare me a few minutes of your valuable time? I have a fancy for strolling in the shrubbery while you and I have a smoke together. I'm sure the ladies will excuse us."

As a matter of fact, no excuse was necessary, for Mrs. Grainger was already going up to her own room, and Annabel, smiling her very sweetest, asked me to go with her to Harry's den, to see what success his photographic experiments had met with.

"Do come and have a look at them, there's a dear," she said. "Harry is really very good at that sort of thing, and you'd be surprised at the lovely pictures he turns out sometimes, although he is only an amateur."

Could anybody believe that card-playing had cast such a glamour over me that I was losing all interest for everything else? Yet it certainly was the case, and I had no inclination to see the results of anyone's amateurish efforts, for I had been victimised in the past by a girl friend who had "artistic leanings," and I had no reason to suppose, notwithstanding Annabel's eulogy, that Mr. Vernon was cleverer than most other amateurs.

But if I had only guessed the real motive which induced the Vernons to ask me to visit "Harry's den," I should have run upstairs, snatched my hat and gloves, and left Vernon Towers in a panic, reckless of what was to happen afterwards!

"Sit down here, there's a darling. You'll be nice and comfy in that chair, and you'll have all the better opinion of Harry's genius. Point of view is everything, isn't it?"

I agreed that it certainly must make a difference, and then resigned myself to the infliction of having to give perfunctory praise to a long series of hideous sun pictures.

Nor was my expectation belied. For fully three-quarters of an hour I was shown all sorts of rubbishy efforts, until I became so bored that I could no longer even pretend to be interested.

"But these are all old things, are they not?" I asked at last, being anxious to put an end to the mild martyrdom I was enduring. "Suppose you show me what has been done to-day?"

"My dear Olive, great things have been done to-day," replied Annabel, whose husband seemed to be intently watching for somebody. "For instance, Mr. Fisher and Mr. Taskot have just been having a talk which will prove of the utmost importance to us."

"I see them coming back from the shrubbery," interrupted Mr. Vernon. "Annabel, Miss Beresford shall see my latest effort now."

It suddenly occurred to me that, for some obscure reason or other, my hosts had been trifling my time away, and that

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they were now going to disclose their real object in inviting me hither.

"Have they been waiting till the two gentlemen had finished their talk?" I was thinking when, following the direction of Harry Vernon's gaze, I distinctly saw Mr. Fisher nod his head vigorously. I also saw that Mr. Taskot was livid with rage, and I tasted a faint foreboding of coming disaster when Annabel thrust a Kodak film into my hands, and exclaimed loudly: "Yes, my dear, you shall agree that great things have been done to-day. What do you think of that?"

Great Heavens! Shall I ever forget the shock which that photograph gave me! Or the sickening dread with which I listened to Annabel's mocking words. "Lovely, isn't it? Did you ever see anything more realistic? Nobody would imagine that you were not posing for effect, would they?"

Annabel's words, and the deadly meaning that underlay them, seemed to strike me dumb, and I could do nothing but gaze in growing horror at the frightful evidences of my own folly, which she took a positively fiendish delight in forcing upon my shuddering notice.

While Mr. Taskot and I thought ourselves absolutely safe from observation, and while we thought Mr. Vernon and Mr. Fisher were nowhere within sight of us, they had occupied themselves in taking innumerable snapshots of us and our doings, with the result that every signal my partner and I had made was faithfully reproduced on the tell-tale films, and I knew only too well that I was entrapped, without hope of mercy, by people whose business it was to live on what they extorted from others!

"A case of diamond cut diamond, eh?" sneered Annabel. "Miss Beresford chose to come here and pretend almost idyllic innocence of the ways of the world, so that we might not guess of what double-dyed deceit she was capable. She wanted to cheat us out of our money, and to laugh in her sleeve at our simplicity. But she has met with more than her match, I fancy."

My distress and terror were by this time so great that I rose from my chair with a frantic gesture.

"Let me go!" I cried. "Let me go! I will explain everything afterwards."

"After you and Mr. Taskot have abused our hospitality by inventing another code of swindling signals?" returned Mr. Vernon. "No, thank you, Miss Beresford, I have a better plan than that in view. You are absolutely in our power now, and if you wish to avoid ruin and disgrace, you will do exactly what I am now going to dictate to you."

(What his terms were will be told next week.)

TITLED DECOY.

"Express" Correspondent.

MILAN, Sunday, Aug. 2.

The police have arrested a gang of professional gamblers. A genuine countess, Sacchi, acted as decoy. Having access to the best society, she easily persuaded persons to visit her at her splendid villa near Milan. There, the visitors were made drunk, and invited to play cards. It is said that many Americans are among the victims.

The above extract from the DAILY EXPRESS *will be of exceptional interest to the readers of our "Bridge of Ruin" series.*

"WELL, Mollie," said her papa, who is a Volunteer captain, "did you see me marching through the town to-night?" "Yeth," said Mollie, "and I was very angry, papa. They might have let you have a drum to play on like those others had."

Your Editor Chats.

THE last list of letters in the Juggled Letters Competition will be found on page 239. All attempts must reach this office not later than by first post on Thursday, August 27th, addressed to the Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The words "Juggled Letters" must be written in the top left-hand corner of the envelope. The attempts of competitors who do not address their envelopes correctly are liable to be disqualified.

A NEW competition will start in a few weeks. Valuable money prizes will be offered in addition to Gramophones and two of Messrs. J. R. Mally and Co.'s famous Billiard Tables, complete with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level. With each Gramophone, too, are given away two records.

WITH the help of the summaries of the new serial and new series, published on the first page and page 240 respectively, any of you who have not already started to read these stories can do so now without missing anything of importance which has transpired in the two instalments that have already appeared.

This week's instalment of "THE 'BRIDGE' OF RUIN" is startlingly dramatic, telling how the code of signals arranged between Mr. Taskot and Olive Beresford is discovered and the results that follow this discovery, leading to the further enmeshing of the Girl Gambler in the toils of her so-called friends.

THE denial of some little luxury in the shape of sweets, or scent, or tobacco for just one week would not be a very great hardship. This is what I ask you to do and then send what you would have spent to the FRESH AIR FUND, to help to give some poor little slum mites that longed-for day in the country to which they have been eagerly looking forward all the year.

Most of you have more than one bright spot in the whole year, but a day in the country through the FRESH AIR FUND is the only bright spot in many little children's year, so I hope you will all respond liberally to this appeal. All amounts, which will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, should be sent to the Hon. Sec., FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Send what you can at once, otherwise the spending of the money will have to be deferred until next year.

Your Editor.

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THREE OF A KIND.

The Love Story of an Old Maid and rier Two Nieces.

"I do wonder," said Miss Polly Whittle suspending her knitting and sending an indignant gaze across the street where a young lady, dressed in the cloudiest of white muslins and the bluest of blue ribbons, was being helped into a carriage by a young gentleman—"I do wonder what's the sense of a woman getting married, and making a slave of herself, when she might be comfortable and independent.

"There's that Jenks girl"—indicating the young lady before mentioned. "She had everything she wanted at home, and her father was worried if she scratched her little finger. She could dress as she liked, go where she liked, and do what she liked. And here she must up and marry that ridiculous snip of a clerk, who earns three hundred a year.

"Of all the foolishness! I wonder where she'll get her ribbons and her scent? It's an example of blindness and perversity, and I hope you girls will take warning."

But for Miss Polly's last remark one might have supposed she was alone in her shady drawing-room that afternoon. It would have been a mistake.

Her niece Jane, a tall, demure-looking young lady of twenty-five, sat at the table, dotting an embroidery pattern. Her niece Mollie, a curly-headed damsel of seventeen, sat in the open window, swinging the sprays of wisteria abstractedly, and watching the couple who had excited Miss Whittle's indignation with envious eyes.

It was a little, old-fashioned room, with a high, gilded looking-glass, a few quaint pictures, claw-footed chairs, spare curtains, and a great vase of syringa on the mantel.

Miss Polly, a woman of forty-five, looked quite as old-fashioned, as she sat knitting vigorously in her white cuffs and black silk apron.

"I hope," continued Miss Polly, after waiting a reasonable time and receiving no response to her former remark, "I shall never see either of my nieces making a fool of herself."

"No, certainly, aunt," said Jane.

"Oh, no!" echoed Mollie, from the window.

"As I have always said, I want to save you from the misfortune of the sex. I want you to keep what health and happiness you have, and not slave yourself to death for other people."

"Yes," was the subdued response of the two listeners.

"I see you understand me. Why, Mollie, there comes Mr. Wilkins home to supper, and there's no fire made! Run, child—oh, stop a minute—I forgot to say that I am going out to tea to-morrow night, Mr. Wilkins and I, to Mrs. Green's. She's been talking about having a tea-party for two years, and now it's coming off. We're to go at three and stay till nine."

Mollie whirled about suddenly in the doorway, and there was a peculiar expression in Jane's grey eyes as she raised them to her aunt's face.

"Shall you stay so late?" she asked.

"I mean to, if I'm well. I don't go merely to get my supper; I go for the sake of social intercourse. What are you waiting for, Mollie?"

"Nothing," responded that damsel, dancing on with sudden light-heartedness. "Supper in fifteen minutes, auntie."

I hate explanations, so I will only say that Miss Polly was a maiden lady with two orphan nieces and Mr. Wilkins was an elderly gentleman boarding with Miss Whittle for the summer.

He was a tall, spare man, a widower, with stiff, grey hair, and a curiously puckered face, which wore a feeble smile.

He always wore most amazingly stiff shirt collars and squeaky boots, and his conversation was a hopeless search for terms that should sufficiently praise Miss Polly. Perhaps this was the reason that the latter endured him with such wonderful patience, and reproved Jane and Mollie very severely for laughing at his personal peculiarities.

If any one had been looking for Miss Jane Saunders immediately after breakfast the next morning, they would have found her in her chamber hastily scribbling a letter.

Of course we cannot make her correspondence public, so we will merely watch while she puts the letter in her pocket, dons hat and jacket, and starts for the village, walking gravely and innocently, as if that pocket were empty.

After doing one or two small errands she goes into the post office. The letter is directed to Mr. Herbert Ellis. The postmistress smiles a little as she sees the name, and Jane turns away with flushed cheeks.

Mollie was out at the gate, as pretty as the morning, ostensibly occupied in breaking dead branches off the rose bushes, with a reckless disregard for thorns.

"Why, where are your scissors and gloves?" inquired Jane.

"I don't want them," said Mollie, hastily. "I can work as well this way. Isn't there a prayer-meeting to-night?"

"Yes," replied her sister, feeling her cheeks grow hot again.

"You're going, I suppose?" questioned Mollie, very busy with the rose bushes.

"I think so, if you're not afraid to stay here alone."

"No, indeed!" was the quick answer, delivered with unnecessary earnestness. "Don't think of staying on my account."

"Very well."

The instant Jane was out of sight, Mollie, looking suspiciously at the front of the house, that looked back at her meekly with closed blinds, after peering down into the recesses of the garden on her right, called in suppressed tones to an Irish child on the street, "Mick!"

"Yis'm!"

"Going past Mr. Bent's shop?"

"Yis'm."

"Give this note to Mr. Hall—remember, to Mr. Hall. If you'll be back in ten minutes, and won't tell anybody, I'll give you the biggest piece of cake you ever had! Will you?"

"Yis'm."

Mollie listened to the patter of his bare feet with a satisfied smile, and went on trimming the rose bushes demurely.

Mick, returning in precisely seven minutes, was duly rewarded with an immense slice of cake, duly cautioned never,

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never to tell and dismissed well content. Then Mollie opened the note; for, like all communications written by females, her note required an answer.

Dearest Mollie—*I will be with you to-night at precisely half-past seven. I'm inclined to bless both my stars and the dragon.*

Tom.

At three o'clock that afternoon Miss Polly came into the drawing-room, where her nieces were sitting demurely, cutting bits of bright silk for appliqué work. She wore a lace cap, tied with yellow ribbons, and a green silk dress. Let the reader not be shocked, for Miss Polly was fond of bright colours and went to tea-parties seldom.

"Don't sit up for me," she said patronisingly, regarding herself in the glass with great complacency. "I shall take a key, and we can let ourselves in. Does my dress fit well, Jane?"

"Very well, aunt."

"What flowers shall I carry? London pride is pretty, and sweet-williams—don't you think so?"

"I think other flowers will do better. I'll go and cut you some," said Jane dutifully.

"No; sit still. I hear Mr. Wilkins on the stairs. I'll pick some myself as I go out."

You might have heard Mr. Wilkins at the other end of the town, such stiff boots had he seen fit to assume on this occasion. It was quite a wonderful thing to watch him as he stood in the little path, awkwardly holding the bouquet of pinks and coreopsis Miss Polly had given him, remarking every other minute that "the — hum — the flowers were—hum—excessively pretty," and finally offering his arm laboriously.

"Does my dress fit well, Jane?" she said, regarding herself in the glass with great complacency.

The two girls turned away from the window without comment, only there was a good deal of wonder in Jane's eyes, and a good deal of fun in Mollie's. They sewed industriously the rest of the afternoon, scarcely speaking to each other, until the clock struck five, and Jane went out to get tea ready.

"What a beautiful sunset!" said Mollie, as she rose from the table. "How long does the meeting last, Jane?"

"Until half-past eight; but I may not be home then, for I'm going to carry old Mrs. Davis some medicine. Don't sit up for me. You can leave the back door open, or I'll take the key of the front one. I shall be back before auntie," she added guiltily, seeing Mollie's surprised face.

"You'd better take the key. I think I'll go to bed early. Don't come into my room, and disturb me, Jane. I never sleep well if I am waked."

As Mollie put the last dish comfortably away in the cupboard she heard the clock strike seven, and saw Jane passing out of the gate basket in hand. She felt guilty. How good Jane was, and what a difference between them! Jane was going to do good, and attend a prayer meeting, and she was going to disobey her aunt, stay at home and see Tom. But, somehow, Mollie thought the prospect pleasant.

At half-past seven she was down by the gate. She had little time for anticipation, for somebody sprang through the gate or over it, and greeted Mollie with the freedom of an old acquaintance. It was a merry-faced young gentleman, with blue eyes and brown curls.

"My respects to the dragon," said the new-comer, bowing to the house with great deference. "My respects to Wilkins and your unfortunate sister. How am I blessed with the opportunity of seeing you?"

"Auntie and Mr. Wilkins are at a tea-party, and Jane's gone to a prayer-meeting. Hurry, Tom! Come down in the garden, or somebody will see you. I've locked up the house. You can stay till just half-past eight."

"One hour! Momentarily expecting that the dragon will fall upon me! I don't care if she does!"

"Stop calling her a dragon, Tom, and don't talk so, if you have any pity for me."

"Quite tragic! Excuse me for saying so, Mollie, but how ridiculous all this is! Here we have been engaged a year, and you frown if I bow to you in the street; you scarcely let me show my head near the house, and you won't hear of my speaking to your aunt.

"If I walk past here I discover Miss Polly glaring out of the window, or Wilkins squinting out of the front door. If I look at you twice in church I'm the object of Miss Polly's furious attention. Now, I say it's ridiculous! I'm not a Gorgon—I'm a respectable young man—at least, I always thought so. If you don't think I'm competent to arrange matters, can't you go and tell your aunt you want to get married?"

"You know I would if I dared, Tom, but aunt is dreadful. I try sometimes, but I can't; really, I can't."

"What's to prevent? Will she put an end to your existence, or shut you up and feed you on bread and water?"

"She'd disown me, Tom. She'd cut me off without a shilling, and never have my name spoken again."

"Is that all? I'll own you, and I'll give you twenty shillings for every one she won't give you, besides bestowing my name upon you. Come, that's an offer!"

I will not give the conversation in detail. Suffice it to say that it was just nine o'clock when Mr. Hall, having exhausted

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all his arguments without effect, finally became indignant and determined to depart.

He was making one final appeal to Mollie, who, still lacking in courage, sat sobbing on the seat before him, when they both heard the gate close softly, and saw dimly two figures turning towards the garden.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mollie, in terrified accents. "Tom, the pear-trees!"

Before Tom quite knew what he was about, he had followed Mollie, or had been dragged by her, under the shadow of the trees, behind a flourishing clump of lilacs.

The voices were very near them now, and a moment after another miserable couple seated themselves on the same seat which the concealed pair had left so unceremoniously.

"Poor little Mollie," said Jane mournfully, glancing back at the dark house. "She has gone to bed long ago, I daresay; I wish I was as happy as Mollie! Oh, what would she think of me if she knew?"

"Think?" replied the voice of Mr. Herbert Ellis. "I own it wouldn't be very agreeable to be discovered lurking about the house in this fashion, but if you will allow me to go to your aunt to-morrow morning, and tell her I want to marry you, she could think or say nothing unpleasant. You are sacrificing your happiness and mine to a miserable caprice. Your aunt happens to have a prejudice against marriage, and so you promise to remain single until she dies."

"Oh, don't speak so! I owe aunt Polly everything, and her death will be the greatest misfortune in the world to me."

'Well, then, consider me a little, let me come here to-morrow and speak to her plainly."

"Oh, I dare not! Oh, Herbert, what shall I do? There she comes now!"

In fact, two more figures were discernible coming through the gate, unmistakably the figures of Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins. They seemed in no hurry to go in, but stood leaning on the fence in the moonlight and talking. Presently—disastrous movement!—they were seen sauntering slowly towards the garden.

"What shall I do?" gasped Jane, in the extremity of terror.

"Come under the shade," said Mr. Ellis. "She won't see us."

"Oh, Herbert, what shall I do? There she comes now!"

In a moment they were so near their fellow-sufferers that Mr. Hall could have touched Mr. Ellis's coat-tails.

"The moon is delightful!" was the first remark of Miss Polly's that reached their ears.

"It is!" responded Mr. Wilkins. "Hum—it is. Enchanting."

"I love to walk by moonlight."

"It makes me quite—hum—sad—lonely."

"Ah!" said Miss Polly, sympathisingly.

"I—hum—feel as if I hadn't a friend in the—hum—the world."

"That's strange"—Miss Polly stooped to gather a rose—"when you have so many."

"You are—hum—mistaken. Hum—I haven't one."

"I'm sure I'm your friend, Mr. Wilkins!" said Miss Polly, speaking lower and putting the rose before her face.

Mr. Wilkins became bewildered in a desert of "hums."

"He—hum—hum—he wished she would—hum—ah—he wished he could—hum—believe it."

"I should think you might," rejoined Miss Polly, "when I say it. I suppose the thought of your past happiness is rather trying?" she continued.

"Hum—no. I—hum—could be—hum—happier than I—hum—ever was."

"Indeed!"

"I—hum—assure you. If—if—you—hum—thought so."

"Don't!" exclaimed Miss Polly. "Remember—think of Mrs. Wilkins dead and gone."

Mr. Wilkins was so abashed by this outburst that he said absolutely nothing for five minutes. Miss Polly got out of patience.

"You weren't congenial," she said. "I see. Ah, that is trying!"

Mr. Wilkins was betrayed again, and declared he—hum—never knew what—hum—congeniality was till—hum—till lately. Would she—hum—hum—let him say so?

"Don't speak to me!" exclaimed Miss Polly, sinking down on the much-enduring bench. "I am a disgrace to myself! Oh, if those girls should hear this, what would they say?"

Those girls! Such a shout of laughter behind her! It frightened Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins nearly into fits. When they recovered a little there was Tom and Mollie on one side, Jane and Mr. Ellis on the other, the last two looking very surprised.

Mollie's arms were about her aunt's neck, and she was crying.

"We'll say you're the dearest auntie in the world! Be good now."

"Be magnanimous," put in Tom. "You see, we've all found each other out."

"And are all equally culpable," rejoined Mr. Ellis.

"And, oh, auntie, say that you don't mind in the least bit, and we'll all be so very happy," put in Jane, who had suddenly recovered her tongue.

Miss Polly Whittles was a wise woman. I shouldn't have written about her if she hadn't been. And when she saw that Fate favoured her, she did not try to thwart it.

Then the six of them all trooped into the house, and although the hour was somewhat late in Miss Polly's estimation they held a hurried consultation, and half-an-hour later tender farewells might have been witnessed in different parts of the garden.

Acute Miss Polly! So it happened that three weddings took place in one day.

A. L. Andrews.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

FORTIETH CHAPTER.

Agnes Has Her Innings.

For an instant there was a sudden hush in the library.

Gilbert Chase took a step back in startled hesitation, undecided whether to wait until the voice spoke again, or to ask Lady Maitland the strange question that had been flung almost as a challenge into his mouth.

Agnes pushed open the door and came into the room. Her face was malicious and spiteful, as she looked at the tall woman who had hitherto treated her with mocking sarcasm and ridicule.

Now her turn had come, and she was glad that she had so carefully treasured the scrap of paper she had rescued from the dog that morning some months ago.

She had remembered the few words that had been written on it, and as her suspicions had grown more bitter against her father's lovely wife, she had been on the watch for any link that might bring a clue in its wake as to the real owner of the ambiguous message.

She had followed her stepmother from the hall to the library, and listened to the opening words of the conversation between her and the detective with a sullen rage, as she now realised that the man whom she had counted upon as a substitute for the more desirable Heriot North had been spirited away by the woman she hated with all the strength of which her puny soul was capable.

The moment the detective had mentioned the name "Vernon Grant" in connection with that of a released convict, the whole of the enigma was made plain to her in one flash, and she had cried out with a mad impulse to see the woman she hated humbled, and a convicted bigamist.

But Agnes Maitland was not acquainted with the strange nature of the woman who, in moments of great stress, seemed to collect all her energies and resources to the undoing of her foes.

Lady Maitland smiled slightly, and turned to the detective, who stood irresolute in the presence of such perfect command and beauty.

"Well, Mr. Chase," she began, in musical tones. "You heard the request of my step-daughter. Will you do as she advised, or defer your strange questionings until a more convenient time. I am anxious to get back to Sir Trevor."

Agnes interrupted sharply. "Ask her now; she will be sure to do something that will secure her from further questioning. I know her, and have long suspected her of—of concealing a secret!"

Gilbert Chase looked from the acidulated specimen of humanity to the stately woman whose beauty seemed to put a barrier between herself and other people, and, for the moment, he felt a twinge of pity pass through him that she should be treated as a peg for suspicions in her own house. Then he pulled himself together with a jerk, as he remembered how for many years—supposing his doubts correct—this woman had imposed upon Sir Trevor Maitland with impunity, and his heart hardened as he said curtly:

"Excuse me, miss; I must ask you not to interfere with my conversation with her ladyship. I think she understands that it is no idle question that I have put to her." Then turning once more to the calm, self-possessed woman standing with one white hand toying with the chain that fell to her waist, he said:

"Your ladyship will, I know, pardon my persistency, but I asked you a question. It was, 'Can you tell me anything about a photo,' the image of yourself, left with the landlady of a house in Ennismore Gardens, London, who informed me that it had been given her by the owner of the photo, Mrs. Margaret Grant, the wife of the felon, Vernon Grant?"

A slight smile played across the curved lips of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife, a smile of mingled sadness and mockery. She had regained the mastery of herself, after that first wild moment of almost self-betrayal. She had never calculated upon her secret being stumbled upon by the detective engaged upon the unravelling of the murder of the man in the spinny.

It had never occurred to her that once her blackmailer's lips were sealed, her guilty past would not be buried in the oblivion for which she had plotted. Digby Scarlett and Heriot North would reveal it to no one; she felt convinced of that, in spite of her enemy having betrayed her to the man who had believed in her. That had been a splash of jealous rage, not of malice aforethought.

She roused herself with a start, and when she spoke her voice was low and musical as usual.

"I was at first inclined to resent your impertinence, Mr. Chase; but on second thoughts it is ridiculous to be annoyed at what is obviously one of the tricks of your trade, just as scratching is the peculiarity of the cat! To spy and to scratch are unpleasant processes, but occasionally useful. But at the same time I am rather sorry that you have wasted so much good time on the unfortunate past that belongs to the dead!"

Gilbert Chase looked at her sharply. Her well-bred snub had a little damped his assurance while it nettled his temper.

"The dead! On which side, your ladyship?" he remarked drily. "The wife of 'Vernon Grant' is among the living, now; and—so is he!"

Lady Maitland breathed a trifle more quickly for a second, then replied slowly:

"I know nothing about the man, Mr. Chase. I refer to my sister!"

"Your sister!" exclaimed the detective and Agnes Maitland with one voice. "What do you mean?"

She raised her brows. "Surely you did not commit the absurd error of imagining that I was that woman? I hardly like raking up a sad family skeleton; but the wife of that man of whom you spoke was"—she paused slightly, as though her tongue had suddenly twisted over the words she was uttering—"was my twin sister! The scrap of paper to which my clever stepdaughter refers is quite correct. I was informed that my brother-in-law was dead!"

She rose slowly, apparently oblivious of the livid expression on Agnes Maitland's face, and the blank astonishment depicted on that of the detective.

"I have satisfied you, I hope, Mr. Chase?" she smiled. "Is there anything else you would like to know?"

Gilbert Chase put his hand in his pocket mechanically, and drew out a pocket-book which he fingered with thoughtful care. He was so taken aback by the story the cold, even voice of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife had unfolded with such an air of confidence, that he almost regretted his precipitancy in not having considered such a like solution, before exposing himself to the enmity of so haughty a woman as he knew her ladyship to be.

But when he spoke his voice revealed nothing of the thoughts within him.

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

"Your statement is absolutely convincing, your ladyship," he began slowly, "with the exception of one little detail that had just slipped my mind. Can you tell me whether—your sister had a child or not?"

She opened her lips to give the answer that quivered on them, then paused in time. How much did this creature with the inscrutable eyes know of the past, she wondered? It were better not to commit herself by an unwise admission.

"I am not sure," she said at last. "Why do you ask?"

He smiled, and looked at her with a sudden gleam in his eyes. "Because it will interest your ladyship to learn that you have a beautiful *niece* somewhere in the world, waiting to be received by her long-lost *aunt*. She would now be about eighteen, I should fancy. Mrs. Philpott tells me she was christened 'Dolores'!"

A faint shadow flickered into the eyes of Sir Trevor's wife, but she returned the gaze of the detective with calm assurance.

"That is very interesting, Mr. Chase! I only trust that one day chance may bring her to my house! Now perhaps you will excuse me. I have matters of more importance to attend to than the mere indulgence of idle gossip. For, after all," she said with a sneer on her beautiful lips, "that is what your 'important few words' has dwindled into."

With a cold inclination of her stately head, she left the room, leaving Gilbert Chase with the unpleasant impression of having been worsted in a battle of wits by a woman whom he had hoped to dumfound by his knowledge.

He gazed after her admiringly.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered. "She's got a nerve of cast iron! A regular 'flyer,' that's what she is, in spite of nearly giving herself away at first! I shall wait before I tackle her ladyship again!"

A rasping laugh startled him from his reverie. He turned sharply, to see Agnes Maitland looking at him with a mocking sneer on her hard, vicious mouth.

"So," she said, her voice trembling with rage; "you have let that woman go! You have been led from your sense of duty by a pair of violet eyes and a dimpled chin! You are as bad as those other fools, Digby Scarlett, Heriot North and Ernest Heath! They know something, and it suited them not to tell.

"I know that Scarlett and she play into each other's hands for some reason; and as for Heriot North, I heard him myself telling her that he would 'keep faith with her, and that nothing would make him betray the bond between them—not even death'; and now"—she laughed shrilly—"his words have come true, for death has sealed his lips! She is safe so far as he is concerned, for the fire at the 'Hollies' has burnt one of the men who knew something!"

Gilbert Chase bit his lips. It was true that that morning he had heard something of the fire and that several lives had been lost, and he had wished regretfully that he had made sure of his man while there was yet a chance.

The angry, abandoned words of Agnes Maitland, although he credited her with more imagination than truth, caused a sensation of uneasiness in him, making him curt and snappy.

"My dear madam, it is impossible to do more than ask questions at first. Suspicions must be proved before the liberty of anyone can be interfered with. At present I am biding my time; you don't know everything."

Again the lean, spiteful woman laughed, bringing a flush to the pale face of the detective.

"How much do you think I know? Has it ever occurred to you to come to me and find out? Had you done so, you would probably have made a name for yourself among your associates in Scotland Yard, instead of wasting your time over the finding of Ivy Strange!"

Gilbert Chase took a step towards her. "Don't imagine, miss," he said slowly, "that it is waste of time to find Ivy Strange! In spite of your unflattering opinion of my capabilities, I know what I'm about!"

The cruel, watery eyes narrowed to the shutting-out of their pale grey colour, as Agnes leant forward and with a voice oddly tense and impressive, whispered:

"Notwithstanding your cleverness, Mr. Chase, you do not seem to be aware of the fact that her ladyship was on terms of strange intimacy with the dead convict for whose murder you are hounding that meek-and-mild girl, Ivy Strange—the charity child! Ask her ladyship what she had in common with the low tramp whom she could only meet at midnight, and then——"

"Then what?" said the detective, his eyelids twitching nervously.

Agnes opened the door, looked out into the hall, and closed it again. Then turning once more to the impatient man, she said slowly: "I will tell you! Listen!"

Some twenty minutes later, Gilbert Chase left the Manor. His steps were those of a man impelled at intervals by spurts of sudden thought, and slow, irregular strides. His face was pale, and his eyes shone with some emotion his iron will only kept down.

He drew his hand across his brow. It was wet, though the air was keen.

"Gilbert, old man," he muttered. "A regard for the niceties of the English language prevents me from expressing myself with the full and eloquent oratory of which I feel possessed. But you are learning, my boy, and the worst of it is that your teacher is no chief of criminal investigation, but a soured, jealous old maid in a village! I have stumbled all along the line, it seems. I have begun to devote too much attention to Digby Scarlett after our last encounter, and let the lesser threads go by, but now"—and he drew a deep breath—"I'm beginning to see the light!"

FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

"The Power of Love."

Jack Maitland had been wandering round the streets of London, seeking vainly for his sweetheart. He meant to find her first, and convince himself that she was well and still loved him, then—and not till then—he would look for the man who had so cruelly disabled him.

A very shrewd guess was concerned with the name of Digby Scarlett, and yet had not Gilbert Chase told him that the master of the "Rest" had returned to the Manor after a fruitless search for him? But in spite of that, he could not get away from the idea that it was not the hand of a poacher on his father's estate that had shot him.

As for the charge against Ivy, he had laughed at it, secure in the conviction of his own intimate knowledge concerning her tender and gentle nature, that was far too sensitive to take the life of a human creature.

One morning, about three days after he had left the Manor, as he was turning over the pages of the *Express*, while idling at the breakfast-table at the Orient Club, he chanced to glance at the column devoted to personal correspondence, such as appointments and greetings between lovers. As his eyes wandered down the list he suddenly sat up straight and breathed quickly, this time looking keenly at the paragraph that had roused him from his moody thoughts—

"Nurse Beaumont has news for her late patient, J. M. She will be at Waterloo Station at six o'clock every evening for half an hour in the First Class General Waiting Room."

"Nurse Beaumont! Nurse Beaumont!" he muttered. "It must be the same kindly woman who nursed me. I remember now her telling me that I was to get well for Ivy's sake; she bucked me up just when I was losing interest in everything, and longed for death. Anyway, even if I am wrong, it will do no harm to go and give a look in the waiting-room at Waterloo. And somehow I feel that I shall see my old nurse!"

The hours dragged by until, at a quarter to six, he hailed a hansom and was soon on his way to Waterloo Station, a strange excitement that increased with each pulse of his being, telling him that he was to learn something that would either

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bring him to the side of the girl he loved, or place a barrier between them for all time.

He went to the first-class general waiting-room at once, but it was empty with the exception of a few men reading newspapers. He sat down and watched the door with eager eyes.

At a quarter past six he rose with a sense of disappointment and a tired look in his face. He had wasted a day for nothing, and was twenty-four hours further from his heart's desire.

As he strolled towards the door, a woman hurriedly entered, and looked back quickly at the man who had passed her with his eyes moodily cast on the ground. She caught her breath and hurried after him, her face quivering with suppressed emotion.

"Mr. Jack!" she cried, touching him on the elbow. "At last, sir, at last, sir! Thank God!"

He wheeled round quickly, his eyes alight with relief and surprise. He caught her hand in his with a nervous grip.

"I was afraid you would not come, or that I had made a mistake!" he said huskily. "Another moment and we would have missed! Tell me," he went on rapidly, eyeing her with burning eyes, "is—is she in London? Have you bad news for me? Your advertisement said you had. It cannot be that she is—married after all?"

Nurse Beaumont shook her head, a faint smile curving her kindly mouth at the impatience of her late charge.

"No, sir," she said quickly, "she is not married, and she is in London. The news I have for you is not bad, but——"

"But what?" he cried tearfully. "Oh, nurse, be quick, and put me out of my torture at once, or I shall go mad!"

"You heard, I suppose, sir, that Miss—our young lady," she said hastily, leaving out the name of the girl, "is hiding away from those that want to say she committed a cruel murder?"

He nodded impatiently. "Of course I have! All that rot was told me at once, but I never gave it a thought, except to laugh at the idea of her being anything but the best and dearest girl in the world, in spite of their telling me that the wretched tramp was her father!"

A gleam of excitement shone in Nurse Beaumont's eyes.

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir," she answered, "for now I can take you to her with a clean conscience, seeing that you believe none of these things that are being spread against my poor, sweet young lady."

Jack laughed for sheer joy. "Hurry up, nurse! What is it to be—a hansom, a motor-car, or an air-ship? Anything that will take me to her the soonest!"

"Then a train will be the best and safest, sir," said Nurse Beaumont, utterly innocent of any irony in her words, and wondering at the sudden laugh that came from the lips of the boy who had lain so near death only a few short weeks ago.

Jack took the tickets to Surbiton, and as they drew nearer their destination the smile left his lips, and his eyes became anxious, while a red spot of excitement flamed on either cheek. They took a cab at the station, and presently were outside the house where for so long his sweetheart had hidden from the law that demanded her liberty.

A cold sweat broke out on the boy's face, and he clutched the arm of the woman who had brought him to the girl he loved.

"Tell me—what is she doing in this house? She had no money, and this is the residence of a man with plenty."

She looked at him strangely. "Yes, it is, sir. You will know all—from her."

They entered the house and went into the drawing-room. Then, looking at him hesitatingly for a moment, she said:

"One word, sir, before you see her. You will be surprised at what you will be told, but don't in turn frighten her by what you may know is taking place in Melton. I will go now and send Miss Dolores to you!"

"For goodness sake, send no one else to me!" he said impatiently. "I want to see no 'Miss Dolores,' only my Ivy!"

The door closed, and after what seemed an interminable time, it reopened softly, to admit a slim figure in some clinging black material, that intensified the red gold of her hair, and the white-rose pallor of her skin.

"Ivy, my darling!" he said hoarsely, reaching out his hands to the girl, who for one instant stood swaying in the doorway like a flower under the breeze. Then with a glad choking cry of mingled joy and pain, she was in his arms, weeping the tears that only joy can bring forth—tears that have their source in the heart.

"This must be a dream," she murmured, after a while. "How did you, whom I imagined had gone out of my life for ever, come here, darling?"

He laughed tenderly, then kissed the wistful face raised to his.

"Our good fairy, nurse Beaumont brought me, sweetheart. I have been wandering through the streets of London looking for you ever since I knew everything that had happened. Oh, my little love!" he exclaimed passionately. "How you must have suffered all this time, but that is over now! You will only know happiness in future!"

"Yes," she said slowly, "I have suffered, but I have also found much happiness in a way that seems almost like a miracle; so wonderful it has been!"

Then quickly, and gliding over the cruel conduct of Lady Maitland that had been instrumental in fastening suspicion on her, and making her run away, she told him of all that had happened, stopping short at the most important stage of her story, to say suddenly, and with heartfelt earnestness:

"Jack, that poor murdered tramp was not my father! You never let them convince you of that, did you? At first I thought it true, and it nearly broke my heart!"

His arm tightened round her. "No, sweetheart mine! I could not believe such a lie! Why trouble about it?"

"Why?" and her voice rang proudly and firmly, as she cried, "because I have found my father, my own dear, good father, whose life was shadowed in his youth by a great wrong done him by the man who has so nearly wrecked *our* lives—Digby Scarlett! See, Jack!" she half sobbed, as the door opened and a tall, white-haired man, with an infinite weariness in his face, but a great peace in his eyes, came into the room. "This is my father, Vernon Vivyan, the author, and the noblest man on earth!"

The hands of the two men met in one silent grip, the eyes of both suddenly becoming misty.

"I must correct what my little new-found girl has said," Vernon Vivyan spoke at length. "I have another name; it is"—and a dark flush rose to his pale cheeks—"that of Vernon Grant, an ex-convict, and the man whose perjury sent me to fifteen years' penal servitude was our common enemy—Digby Scarlett! Had it not been for the good offices of Nurse Beaumont, my child and I might have passed out of each other's lives ignorant of the joy so near at hand."

He stopped and looked at the boy who was so loved by his little treasure, and he smiled—one of those very rare smiles that came to his lips but seldom.

"I have found her, my Dolores, not to lose her, but to lend her to you! I am glad you will make her happy. I have a mission to perform before I rest, after that—when I have faced my enemy, and done one other thing—I shall know that my duty is finished! But now you young people have a lot to say to each other. We shall meet again!"

When he had left the room, Ivy, in a few artless sentences, told Jack all that she knew

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

through Nurse Beaumont about her birth, adding shyly:

"It was the mark under the hair on my temple that helped her to trace me, darling—the mark that has been one of shame before, but now to me is worth more than a martyr's halo!" She stopped, then said after a pause:

"One strange delusion my darling father has, is that he sees in Lady Maitland's photograph the likeness of his dead wife, my mother! Nurse Beaumont has said nothing about her to me—or to him—but I cannot get the idea out of his head! I should not like to think that she was my mother! Besides, it is impossible that she should have married again."

Jack was silent. He was thinking deeply and swiftly. The girl's words had set a train of thought in motion in his mind, startling in its weird possibilities.

He took her in his arms and kissed eyes, hair, and mouth, then, with reverent fingers raised the loose curls on her brow and pressed his lips to the brand of the broad arrow.

Suddenly, above the throbbing of their young hearts, there sounded loud voices in the hall, the voices of men raised in fear and questioning.

Instinctively Ivy tightened her hand on her lover's arm, as the door was flung wide open, and Vernon Vivyan rushed into the room, followed quickly by the man who had almost discovered her identity on the night he had dined with the master of the "Retreat." It was Ernest Heath!

FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Ernest Heath Intervenes.

With a great fear tugging at her heart Ivy stretched out her hands to the man who was her father.

"Tell me," she gasped, with whitening lips. "What has happened? What has happened? Why do you and Mr. Heath rush into the room like this?"

Standing between her lover on one side and her father on the other she turned to the man who faced them with panting breath and excited eyes.

"I have upset Mr. Vivyan rather badly, I fear," he began; "but I came here from Melton and have come to warn you, Miss Lodge, that your hiding is in danger of being discovered by the detective who is hunting for Ivy Strange; and I know I am right in believing you to be that lady."

Before she could reply, Vernon Vivyan flung his arm before her to protect her from physical harm, and cried passionately:

"I cannot let her go! I know what it is when once the law holds you in her grip. She crushes the life, the heart, the very soul out of you, leaving but a wreck of what you once were."

"I don't understand," Ernest Heath said, looking at Ivy with a puzzled frown. "I did not intend to pain you, and meant to render you a serivce if I could by warning you. I left Melton yesterday, and feared to come straight on here because I might have been watched. So I waited, and by driving in a four-wheeler from town I managed to get here without attracting any attention."

"Where did you say you had come from?" said Jack, speaking for the first time. "I am the son of Sir Trevor Maitland, so take an interest in anyone coming from my native county."

"The son of—of Lady Maitland?" queried Ernest Heath, in a curious tone, looking at the frank, manly face of the boy before him, whose air of proprietorship towards Ivy told its own story.

Jack shook his head. "No, she is my step-mother—far too young to be my own."

"And Miss Strange?" said Ernest Heath slowly. "Her parentage is, I hear, still under a cloud? Don't you think that as she professes to be innocent of this murder, she would do more good by facing the music? I know it is the most natural thing in the world," he went on, "to want to shield her from the publicity of an arrest, but surely it is the cruellest in the end, for it keeps her far more before the public eye while she is still being searched for."

Vernon Vivyan turned sharply to him—his face was grey and his eyes were haggard.

"Firstly, Heath, let me tell you what you did not know the last time you were here. I have only lately discovered that Miss Lodge was the runaway Ivy Strange, the foundling from Melton, and my long-lost daughter, whom I had never seen—Dolores Grant! Through the villainy of a man called Digby Scarlett I was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude for forgery. My wife"—and he paused suddenly—"was Margaret Heath."

Ernest Heath started violently. "Then—then——" he exclaimed, "she must have thought you dead. She must have, for I have seen—oh, my God! This is awful!" he murmured. Then he looked at Ivy—a long, searching glance, full of tenderness, thought, and pain.

"Child, leave us," he said; "your father and I have much to discuss. But before you go, I would like to touch your brow first; you are very like someone who was once dear to me."

He bent his head and pressed his lips to the girl's burnished hair, and Jack Maitland, watching, knew that there was a tragedy underlying that kiss on his unconscious sweetheart's head.

He drew her softly out of the room, and the two men were alone.

Ernest Heath looked at the silent figure of the man whose work had attracted him to the extent of wishing to know more about him—the man whose personality had seemed to spell despair and everlasting sorrow.

Then, as he looked, another face rose up before him—a woman's, beautiful and haughty, with a coldly-gracious manner, that had changed to a wildly-beseeching one, when they had stood alone for those brief moments before he had left Maitland Manor.

"It cannot be," he muttered, "and yet it is, I know, in spite of the hair, and severity of style—it is the woman!"

Just then Vernon Vivyan turned. "I want you, if you will, to stay here with—her, while I go and find my enemy and kill him. The end is coming. This time I will be the victor."

With a sudden grip, Ernest Heath caught his arm. "Are you mad, Grant? Do you want to break that child's heart, as it would—to lose you in that way! Killing your enemy would not publish your innocence of that forgery charge, and only serve to put a rope round your neck. Besides——"

He stopped abruptly. A strange, burning gleam had come into the haggard eyes of the man who had married his little cousin in the years that had gone.

"How is my innocence ever to be proved?" Vernon said, slowly, "except by forcing the black-hearted villain to disgorge his infamy?"

"I know a better way than bullet persuasion," replied the other, with emphasis; "and you will know what it is soon. Your duty now is to take care of—*her*, the girl we both claim, with young Maitland, the link with the past. Promise me you won't seek out Digby Scarlett?"

Vernon Grant hesitated, then answered: "I promise not to seek out Digby Scarlett."

And it was not till afterwards that Ernest Heath remembered the manner in which the promise had been kept.

With a hasty farewell to his host he left the room, and sought Jack and Ivy, who were in an adjoining one.

"I want you two young people to stay with Mr. Grant," he said, quickly. "Don't leave him alone. I am going away on important business."

Jack went up to him, and, drawing him aside, said in a low tone: "Sir, tell me—you won't visit the—the—Manor? My father is lying in a dying condition, and any scene——" He stopped, and glanced meaningly at Ivy—he could not think of her by any other name—and following his gaze, Ernest Heath answered gravely:

"I shall not visit the Manor. *He* knows nothing."

When they were alone, Jack said quickly:

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"Darling, I am going now. But I want you to meet me, with Nurse Beaumont, to-morrow at Kingston Parish Church. Then I shall have a special license ready, and we shall get married quickly, and return to your father. He would be pleased, and you, dear one, will be happy with me to protect you."

She flushed warmly. "But my name, Jack; it is so notorious now, that no clergyman would marry me while the police wanted me."

He drew her to him tenderly. "No, sweet, your name is now Dolores Grant; no one knows that. Then, as Mr. and Mrs. John Maitland, we will return together to face that charge, strong in each other's love. I will take no refusal, and I know that your dear heart has none to give me."

"But—but, my father," she murmured, protesting while she yielded; "he ought to be told, Jack. He may feel hurt at our want of confidence."

"Sweetheart," he said gravely. "It will be a joy to Mr. Grant to see you safely my wife, before the police can step in between us! You know how he longs for your happiness."

And his kisses stopped the questions that fluttered to her lips.

In the meantime Ernest Heath was waiting at St. Pancras for a train to start for the north. As he settled himself in the corner of a first-class compartment, he murmured:

"It is a bold move, but for his sake I'll play it for all it is worth. I don't think time has robbed me of my peculiar gift; it has been an amusement hitherto, but this time it will bring tardy justice to avenge a great wrong."

The following morning a quiet little wedding took place in Kingston Parish Church, between two hearts that beat as one; attended only by an elderly woman, whose eyes sparkled with almost as much joy as those of the bride and bridegroom. Then together they returned to the "Retreat," and as they entered the house so dear to them, Jack whispered to his girl-wife:

"Now to make him rejoice with us in our joy—to say that he has not lost his daughter, only gained a son."

They ran to the room where he always sat among his books, and with a happy laugh Ivy flung open the door:

"Father—darling, father!"

Then the laugh died on her lips, and she turned a blank look upon her new-made husband.

Vernon Grant had gone; but a photograph lay on the open desk, and as their eyes fell upon it, a wave of terror sent the blood from their faces, and they understood.

The face that looked up at them from the cardboard was that of Lady Maitland!

FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man and the Boy.

Gilbert Chase examined his note-book carefully. He had erased and corrected the notes until they bore very little resemblance to those he had first made when the young son and heir of the dying Sir Trevor had enlisted his services on behalf of the girl he loved, the girl on whose account Gilbert Chase was now waiting for a telegram from his junior.

He had wired him to hunt up the address of the author Mr. Vivyan, and at first this had seemed more difficult than he had anticipated, for the publishers of Vernon Vivyan had refused to give up the address of their contributor, but had offered to forward any communication.

At first this had delayed them not a little, but Scotland Yard has a way of getting over difficulties, and Gilbert Chase had wired his instructions for the arrest to be made of the missing girl, Ivy Strange, who was, under a disguise, probably in the house of the author as secretary.

And it was the answer to that telegram for which he was now waiting so impatiently. It was to have been sent immediately after the arrest of the girl, and that ought to have been accomplished some two hours ago. He could not understand the delay; it chafed him, for he felt he ought to have gone

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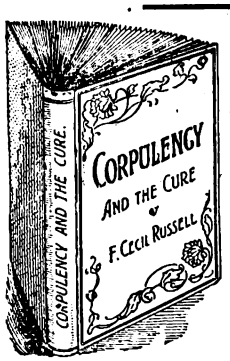

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himself; but he had a strange disinclination to leave Melton until he had accomplished what he had in hand.

He had visited the scene of the murder of Mike Holland once more after hearing the fresh evidence Agnes Maitland had divulged in her jealous spite, and had argued that it was no positive proof to find the stump of a cigar, after all.

As he walked to and fro in his room at the "New Age," a knock at the door disturbed him. Going hurriedly to it, he opened it, and a youth stood outside with an orange-coloured envelope in his hand.

Gilbert Chase took it from him with a pleased smile, and shut the door. Now he was sure of the girl he wanted!—the girl whose evidence would put a noose round someone's neck, if not her own; and somehow he did not think it would be her own!

He opened it hurriedly; then a muffled anathema rose to his lips as he read the few words that dashed the cup of success from his grasp. They were:

"*Went Retreat as ordered, girl gone, also the master; no one in possession but a stupid old woman, who knows nothing; send instructions.*"

With a bitter sensation that Fate was on the side of the wrongdoers, he folded the flimsy bit of paper and placed it in his pocket, then went slowly down the stairs of the inn, out into the street. It was nearly dusk, and he was too preoccupied to notice a tall man coming towards him.

"Excuse me," said the stranger in a melodious voice, "am I on the right road to Maitland Manor?"

"Yes," he answered curtly; "keep straight on for about a mile and a half, and you will reach it, lying back near the wood."

The stranger passed on with a courteous acknowledgment, and as he disappeared Gilbert Chase wondered where he had heard a voice like that before! It haunted him, like the face of Lady Maitland had, until chance brought back the occasion to him of a brief meeting in the years that belonged to the past.

"It can't be a relation," he said, half-aloud, "going to see poor Sir Trevor on his deathbed; and it can't be that Mr. Heriot North who was nearly burnt to death the other night! He won't be about for some time at least! I wonder who it is? He's a stranger in these parts, that's clear."

And later on Gilbert Chase knew that the stranger was a man he would have given much to meet again, a man who would have proved a strong lever in the charge he was bringing round a proud, beautiful woman.

* * * * *

"Let me go, mummie. I want to do something that will help, something that will make you think me useful; now poor father is too ill to look after you, I want to take his place," and the wistful, childish face of Woolf Maitland gazed up into that of his mother.

She hesitated. It was agony to refuse him anything, and, on the other hand, she hated to have him out of her sight, the one pure love that had remained hers. As danger had threatened her more closely, her heart had centred its whole strength upon the son for whom she had willingly done so much and dared so bravely!

She smiled wearily, and said gently: "You have been to the 'Hollies' before, Woolf; there is no great service in inquiring for poor Mr. North; but if your heart is set upon it, then I will let you go; only come back soon, my darling, and be careful. I hate to let you go from me into those lonely roads at night!"

She bent her head and kissed with passionate tenderness the face of the child who was the essence of her life.

Boylike, he was restive under her caresses, and with a merry laugh ran lightly down the drive, the woman watching his lithe little figure until it disappeared. Then, with a soft expression in her eyes, she turned back into the Manor to watch the ebbing away of the life of her son's father.

The shadows grew darker along the country lane, and a slim, childish figure wrapt in its thoughts of self-importance did not hear the "toot-toot!" of a motor fiend, scorching along the road like an infuriated demon, with snorting engine and glaring red lights.

"Toot-toot!" and above the shriek of the motor a man's voice rang, sharp and imperative.

"Child! child! Out of the way! Quick!"

The boy turned, startled and wondering, but he did not move, fear seemed to have chained his feet to the ground. Then with a sudden dash, the man sprang forward into the middle of the road and flung his arms round the boy.

"Toot-toot!" came the motor, deafening them by its proximity; and then, before he could get the child out of the way, there was a thud and a shriek, a sickening sensation of life beneath the motor, and the next moment the great demon of the King's highway sped into the mist, leaving in its wake the two crushed shapes that lay across the lane, blurred and still, with an awful silence!

FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Tightening of the Coil.

"Remember, I want none of your fairy tales. If you try to bluff me with lies, it will be the worse for you!" and Gilbert Chase planted his back firmly against the side door of the Manor that led to the servants' entrance.

Mary Mason was his companion, and her black, beady eyes flashed vindictively upon the cool, imperturbable countenance of the detective.

"There's nothing I can tell you," she said sullenly. "I'm only one of the servants at the Manor, and know no more than the rest of them! And I can't stay long anyway, because Master Woolf has been brought in unconscious, with a strange gentleman who tried to save him from being run over by a motor-car. They are very bad, and I'm wanted to help."

"Oh, yes; you *can* stay, Polly," the detective retorted, noting the start that his use of the name had occasioned. "You won't be wanted for a few seconds; and it will be better for you to speak the truth briefly now, than to go into a police-court and have few details about your interesting career dragged out!

"How would you face your respectable fellow-servants at the Manor if they knew that you had only recently come out of prison, and belonged to a family of gaol-birds, of which the most notorious was your charming brother, the dead Mike Holland!"

The woman who had passed as "Mary Mason" for all those months drew back with a pale, frightened face and cowed eyes.

"How did you find out—that?" she gasped. "Who split on me?"

"I had the pleasure of meeting 'Mrs. Mike Holland,' your dainty little sister-in-law," he remarked blandly, "and she was very communicative—up to a certain point, but she gave me the address of her 'town residence' in Whitechapel!" He suddenly ceased his bantering tone, and said sharply: "Now, Polly Holland, you have thrown out a great many hints lately; I expect you to cease to *suggest* and do a little plain speaking, by way of a change."

The woman bit her lip. "What do you want me to tell you?" she said, after a brief pause.

"I expect you to tell me what this secret was between the dead convict and your mistress, Lady Maitland!" he said, in a business-like tone. "I believe you once served as the bearer of a message between them?"

"I know nothing about the secret," she replied quickly. "I only know as one night, when the family was at dinner, I was putting something away in 'er ladyship's dressing-room, when I 'eard a noise like a moan and a scratching sound coming from the wardrobe. I went up to it but it was locked, and after a bit I got the key of another wardrobe and opened the door, when Mike tumbled out 'arf dead!

"I was took by surprise. But 'e told me that 'e had 'er ladyship in 'is power. 'E wouldn't tell me any more; 'e

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was always close, was Mike, but 'e said as 'ow there was a chance of makin' a mint of money! I took 'er a note from 'im once but she got round me so clever like that I can't say as she got it. She's one with a nerve!"

"What prison was your brother in?" said the detective thoughtfully.

"Dartmouth—'e 'ad a 'twelve year stretch' for robbery and coppin' a peeler on the nut!"

"Dartmouth!" murmured Gilbert Chase. "I see now—another man was working on the bogs at about the same time; that man was—was—phew! What a narrow little circle our lives run in!"

He looked at his informer. She was watching him from under her long lashes in a suspicious manner. But much as he distrusted her veracity, he knew he could rely upon it this time. Fear for her own skin had made her divulge another's secret.

"Remember," he said curtly; "you may be called upon to give evidence, so be careful what you say now. Did you ever find anything suspicious?"

She shook her head regretfully. "No; I listened and spied a lot on 'er, but only found a silver tassel off one of 'er dresses near the—the old oak in the spinny!"

"The old oak!" he said sharply. "What, since the—murder?"

"No, before—long before that, sir."

He caught her wrist suddenly. "Do you know, Mary, or Polly, who the murderer of your brother was?"

A grey pallor spread over the woman's sallow face.

"No," said she hoarsely, her eyes glittering with apprehension. "I don't! I don't!"

"I am going round to the front entrance presently," he said. "I shall ask to see her ladyship. I may require you again."

It was the morning after the disappointing telegram had reached him, saying that his prey had escaped again. He had gone on to the Manor and asked to see Lady Maitland, but had been met with the news that Sir Trevor was rapidly sinking, and that her ladyship could not leave his bedside.

For some unaccountable reason he had refrained from pressing his inquiry at such a time, and he had turned back, and cut across the wood into the village that way.

One of the witnesses in the case he was unravelling was on a sick-bed, too, nearly burnt to a cinder, but he would eventually buttonhole him; while there was the master of the "Rest," whose movements were certainly worth watching.

As he passed the front windows of the Manor he looked up at them, and then he saw that every blind was drawn.

He stood for a moment, awed by the knowledge that Death had taken the squire of Melton, and for a few seconds he remained silent, hat in hand, an expression of regretful deference on his face.

"Poor old Squire!" he murmured. "I'm almost certain he heard something that opened his eyes, and the shock was too much for him at his age. Out of respect for his memory I will leave her to at least regret some of her doings! She has only begun to realise that a rope dangles perilously near her lovely neck! And Mr. Jack is now the master!"

He moved away slowly. As he was crossing the road to enter the "New Age," a voice hailed him.

It was Digby Scarlett, and he greeted the detective with derisive hilarity.

(To be concluded shortly.)

Jones: "You say she is proud?" Bones: "Proud, why that woman wouldn't read a serial story because she'd have to buy it on the instalment plan."

Little Dot: "I don't see how cows can eat grass." Little Dick: "I s'pose when they is young, the mother cow keeps saying to her children: 'If you don't eat grass you shan't have any cake.'"

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Good Name for It.

She: "Why do they call a battleship 'she'?" He: "Because there are so many arms about her."

Peaceful Separation.

The Maid: "I trust that theirs was a peaceful separation?" The Man: "Very! He put the Pacific between them."

Didn't Want a Piano Solo.

Geraldine: "Life will be one grand sweet song after we are married." Gerald: "I don't care as long as it isn't a piano solo."

A Hard Face.

"Jack wanted my photo to put over his heart to keep the bullets from penetrating." "He must think you have a pretty hard face if it can stop bullets."

Accounted for by Ignorance.

Mr. Spelter: "Oh, you may talk as you please, Jane; but you were an ignorant woman when you married me." Mrs. Spelter: "Yes; that probably accounts for it."

No Cause for Excitement.

"Isabel, your new hat is absurd; it looks just like a huge flower-bed." "Well, you needn't get so excited, Edgar; you don't have to get up before daylight and pull weeds out of it."

A Physical Impossibility.

"Horace," she said chidingly, "why don't you tell me you love me?" Seizing a scrap of paper, the young man wrote on it: "How can I, darling, unless you remove your arm from round my neck?"

Still in the Family.

Jack: "My grandfather had a fine collection of silver which he bequeathed to my father on the condition that it should always remain in the family." Ethel: "Then you have it still?" Jack: "Well—er my uncle has it."

Where She Scored.

Mr. Whingleby: "Oh, you needn't feel so uppish. You're not the only girl in Peckham." Miss Flashleigh: "No, I'm not the only girl in Peckham who has publicly announced that she wouldn't have you if you were the last man on earth."

Unable to Agree.

"No, we couldn't agree," sighed the man. "I said I wasn't worthy of her, and she said I was. For the sake of harmony I yielded my opinion and said I was worthy of her, and she, not to be outdone in generosity, I suppose, yielded her opinion and said I wasn't."

Subtle Flatterer!

"Henry," she said disconsolately, "you didn't give me a birthday gift." "By Jove, that's so," said Henry, "but, you see, you always look so young that I can't realise you ever had birthdays." Then she was happy, and he smiled the mean, subtle smile of a man who has saved money.

He Claimed a Privilege.

"No, George," said the sweet girl, "I can only be a sister to you." "Well, then," he savagely replied, as he heard a subdued chuckle, "as your brother, I shall claim the privilege of lying under the sofa while you make fools of the other fellows."

Unkind Reflections.

"How long have you been married, Mrs. Ashleigh?" "Eleven years. You wouldn't believe it, would you?'t "Not after seeing your husband." "He is young. The fac' is that we ran away from school together and were wedded." "Oh! Then he must have been one of those boys we read about who are always falling in love with their teachers."

Willie Knew Something.

"Willie!" she cried from the window, "you two boys get out of that hammock. You know you will break it down!" "Two little fellows like me and Tommy break it down?" inquired the boy. "Yes, you will." "An' last night, when that Mr. Smithkins called on you, an' you got tired sitting on the couch, and——" "Never mind, Willie," she interupted hastily. "Perhaps it's all right, after all."

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"Nellie," spoke the youth, with an air of confidence, "only say the word and you and I will sail together on the rough sea of life, bravely buffeting its waves, trimming our sails to meet the adverse winds that——" "Go, Geoffrey, go," interrupted the maiden. "The man who takes me on that journey must offer me a first-class passage on a steamer," Whereupon Geoffrey sailed out of her presence with a decided list to port.

Experience Teaches Wisdom.

He had just reached the peroration of his tribute to the modern athletic girl when the little fellow in the corner interrupted him. "Pardon me," said the little fellow, "but may I ask if you married one of these modern girls?" "Why, no, I——" "I thought not," interrupted the little fellow, as he resumed his seat, and those sitting near him were quick to note that he carried one arm in a sling and had a large bump on the top of his head.

The Elopement Was Cancelled.

He had adjusted the rope ladder and stood waiting in breathless silence. Suddenly her face appeared at the window. "Darling," she murmured, "you will have to go without me." "What!" he cried hoarsely. "Do you falter at the last moment? Speak, Miriam. What is it that keeps you back?" The young girl buried her face in her hands. "I am sorry, John," she moaned. "But father has just left a note in my room saying that I may have that new hat, after all." John knew it was all over then, and took away his rope ladder to look for another mash.

She Was Pleased.

The young man had only recently taken up photography and was an ardent enthusiast. He persuaded the girl to whom he was engaged to pose for him. She was seated in a hammock, and he stood directly before her when he took the picture. In a day or two he proudly exhibited the result of the sitting. She gave one glance at it and then handed it back. "Don't you like it?" he inquired. "I don't presume to criticise," was the reply. "I thought it was pretty good for a first attempt," he insisted. "Perhaps it is. I am glad you are satisfied with it." "Of course it might be better." "Do you think it looks like me?" "Yes." "Then, Herbert, I am content." "But you don't seem very cheerful over it." "Perhaps I don't show it; but that photograph has made me very happy." "I'll have a frame made for it and give it you." "No, I don't want to keep it. But it fills me with joy, nevertheless. They say that when beauty fades, affection vanishes; but when I realise that you can see me depicted with hands and feet like those, without breaking our engagement, I am convinced that there can't be any doubt about your loving me when I am old."

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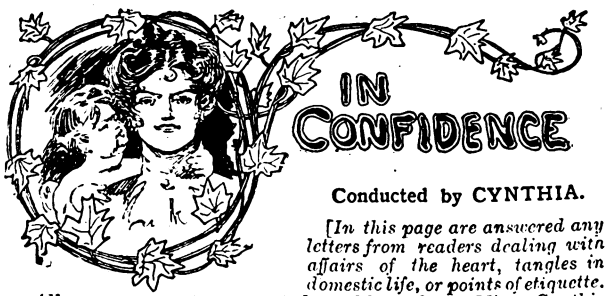

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Taking the Visitors Compliments.

"A GENTLEMAN friend has been staying a day or so with us," writes "QUEENIE." "We did not very much care for him, but on his departure he said he had made a most enjoyable stay. How should I answer this compliment?"

* * * * *

I am afraid there is only one stock answer in such a case, and that is "I hope we shall see you again, Mr. Blank." However you may have disliked the gentleman, you should try and give the impression that his visit has been pleasant to you, though there is no need for you to ask him again.

❦❦❦

The Absent Kiss.

"DOES my young man think anything of me?" asks "E. N." "I have kept company with him for three months and he has never yet offered me a kiss. Should I wait a little longer, or shall I break off the engagement?"

* * * * *

I suppose the absence of the kiss is not the only sign of his feelings towards you. Perhaps he is too modest to embrace you, but wants to know you a little better. You must judge by his general actions, the way in which he speaks to you, whether he seems glad to meet you and sorry to part, and a host of other things. But, I must say, when there is any real love on a young man's part, he does not usually lose many opportunities for signifying it in the usual way—that is, by a kiss.

❦❦❦

An Indiscretion.

"SEASIDE LASSIE" suffers from a lack of friends, especially of the opposite sex. The other day, a young student at a local college spoke to her, and having taken a great fancy to his appearance, she answered him, and allowed him to walk with her. Since then, they have met in the evenings, without her parents' knowledge. They would be very angry if the affair leaked out, as they occupy a very good social position, and could not afford to be talked about in the town. Should "SEASIDE LASSIE" drop the young man, and if so how?

* * * * *

I sympathise with "SEASIDE LASSIE," as no doubt the temptations to receive attentions from a nice young man are very great. I think, however, she had better postpone the affair until she and he can meet on a more satisfactory footing. It is not quite right for a girl in a good social position to have secret meetings with strangers which might be noticed by other people. The young man should find some means to get properly introduced to her, and until he is able to do so "SEASIDE LASSIE" should ask him to allow the affair to drop. And in future, "SEASIDE LASSIE," do not speak to strange young men, no matter how attractive. That is not what a well brought up girl should do.

Absent Parents.

"MY parents are going away for a holiday," writes "MISS W. E." "I shall be alone in the house with my two brothers. Would it be wrong of me to ask a young man occasionally to tea or supper?"

* * * * *

If your brothers are at home, certainly you could do so. After all, you are hostess in the absence of your parents, and could ask whom you liked. Most girls, I am afraid, would not have any doubt about doing so.

❦❦❦

The Art of Recognition.

"SHOULD a lady always make the first bow to a gentleman friend in the street?" asks "HETTIE." "If so, how should she act if she met him several times afterwards on the same walk?"

* * * * *

It is the lady's privilege to make the first acknowledgment of a man. The second time of meeting, it is usual to just smile recognition; but if more meetings result, one is quite justified in turning the head in an opposite direction. The situation is usually saved, in such cases, by the parties speaking to each other.

❦❦❦

Confiding In Brothers.

"SHOULD a girl tell her brother her love affairs?" asks "ALICE." "I have lately been receiving attentions from a young man, unknown to my brother, though my mother knew all about it. When he found out, he was most angry, saying that I ought not to 'carry on' with fellows he did not know."

* * * * *

If your mother approves of your conduct, I suppose that is licence enough. If your brother, however, is a good friend of yours, you would not be doing any harm by confiding your love affairs to him. It might be a wise safeguard, as a man would be very careful not to get entangled with you if he knew you were being sternly watched over by a male relation. Further, a brother might help you in many ways in testing the suitor's position and suitability for your hand. Cold, calculating men often observe things about others which escape the eyes of young ladies in love

❦❦❦

A Vanishing Vision.

"DISCONSOLATE LOVER" is in a fix. He met a girl several years ago, and only saw her once. He did not trouble to inquire her address, or even her surname. Since that, he has been recalling her sweet face and quiet manner, and has experienced a longing to see her again. In fact, he has discovered that she is the one girl in the world he could ever love. The trouble is that, now that he wishes to resume her acquaintance, he does not know how to trace her. Beyond her Christian name and her district, he knows nothing of her whereabouts. She is a factory operative.

* * * * *

As you say, to advertise in a newspaper might not be the best means of reaching her, as factory girls would not be likely to read the papers. However, one cannot be sure on that point, so you might at any rate try once in one of the dailies. If it did not reach the girl herself, possibly one of her friends might see it. Supposing that to fail, I suggest that you haunt the neighbourhood in which she works at the times for closing the factories, and carefully watch for the girl. It might be a wearisome task tracing her, but what is that when the prize is the "one girl in the world"?

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 765.] Week ending August 29th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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(An Incident from the Thrilling Story, "Gwendolen's Burglars." See inside.)

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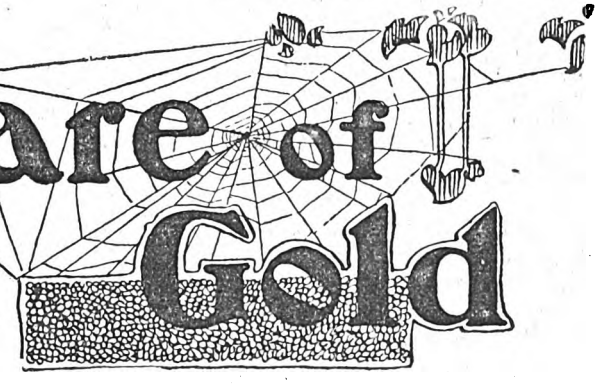

A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in graye clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees, what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con. (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and while wandering aimlessly along the streets, manages to stop a pair of runaway horses attached to a brougham.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

Here Geldart meets with Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter, who has offices in the same building.

Recovering from his accident, Ronald is able to come to the assistance of another girl, Phyllis Daventry, who has been attacked by two pickpockets. His efforts to find a situation have, so far, been in vain, and he is contemplating the necessity of leaving Mrs. Skimper's boarding-house where he had taken up his residence.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Eric Makes his Maiden Speech.

Eric Geldart had attained his heart's desire; at least one of its desires, the magic letters M.P. were tacked on to his name. He had taken his seat, and had already proved himself a fighting force and an invaluable adjunct to the band of political guerillas under whose flag he had enlisted, the Progressive Conservatives.

As has been pointed out, it was the policy of that company of Parliamentary irregulars to squeeze the utmost possible out of either party by throwing its weight into either scale when the scales were almost equal and ounces turned the balance, principles which suited Eric Geldart admirably, seeing that he was perfectly willing to throw his weight and influence into either scale, to desert or join any standard, even that of his new made captain, provided there was tangible advantage to be reaped.

To the vain man no walk in life is more alluring or offers more attraction than that of a Member of Parliament, unless perhaps we except that of a successful actor; both perform in the public view, both have their Press notices, and both adapt the part they play to the requirements of the public.

Eric, a young man of means, and not only unmarried but unattached, was as great a social as a political success, and indeed for a similar reason; there was a chance of attaching him.

Lord Lynton lost no opportunity of impressing on his daughter the brilliant future awaiting his political *protégé*, also the necessity of her making a wealthy marriage, and was more than disappointed to observe the indifference of Madeleine towards him. Eric himself made no secret of his infatuation and lost no opportunity of declaring it.

The session was at its meridian and political feeling was peculiarly tense. The Ministerial party were suffering from decrepitude, having survived for several years its re-election after the allotted Ministerial span, and His Majesty's Opposition, after a lengthened period of enervation, had at length girded its loins to a strenuous struggle.

In few phases of life is chance a more potent element than in politics, the glorious uncertainty of cricket is annihilated by the possibilities of a system which enables the destinies of an Empire to be swayed this way or that according as the members of a party are rallied to a swift and cunning whip or have dallied at an Ascot meeting.

The political sky, an arch of speckless turquoise in the morning, may at noon emit from its blue a bolt that will shake the earth, and ere sunset be obscured with cloud.

Party feeling was running high. The answer in hot haste of a minister had been seized upon by an Opposition watchful and alert as terriers at a rat hole, and the Ministry stood on its trial, face to face with not only exultant foes but whilom friends. Eric Geldart, dropping in at Lorraine House, found Lord Lynton in a state of unwonted excitement.

"Geldart!" he exclaimed as Eric entered the morning-room, "they've done it this time, isn't it a judgment on them for the way they've treated me?"

"Exactly what I thought last night when I left the house," said Eric, who had never, as a matter of fact, given the Viscount a first, let alone a second thought in conjunction with the affair.

"They'd have been thrown out last night," the Viscount went on, "if there had been a snap division. I was in the Peer's Gallery watching the whole business."

"It'll be a near thing to-night," said Geldart musingly, "there's a rumour of wobbling on their side."

"Well, now!" said Lynton, "it'll do them good. Perhaps it'll teach them gratitude. They'll be glad enough of your support to-night, for of course you'll go into their lobby?"

Eric made no answer, for just at that moment Madeleine entered, dressed for riding, and looking so delightfully fresh and fair that there was every excuse for Eric talking of anything and everything but politics.

"You had an exciting time last night in the House," she said, "and they tell me the storm isn't over yet."

"Last night's business was child's play to the fun there'll be to-night," he said, "come and see."

To his infinite delight she assented, and Eric, taking care to avoid any further discussion on the subject with her father, walked out with her, and, after assisting her into the saddle made his way clubwards intent on sketching out his plans.

The events of that evening's sitting will long be remembered in the annals of the House of Commons, historic as those annals are.

The word had gone forth even to the very ends of the earth that the fate of the ministry hung in the balance, and the atmosphere of the House was electric with excitement.

In the outer lobbies men of importance and ladies of eminence gathered in crowds, in numbers sufficient to have swamped every gallery in the House, and in many respects the precincts of the House resembled the vestibule of a smart West End theatre on an important first night.

Inside the House, the excitement was most intense of all, for here was the very vortex of a maelstrom, the breathless hush of one minute succeeding the stormy roar of another as this or that gladiator made his point.

Madeleine Lorraine, one of a bevy of fashionable loveliness, gazed on the scene like the rest, under the spell of the fascination peculiar to a momentous contest, whether of intellects or force. For the love of battle is innate in the breasts of women as of men, and in no arena is the battle fought more strenuously than on the House of Commons floor.

Instinctively her eyes sought and rested on the face and form of Eric Geldart. He was seated with the little knot of members forming that tiny apology for a party, the Progressive Conservatives; his legs crossed, his hands in his pockets, his hat shading his eyes, and Lady Harwardine, her chaperon, smiled wisely as, noting the direction of Madeleine's eyes, she whispered:

"There's Mr. Geldart, dear Madeleine; they say he's going to speak to-night. With the House so evenly divided as they say it is on this question, his party will be quite an important one."

Somehow the girl's heart strangely softened towards Geldart that night. She saw him there, a man among representative men, waiting his turn in a contest affecting the destiny of an Empire, he was strong and daring—perhaps, after all, it is strength and daring which women most admire in men.

Somehow she felt her heart beating quicker, and inclining towards him more than ever yet before. For she knew he loved her, he had said to her that, cheered by her, he could be sure of life's battle all along the line, and it is the consciousness of such a faith in her that wins a woman's heart.

Yet, even in that moment there came the recollection of another handsome face, and for the first time she reflected how strangely similar it was to the strong, set face down there.

Then she smiled at her own folly. Grateful as she felt to the brave fellow who at the peril of his own life had saved hers she reflected that in all probability she would never set eyes on him again; they had met just for a few moments, even as ships upon the ocean speeding different ways. And Madeleine remembered that hers were no days, nor was hers the environment of sentimental romance.

And one other woman's eyes were fixed on Eric Geldart's face, while down there the battle waxed fiercer and fiercer.

The Ministry were in a tight place, for the Irish Party, astute Parliamentary hands to a man, and that night in splendid fighting trim, had thrown their lot in with the mover of what was practically a vote of censure on the Government. But ministers, like other men, are often dangerous in the tightest places, and with their backs to the wall they fought like lions.

Below the gangway they were conscious of a few waverers, and were fully alive to the certainty that the division must be a close thing.

"But," whispered the Home Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer reassuringly, "even if Thurston and Smee

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mean to rat we've got Maythorne and his lot," and he glanced in the direction of the Progressive Conservative Party, who, so far, had not broken a lance in the tournament.

"I suppose so," said the other, "I suppose Hastie has sounded them. Let's ask him," then, turning to the Ministerial Whip, he whispered, "How about Maythorne's lot?"

"I think they're safe," was the answer, "that chap Geldart seemed inclined to give himself airs when I tackled him at the club, of course he's a young man as well as a young member, and you know their way; said something about the ministerial short memory."

"Oh, yes, old Lynton put him up to that, they're great pals, he's after the daughter, or she's after him, any way, there's the hang of it, we must muzzle Lynton, give him something as a solatium for the Lord Lieutenancy. Hullo, we shall soon learn their little game, Claverton's up!" for that moment Eric Geldart, removing his hat, rose in his place, and the Speaker, ignoring other simultaneous risers, remarked tersely, "Mr. Geldart," recognising the traditional claim of the maiden speaker.

There was a hush, absolutely heavy in its intensity, the courtesy accorded by the House to every member on the occasion of his maiden speech, for who can tell what for the House and for the country may lie in store?

It may be that a new Rupert of debate is about to break his maiden lance, it may be that a new Bernal Osborne is arising to leaven the prosaic routine of Parliament with the brilliancy of his wit, that a new Gladstone has come to thrill it with his fervid eloquence, to galvanise it with his vitality, a new Parnell to disorganise and bewilder it, or a new Disraeli to enthral it with mysterious glamour, alternately to delight it with skilful mockery, to dazzle it with the genius of his statecraft.

True, such are rare birds, even amongst the elected, but it is only when they have fluttered their oratorical wings they can be told.

The Ministerialists accorded Eric an encouraging cheer, the Opposition a polite one, but before he had been on his legs five minutes the benches opposite him clamoured with delight, while those on his own side were dumb with dismay. For the member for little Claverton smote them hip and thigh, holding their policy up to derision and tearing it to tatters and amid a salvo of Opposition cheers swelling into a hurricane from below the gangway.

He resumed his seat after hurling at the Ministry the thunderbolt that the "Pro-Con" party had gone over to the other side.

And, just as suddenly as he, the new member for Little Claverton, sprang into prominence, so that germ of a party fructified and sprang into being as a political force. True it numbered only a sextet, but on a division they meant twelve, and it was anticipated that they, with the ministerial waverers, would turn the scale.

And so it was. The amendment being put, the Speaker called upon those in its favour to say "Aye," and on the contrary "No." And two storms of Aye and No filled the House with their volume, and the Speaker expressing his opinion that the Noes have it, from the Ayes arose a clamorous demand, "Divide—divide—divide!" whereupon the Speaker called upon the strangers to withdraw, to which request the strangers paid no heed, and appointed the tellers of the respective sides.

The division bell began to tingle madly. There was a busy hum as members filed out in twos and threes and groups, many of opposite sides cheerfully conversing together as they went their way, until those ways divided.

"Madeleine, dearest," whispered Lady Harwardine, "what a splendid speech. Eric Geldart has made his name and his mark for ever."

"Yes," answered the girl, adding sadly, "but he has sold his friends."

"Tut, tut, child," the Countess answered, "we are in the world of politics, I will dree his weird, the Hon. Member shall be Right Honourable ere long."

Madeleine could not help wondering whether both terms were not, sometimes bought at the cost of honour. But she made no answer, for her cheeks were aflame, her eyes aglow, her heart was beating fast. The man who loved her above all others had made his mark and set his seal upon his time, there in the eyes of the world.

And when half an hour later he came up to the gallery, she gave him her hand so frankly, with such a look in her wonderful eyes, that he felt the citadel of her heart was almost won. Yes! As in lists of old, Beauty's smile is given of right to him who conquers.

But in that half hour much had happened.

The division over, members filed back into their places, and soon what had been a beggarly array of empty benches, became a packed assembly, with not one patch of leather of the seats visible; the side galleries were crammed, while telephone, telegraph, and cab had brought to the Reporter's Gallery a veritable host.

Amid a breathless hush the tellers returned to the House and ranged themselves before the Speaker's table.

And as they did so, before one word was spoken, there went up from the Opposition a hurricane of cheers, for it was seen that the Opposition teller held in his right hand the white slip of paper containing the figures of the division, and because he bore that simple slip of paper they knew their side had won.

An hour later Eric Geldart, leaving the House, sought

He felt a touch upon his arm. He turned and there, in the starlight, looked upon the face he would fain have forgotten—the face of Clare Armitage.

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the Terrace that he might cool his heated brow with the breeze from off the river, for heart and brain were in a whirl of excitement, such as comes to few men, an exhilarating intoxication, terrible in the poignancy of its very ecstasy, yet well worth living to feel.

He had won political distinction, of that he was certain, he was certain also of the price of his alliance, of that he had made certain at luncheon time.

And he believed that he had won the heart of Madeleine Lorraine, and to him that seemed a prize almost as precious as political success. Not quite, because he prized the latter above all things in earth or heaven.

His cousin Ferdinand, who had been consumed with indignation at the commencement of his speech, particularly at that portion wherein Eric definitely declared the intention of himself and colleagues to support the vote of censure, moderated the vehemence of his indignation as he observed the effect of Geldart's maiden effort on the House and listened to murmurs of "The most dangerous man against us!" "Pity we've lost that man!" "A new force to be reckoned with," and so on, and so far from answering inquiries as to their kinship with an off-hand "Sort of family connection, very distant!" swelled and beamed with gratification as he answered in a much louder tone, "Oh, yes, member of my family, son of my cousin George. George and I, of course, were like brothers, so I regard this chap quite as a nephew, indeed I'm as proud of him as if he were my son."

And, amid the uproar following the division, Mr. Ferdinand Geldart, M.P., deliberately rose from his seat, doffing his hat and striding majestically along the floor of the house, advanced to where his young kinsman with sparkling eyes and a face aflame, was sitting and extending the right hand glove of good fellowship said in his most impressive tones:

"Eric, I congratulate you. My dear boy, we are opposed in political views, but we are allied in blood and patriotism and I am proud, unaffectedly proud, to congratulate you as one whom I've regarded almost as a son on your brilliant maiden effort, and my only regret is that your dear father, my almost brother, was not spared to be present to witness your brilliant triumph."

While those seated around murmured sympathetic, "Hear—hears!" One member, a journalist representing a Scottish Highland crofter borough and a London Society paper, writing up and working up the incident for the benefit of his readers, Eric listened coolly to his relative's encomium and replied:

"You are extremely kind. Let me see, your name is spelt the same way as mine, is it not? There's some kind of family connection, of course, you came to our house at my father's funeral."

Mr. Ferdinand Geldart was somewhat taken aback at this reception of his overtures towards amity, but, concealing his embarrassment, he replied:

"Oh, yes, yes, your dear father and I were quite like brothers, how dreadful his being cut off in so untimely a fashion. Well, you've done very well and I congratulate you. By-the-bye, have you heard anything of your brother?"

"No, news," said Eric, "and I think you will understand when I ask you as a gentleman, a friend, a kinsman, and a fellow-member of this House, never to mention or to refer to him in my hearing again."

"Quite so," replied Ferdinand. "I heard the story, and I respect your feelings."

On Eric's way through one of the corridors he was stopped and button-holed by an enthusiastic admirer.

"By Jove, Geldart, you've knocked them, you've made yourself, old man."

"Hullo, Scrimshaw!" he said, "how do you do? Where are you?"

"I'm in the Special Gallery."

"Ah, watching the game to get your hand in before you join in it?"

"Yes, Geldart, and if I work it half as well as you, old chap, I shall be more than satisfied. Good-night—good luck!"

"Bounder," muttered Eric, as he strode away, "nevertheless, useful."

How pleasant it was to pace there on the terrace pulling at a rare cigar with the warm South wind of the summer night kissing his fevered forehead, as though to felicitate him on his success within, and to think of it all there alone beside the dark expanse of water that silting and slithering against the Terrace wall, seemed to whisper, "Well done—well done, well begun, go on and on to bigger things, play party against party, man against man, woman against woman, let self be king, self—self—self!"

It seemed to him the very happiest moment of his life. He felt a touch upon his arm. He turned and there, in the star-light, looked upon the face he would fain have forgotten—the face of Clare Armitage!

"Clare," he exclaimed. "You here?"

"Yes, Eric, I've been inside, witnessing your triumph. Eric, you outmatched them all, everybody said yours was the strongest speech, that you were the strongest man, and I listened, and it was music for me to hear, almost as sweet music as listening to you. Yes, Eric dear, I came to share your triumph."

She took his coat-collar in her hands, drew towards him, and would have kissed him, but he pushed her from him rudely—almost roughly.

"Don't be a fool," he exclaimed angrily. "Remember where we are."

"Oh, yes, I know—I know, but, oh, Eric, I came to watch you to-night with my heart full of seething anger only when I saw you and when I listened to you so bold and strong down there, with those white-haired men hanging on to your words, I felt all the anger vanish, there was pride, only pride, and I said I'll forget all hard words, Eric will forget them too."

"No! No!" he exclaimed. "I can't forget, I won't forget, at least what I mean is, what is to be forgotten is the boy and girl nonsense about any attachment between us, it's a dream to be forgotten once and for all."

"What, you tell me that, you dare to say that! Tell me, who was that girl you came and spoke to in the Ladies' Gallery? I saw you, I watched you, though you didn't see me, the girl with fair hair and doll's eyes, tell me, who was she?"

"That lady," he answered sullenly, "is the Hon. Madeleine Lorraine."

"And what is she to you, or you to her?"

He answered deliberately and untruthfully, although it was his hope that what he stated as a fact would some day be one.

"She is my *fiancée*."

Turning deathly white Clare drew herself up for a moment then suddenly her demeanour changed, laying her folded arms upon the parapet of the Terrace wall, she let her forehead fall upon them, and her frame shook with the hidden sobs.

And as they stood there alone, Big Ben up there booming out the hours, an evil thought came into Eric Geldart's mind, an evil impulse stirred his callous heart; there was no one looking, how easy just to—to—— One swift, strenuous heave, she will be over, her voice that could work for him so much harm, would be for ever silenced.

Doubtless could the river speak it could tell of many a one so silenced, many a dangerous presence removed. Should he—should he?

There was an evil name for it, but then if it were never known, she had it in her power to blight the future which shone just now so brilliant, her breath could tarnish it once and for ever, could curse his whole life, and in a moment—just a desperate struggle—and Old Father Thames would tell no tales!

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He sprang at her, seized her in his arms.

"Eric!" she cried convulsively.

And then up from behind a cloud sailed the silver moon, and there in its steel blue radiance out of the shadows glided and faced him——

Surely he could have sworn to it. His father's spirit!

It stood still, regarding him with wondrous eyes, he felt his heart sink, his blood grow cold, his flesh creep as it passed on.

"Eric! Eric! What do you mean?" asked the girl, looking up into his face.

"Didn't you see it?" he asked.

"What—what?"

"Never mind."

"But why did you seize me like that?"

"I—I was going to kiss you, and to ask you to let bygones be bygones."

"Oh, yes, yes, only, Eric, never forget I can never give you up. Kiss me."

Their lips met, and his imprinted upon hers the kiss of Judas.

TENTH CHAPTER.

"We'll Spoil The'r Little Game."

Since the eventful night of their making each other's acquaintance, Mr. Scrimshaw saw considerably more of his City neighbour, not in his own superb offices, which Geldart rarely entered, but upstairs in the bare, scantily-furnished room that served for the purposes of Stanyer's agency, Scrimshaw often sat after hours and sometimes before his own office hours, arranging with Old Mystery little matters of business he did not care to intrust to his own staff.

The little office on the second floor was not now quite so bare, but it boasted no luxuries.

It was by no means upholstered and furnished like the floor beneath, it boasted no luxurious divans, Turkey carpets, seductive big, saddle-bag or velvet armchairs, no rare prints or engravings, nor was its atmosphere redolent of the subtle flavour of expensive cigarettes. But on the mantelpiece a tape machine intermittently clicked and emitted its serpentine coils of tape with figures, hieroglyphics to the uninstructed or popular world who were not connected with the Markets.

And on Old Mystery's table reposed a telephone tinging every now and then, with one especial switch to Scrimshaw's own apartment, the file of the daily list adorned the walls and a shelf contained interest tables, directories, gazeteers, banking directory, the rules of the Stock Exchange, and other works of reference necessary to such as congregate upon the world's Rialtos.

"I want you," said Scrimshaw one evening, "to write Brallingham, he's the member for Brixwell, and ask him whether he doesn't think the time has arrived for the business he and I discussed to be arranged. I may as well tell you what that business is. He's very hard pressed, and owes me a considerable bit, he's beginning to flounder already, and if he isn't careful he'll be out of his depth in no time."

Old Mystery made a note in a black, oblong book marked "S.," and his semi-principal went on.

"I've shown him one way of getting out of his mess quite comfortably. I want him to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds on the score of ill-health, recommending me as his successor to his party. I've got the place pretty well salted, attended a heap of functions, and I've some property there too.

"We can nobble his association in five minutes, they are a most businesslike lot, and it'll work like a charm. As soon as he announces his intention of retiring I start stumping; by the time the new writ's issued we shall have the whole thing cut and dried. I may want you to do some work for me on the election, only remember, not a word."

"Then are you of Brallingham's own shade?"

"Don't know," grinned the other; "he's just a wee bit too shady. My idea is to attach myself to that new party; they're going to make things hum, I can tell you."

"What! The Pro-Con's? So that's what you wanted me up at the House about last night?"

"Yes, I've approached young Geldart about it; smart chap that!"

"Very!" said Old Mystery, drawing a deep breath.

"He's the backbone of the whole concern. Maythorne's a mere figurehead. Geldart brought off that coup last night; he'll soon elbow Maythorne overboard if he doesn't take a back seat."

"He's not particular I should think."

"Not a bit—hard as nails and smart as paint; almost a bit too smart. I have to watch all the points in dealing with him."

"Then does he deal with you?"

"Oh, yes, we're in a lot of things together. He does an occasional flutter in the Share Market, which reminds me, by the bye, to ask you to make a note to write him reminding him that his cover's exhausted, and that I've a debit of a thousand odd against him; you'll find the figures in my private ledger."

"But I thought Geldart was pretty wealthy."

"So, he is, fairly; only his late governor tied up his money so that this chap can't anticipate income. He ought not to want to, the old man left the lot to him, the younger brother did something quisby—took some securities and bank notes out of the old chap's private safe at home. The old man was in the City, on the produce market, you know; pompous old priz, I believe."

"Ah!" Old Mystery drew a deeper breath.

"Wanted the world to go round just as he wagged his finger—at least so I gather from the young 'un, who's a bit like him himself. However, he conveniently died, as Eric puts it."

Hearing himself spoken of like this invariably gave George Geldart just the impression of having been really dead and buried for months and months beneath the stone crowded with the record of his alleged abundant virtues.

Repressing, however, the shudder that thrilled him, he continued methodically, almost mechanically, to enter Mr. Scrimshaw's instructions in his note book.

"Who do you think they'll put up against you?" he inquired, and Mr. Scrimshaw answered airily:

"I understand the candidate on the other side is a gentleman rejoicing in the name of Blagdon."

"Boanerges Blagdon?" quickly ejaculated Old Mystery, and Mr. Scrimshaw, knitting his brows, said in a curious tone:

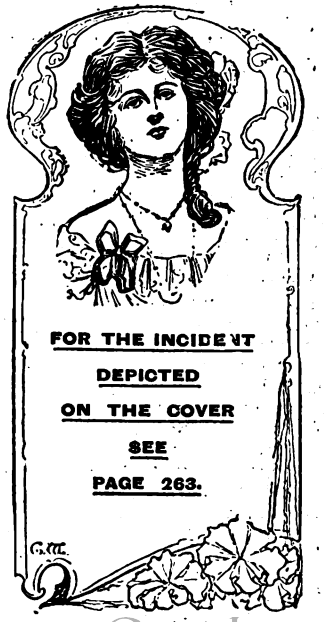
"Hullo! What do you know about him?"

"I—I've heard the name."

"Now, look here, Old Mystery, you know lots about him; I know that, though I don't quite know how much you know. Now remember our bargain—I'm content to let you remain Old Mystery, I don't even want to know your right name, who you are, nor who you have been.

"It may be you've made a mistake of some kind, it may be you've come a cropper; that's no business of mine, only this is our compact—you're going to be straight with me and I'm going to be straight with you.

"You and I have one little knack in common; we understand the value



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of money, the potentiality of money, and the science of figures; we know the worth of property, and in financial calculations next to myself you can cut margins as fine as any man in the city of London.

"This is our bargain, we work in secret, and we're as straight right through the game as we were at the beginning, when you laid on this table the bank note I'd lost and should never have missed, and I, in return, showed you how fifty pounds could be turned next day into five hundred by a little flutter in Eldorado A's."

"That's right."

"Then tell me what manner of man is this fellow Blagdon that I've got to fight."

"Firstly, he's a thief; secondly, he's a bully; thirdly, he's a coward; and fourt ly and lastly, he's a liar."

"A pal of yours, I suppose, from your intimate acquaintance with his character."

"I was once his friend," said Old Mystery.

"And now there's a score to be settled between you, eh? You owe him for something or other."

"It's more a question of what he owes me than what I owe him."

"I say, Mystery, ours was a strange meeting—rather a lucky one. By-the-bye, there's just a possible chance that this fellow Geldart might jib, he certainly would if he could; he's very great pals with Lord Lynton—indeed, they say he's after his daughter.

"Lynton, though in the Lords, is one of the pillars of that political wasp party, the 'Pro-Cons,' and it is just within the bounds of possibility that young Geldart, aided by Lynton, may be able to chuck me overboard, a thing he'd do without a moment's hesitation—if he dared, even I drowned. Now, do you happen to be able to put a string in that direction?'

Old Mystery smiled cunningly, and then his face clouded. He had the man in question in his power, he had only to say the word and the rising star was dimmed for ever. But he remembered, the man in question was his son, the son that he had loved and cherished, and Nature's touch upon his heart strings struck a chord that thrilled him to silence.

At the same time he remembered the other son, to whom, in his firstborn's interest, under that firstborn's influence, and misled by malicious representation, he had been unwarrantly unjust.

He would do his best to right the wrong; it was not only his desire, it was his duty, and Eric Geldart's injustice to his brother should be righted, even though he, his father, had to play the part of that Rhadamanthus whose accepted lot it was to doom his hope and heir.

A boy's feet rattled up the stair. Presently a messenger entered with a cable. Old Mystery opened it with knitted brows, and spelt out of the code agreed upon between himself and Stanyer the following:

"Hear you have been dead four months, explain."

Taking from a safe the file containing the code, he wrote what represented the following:

"Am minding your business—do likewise."

And an hour or so later Frederick Stanyer, sixteen thousand miles away, spelling out this message from the cypher, soliloquised:

"What on earth's the little game? It was George Geldart I met over there before I crossed back, I'll swear, and our little business has worked since like a charm. Whatever game he's playing, he's playing fair with me. I'll take his tip, I'll mind my business and let him mind mine on the other side and his own too."

Then the lonely old man there in the barely furnished room leant his head upon his hands, absorbed in thoughts neither cheering nor consoling.

What a sordid world it was, and what a selfish one, each fighting for each, and those least tainted with greed and grasping going to the wall; a shoal of glutton fishes, the strongest sharks best in the swim, all surging and struggling and fighting for the gold wherewith the devil baits the net for human souls, a flock of ravenous birds in the air, the doves and wrens falling out with broken pinions while the hawks and vultures in the first flight, swooped with swift wings towards the Snare of Gold, the snare that lures to evil and destruction.

He felt some qualms at times regarding the safety of his property, seeing that Eric and Blagdon were two of his trustees.

Then he reflected with satisfaction that there was a third, old Dick Farningham, director of the Bank of England, master of a City company, director and pillar of several of the biggest banks and other corporations in the city; his integrity was above suspicion. But then so had Blagdon's been before he found him out; so had Eric's, his firstborn, until that dread hour when in a sense he himself seemed to have been re-born!

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

Aceleigh: "Can you unite the separated?" Clairvoyant: "I never fail." Aceleigh: "Well, just connect me with the five-pound note I got separated from last night."

"Has Willie Giggs a responsible position?" asked one girl. "Yes," replied the other, "in one way. Every time his employer rings a bell he's expected to respond."

"I don't know," cried the excited feminine voice in the darkness, "whether you are my husband or a burglar, but I'm going to be on the safe side, and shoot."

Little Johnnie says he likes his Sunday-school better than he does his day-school. In Sunday-school, he says, when he does anything, the teacher only says: "I wouldn't do that?" but in the day-school out comes the cane.

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GWENDOLEN'S BURGLARS.

The Story of a Girl's Bravery.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"But, papa, would you have me marry for money?"

The speaker was a lady of twenty-two, who addressed a worried-looking gentleman of sixty years.

She was his only daughter—his only child in fact—and he would have been justified had he considered few men deserving of her.

She was very pretty. She had a pliant, graceful figure; a perfectly colourless face, excepting for the vivid red in her lips; eyes hazel, and black brows, and hair bright as sunlight.

"I would *not* have you marry for money," her father said. "That would be a degrading contract. Allan Prescott has something besides his money to recommend him. Still, his pecuniary advantages are not to be despised. I wish to see you comfortably established in life, for my affairs are in such a bad condition that I fear I cannot long support you."

"If you simply desire me to be supported, I might maintain myself. I can play the piano; I can keep house; I can paint on china and make a pudding. Surely, I can find my vocation!"

She spoke lightly, but her words irritated her father.

"You have said something like that before, Gwendolen, and you mean it, in spite of your trifling tone. Why don't you say frankly that you would be a music teacher, a housekeeper, a dauber on china, or a cook, rather than marry Prescott? That is undoubtedly what you mean."

"If you prefer me to say such disagreeable things, I will do so, papa."

Her father took her by the shoulders, while an expression on his face indicated that he would like to shake her. She remained standing, her black brows drawn into a sharp little point above her nose, and with a decidedly bored expression about her red, sarcastic lips.

"Now meet the question fairly. Will you marry Allan Prescott or not?"

"I should think it would be soon enough to answer when he asks me," she said, inconsequently. "Would you have me emulate Elizabeth Baxter, who refused her lover 'afore he axed her'?"

"He has told me of his intention to ask you to be his wife, and I would know what answer you will make. Oh, Gwendolen, can you not see that you have worried me to death? My business affairs are reaching a crisis, and before the end comes I want to see you safely cared for. If Prescott was unworthy of you, I would tell you to paint pottery for a living rather than be his wife; but he is a gentleman, a man of honour, and he is fond of you. What more can you desire? Confide in me, my dear. What answer will you make?"

She drew away from him.

"Don't ask me, papa. I really don't know what I *shall* say."

Mr. Thayer seated himself with an air of a man whose patience was exhausted.

"Go away!" he said, crossly. "I can never get a straightforward answer from you. I want to be alone."

She started to go—a little resentful flush rising in her cheeks—then hesitated, came back, knelt beside his mute figure, and placed her cool little hands upon his head.

"Dear papa, if you will know that I mean no disrespect to you, I will tell you all I feel regarding this proposal."

He made no answer, but encircled her with his arm.

"When you told me this morning that Mr. Prescott had spoken to you, you were displeased because I did not accede at once to his proposal. You said he was honourable and agreeable, and that he had money. You and I have been so constantly together since mother died that I had believed you would be reluctant to lose me, and yet you seemed very willing to give me up. Your business required ready money, you said, and if you had not the expense of keeping a home for me you might save enough for your purpose. I know your trouble, and I want to help you. But would you want me to marry if we were in straitened circumstances? Suppose Mr. Prescott were poor; would you still wish me to be his wife?"

Her father withdrew his arm from her waist.

"Let us be candid with ourselves and with each other, papa. I cannot marry for a mercenary motive."

"Very well," he interrupted, almost roughly; "let us have no more words about it. You are willing to see me bankrupt and disgraced. I might have expected as much from one with your sentimentalities."

Her answer startled him.

"Yes," she said, rising to her feet, "I would rather see you a wretched pauper in the street than know that my father, whom I had honoured, had sold his daughter to keep up the business."

She was going haughtily out of the room, when he stopped her.

"It is as well that you should know the details of the case," he said. "I will not be alone in my pauperism, for when I fall a score of my creditors will sink with me. They will say I have robbed them, though God knows nothing has been further from my intention. My house is already mortgaged for more than it is worth, and I am absolutely without resource."

She put her arms about his neck now, and drew his tired head against her bosom.

"Will you not consider this proposal, Gwendolen? Allan will be here to-night, and will want his answer."

"Yes," she said, slowly; "I will consider it."

* * * * *

Gwendolen had cause to be proud of Allan Prescott's love. He was a man of exceptional attainments, and, better still, a man of perfect honour.

He was ten years older than she, had a spirited and handsome face, a tall, active figure, and a breadth of chest and firmness of muscles which spoke eloquently of his strength.

He and Gwendolen's father were both manufacturers; and though the former did not know it, his success in his commercial career had added many lines to Mr. Thayer's careworn face. Mr. Prescott, having so much more capital, had been able to supply retailers with goods much faster than Mr. Thayer, and had thus unwittingly gained many of the latter's customers.

Mr. Thayer believed it would be useless to struggle against such competition, and was in despair, when Allan came proposing to marry Gwendolen. If only the girl would yield, here was an easy adjustment of all difficulties. Those two men, once related, could not remain rivals, but must unite their interests.

It was Saturday, and Mr. Prescott was expected at Thayer's house, there to remain until Monday. Being quite incapable of taking any advantage of his host, he had acquainted Mr. Thayer with his intention of addressing Gwendolen with a proposal of marriage.

She was lovely that evening. Even her father noticed that she looked remarkably well. As soon as he could do so gracefully, he left her alone with her lover

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He went to the library and sat there an hour. He wondered what was being said behind the closed drawing-room doors. What answer would Gwendolen make?

She had been standing beside a centre table when he left the room, with the strong light of the chandelier shining full upon her face, but he had not been able to judge from her expression what was in her mind.

How cool, how self-possessed, how almost scornful she looked in that glaring light! She had known perfectly well why he was leaving her alone with Allan. Had she mentally blamed or thanked him for his absence?

The time dragged on. It would have been difficult to judge who was the most anxious to know her answer—the young, hopeful lover within the closed doors, or the tired old man who waited without.

The drawing-room doors opened at last, and footsteps approached the library.

"When you are ready to retire," Gwendolen was saying, "James will show you to the south room. You will prefer it to the guests' chamber, into which the sun can never shine. Good night."

Then she ran upstairs. Mr. Thayer rose to his feet.

"Well," he said, extending his hand as Prescott entered the library; "has she given her consent?"

Allan took the offered hand and answered, huskily:

"She has refused me. If I had been a poor man," he continued, at length, "I might have had a chance of winning her. She realises that she would better her financial condition by marrying me, and she would not accept me with that thought in her mind. She has been most candid with me, and I have never loved and admired her more than I have to-night. She has told me of your difficulties, and how my manufactories are hurting yours. If you like, we will talk over your affairs, and see if, together, we can pull you out of the troubles into which you have fallen."

Very late that night Mr. Thayer tapped at Gwendolen's door.

"I saw your light, and knew you must be awake," he said. "I want to tell you that my affairs will be all right, after all. I am very sorry you disappointed Prescott, Gwendolen. Still, you know your own heart best. He has proposed that he and I shall unite our business interests, and after this the firm's name will be Prescott and Thayer. If it was all right between you two, I would be happier to-night than I have been in twenty years.

"By the way, I sent James to bed an hour ago, and did not remember to ask him what room Prescott was to occupy. He said he believed you mentioned it was on the south side of the house. Being in doubt about it, I put him into the guests' chamber. Good-night, my dear. You should have been asleep long hours ago."

He went away, and Gwendolen turned her light down very low, and seated herself at the open window.

So Allan had taken her father into partnership with him. She had told him of their embarrassing circumstances because she believed he would be considerate of his weaker competitor; but she had not hoped for such generosity as this.

She had told him frankly that she liked him, but had never thought of him as a lover until that day.

Coming, as his proposal did, together with her sudden knowledge of her poverty, she had been unable to separate them in her thoughts; and she would not do him the injustice, nor herself the dishonour, of promising to marry him while she could weigh any mercenary considerations.

She sat a long time, thinking of what had passed between them. Now that she had refused him, he would probably come there no more, and, very singularly, the thought gave her pain.

She was still sitting in the darkness, when she was surprised by hearing footsteps in the corridor. Everyone in the house should have retired long before, and yet she was certain she heard subdued voices close to her door. What did it all mean? Who could be going stealthily through the halls at two o'clock in the morning? The house was large, and her room was far from her father's or the guests' chamber.

She suddenly felt a sickening sense of fear and helplessness. Were there burglars in the house? The thought set her heart beating so wildly that she was sure it must betray her. She was not a timid woman, but had never encountered any danger great enough to test her courage.

She listened. After all, she might have been mistaken. She could hear nothing now. Doubtless the sounds which had frightened her had been conjured by her overwrought imagination; she had been excited by the events of the day—by her father's misfortunes, by Mr. Prescott's proposal, and by the disappointment and pain she had unwillingly given him.

All these occurrences had made her nervous, and induced her present unreasonable state of fear. She was calling herself a coward, when she discovered a light shining through the crack above her door.

She crept across the room and listened intently, with her face pressed close to the door. There were several men outside—how many she could not learn; but even in the tumult of her excitement she managed to hear some of their conversation. They had stopped close beside the door.

"Which is his room?" one man asked.

"Hush!" said a second. "Not that one—don't turn the knob!—that's Miss Thayer's bedroom. His is in the lower hall. She told me he was to sleep in the south chamber."

"We'll go to his first," said a third. "They say he carries a bag of money with him every Saturday night. Be careful with that lantern, and keep quiet. If he wakes, he'll be a tough customer to deal with."

A sharp click followed, which startled Gwendolen almost into a shriek. Some one had cocked a revolver.

"I think that will quiet him," one of the men remarked.

Gwendolen stood with her hands pressed to her heart, trying to restrain its tumultuous beating.

She had now recognised the second speaker to be her father's butler; and with a woman's quick intuition had understood the whole situation of affairs. These men were burglars, and the butler, either by choice or compulsion, was their accomplice.

He had been told that Mr. Prescott was to occupy the south chamber, and had not known of the exchange made in that gentleman's quarters through Mr. Thayer's mistake. He was therefore conducting his two burglar companions to the south room, where they expected to rob Allan Prescott. Not finding him there, the butler would immediately suppose he was in the guests' chamber, where they would find him.

What chance had one man, unconscious of danger, and doubtless asleep—what possible chance could he have against three armed and desperate ruffians?

These thoughts flashed through her mind while the burglars went stealthily down the corridor. She had not made a sound, for it would have been worse than useless for her to call for help.

In that remote part of the house no one would hear her, excepting the burglars themselves, and she shuddered while she thought that they might so effectually silence her that she would never utter another sound. She was not a coward, and she suddenly determined to risk her life to save Allan Prescott from these outlaws.

The guests' chamber was in a wing of the house opposite from the south room, and she would attempt to reach Mr. Prescott's door, and warn him of his danger before the burglars returned. It would be a perilous experiment. They might have some one stationed in the corridor, or she might, by a mis-step in the dark, betray her intention. Should they discover her, they might make short work of her. Still she would risk the danger for the man who had befriended her father

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Knowing that she must act quickly, she summoned all her courage and unlocked the door. When it opened, it creaked raspingly upon its hinges. She listened. Had it betrayed her? Instead of retreating, the footsteps now advanced.

She tried to close and lock her door, alive now to her own danger; but she was too late. Three masked men were in her room, stifling the cries which broke from her white lips, and binding her hands and feet with cords which cut cruelly into her delicate flesh.

It was all done so quickly that she had scarcely realised what happened. A lantern had been thrust into her face blinding her so that she could not see her assailants. They had told her that if she uttered a cry, or attempted to escape, they would send her into eternity.

They had not covered her mouth, knowing, doubtless, that, even if she had dared to cry for help, she could not be heard. they bound her to the chair into which they had roughly thrust her, and left her alone.

She could only remember that she had failed to save her lover from these men, who were in search of his money, and who would have it if they stained their hands with his blood to obtain it.

She remained, perforce, where they had left her, sick and dizzy with pain and fright, when she suddenly saw a chance of escape. She attempted an experiment from which another woman would have shrunk as fearfully as from the burglars.

The gas-jet was just above her head, and the light burned very low, as she had left it when she sat by the window. She found that, by holding her hands high above her head, she could reach the burner.

She determined to burn the cords from her wrists.

It was a daring feat; but she accomplished it, moaning with pain, but clinching her teeth when the fire licked her tender flesh, and bearing her suffering like a staunch little martyr at the stake.

When her hands were free, it was a comparatively easy matter to remove the other bindings, and she stood released.

The burglars had left the door open, so she had one difficulty less to encounter. She was thankful that her dress was of wool, and did not rustle when she moved.

She slipped noiselessly into the hall, which was now dark, since the thieves had taken their lantern with them.

In spite of her excitement, she could hear them returning. They had found the south room empty, and were on their way to the guests' chamber.

There was no time for caution now. They were close behind her, and she must run—run for her life, and save Allan Prescott.

She rushed through the dark corridor, hearing a frightful oath which followed her, and knowing their footsteps were in hot pursuit. The door of the guests' chamber was before her. Unless they fired and shot her, she would reach it in time.

* * * * *

Mr. Prescott had been very restless that night. Gwendolen's refusal had bitterly disappointed him.

He reproached himself for having been so precipitate in his proposal.

"Why did I not wait?" he asked himself. "Why was I such an insane fool as to suppose she had understood my regard for her? She has been very honest with me. Another woman, in her circumstances, would have married me off-hand, to escape from her difficulties. Gwendolen said that she liked me, but she chose poverty and hard work rather than pretend that her liking was anything warmer than it is. Perhaps I might have won her, if I had been less impatient to test her feeling for me. Now all is lost."

He did not undress nor attempt to sleep. He sat moodily, watching a foolish moth fluttering about the light. He was still busy with his gloomy thoughts when some one tried his door. It was locked, and the person without beat violently against it, calling him by name.

"There are burglars in the house! They are coming to your room! Oh, wake!—do wake at once!"

He opened the door, and Miss Thayer almost fell into the room. "Ring the bell!" she implored, "and try to wake the servants. Have you nothing with which to defend yourself? The butler is in league with the thieves."

He rang the bell and rushed into the hall.

In a little while he returned, and found her white as ashes.

"Too late!" he said. "They heard you at my door and ran away. We have the butler, however, and will probably catch the others also. When did you see them first?" Then seeing the burns and livid marks where the cords had cut into her wrists, he gave a cry. "You have been hurt! Tell me what has happened!"

They went to the library, where she told him all, while he dressed her wrists as tenderly as a woman could have done.

"And you did all this for me, Gwendolen?" he said.

"You have done more for me to-night than *I* for you. You have saved my father's good name. And I love you, Allan."

He started to catch her in his arms, but drew back.

"You do not mean that, Gwendolen. You have had a terrible strain on your nerves to-night, and you feel happy and at rest because the danger is past."

She rested her injured wrists upon his arms.

"You have reason to doubt me—reason to disbelieve me—since I have not known my own mind. But hear me now. To-night, when you spoke to me in the drawing-room, I did not know my heart. I believed I had only a warm friendship for you, and that I had more anxiety about papa's affairs than affection for you. I meant to be honest with you, for I thought too much of you to deceive you, even for my father's sake."

"Do not deceive yourself this time, Gwendolen," he cried. "I cannot bear a second disappointment."

She continued a little more firmly and courageously:

"After I went to my room I began to see matters differently. Papa came and told me his troubles were at an end, and I knew we could live here just as we had always done, the only difference being that you would not come to see me. That difference made me very wretched. I began to know that if you had been poor, and dishonoured, as papa came so near being, I would have shared your fate rather than remain here without seeing you. And then the danger came to you, and I *knew* that if you were killed I should die. Papa's troubles did not influence me then. I put my arms into that flame to save you, because I——"

He had her in a close embrace long before this.

"Go on," he whispered. "Let me drink my fill of this sweet confession. Because I——"

"Because I love you, Allan."

* * * * *

Mr. Thayer came down late to breakfast. Having been relieved of his heaviest cares, he had slept sounder than usual, and had heard none of the disturbance caused by the burglars.

He was most astonished when he learnt what had happened.

"I telegraphed for a detective," Prescott told him, "and he came immediately. I was fortunate enough to secure the butler, and had him locked in his own pantry until morning When he was arrested he told who his accomplices were, and the detective says he will have them within twenty-four hours. They ran away empty-handed; but, sir, had it not been for your daughter's bravery, they might have succeeded in carrying away considerable plunder."

"You and Gwen look remarkably cheerful for persons who have passed such a night of horror," Mr. Thayer remarked.

"Last night a second partnership was agreed upon in your library, and all it lacks now is your sanction," replied Allan.

Mr. Thayer stared in bewilderment.

"What!" he said. "Has she changed her mind?"

"Oh, no! I only made the mistake of insisting upon having my answer five hours before it was ready for me."

A. C. Manton.

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Fairview.

The Story of an Old Maid's Love.

"Fairview! Fairview Station!"

I had been half-asleep after a railway journey of eight long hours, but as the porter's cry rang in my ears I started up wide awake and greatly excited.

The little station at which we had stopped was a dainty affair at the boundary of a large private estate, and I stood beside my box, as the train dashed forward again, looking down a long avenue of large trees on one side, while beyond the railway track and but a little distance from it, stretched a rocky coast, against which the ocean broke in a hoarse, monotonous roar.

I was looking at the waves dashing up on the great rocks, when a voice beside me inquired:

"Miss Maxwell?"

"Yes," I said, turning quickly to face an elderly man who had left a handsome carriage and pair at the steps of the station platform.

"I have your box on, miss," he said respectfully. "I drove down as soon as we heard the train stop. It is but a step," and he held open the carriage-door for me.

And, indeed, the distance in the grounds themselves was so short that, but for the box, it would have been a farce to send the carriage.

We drove round an imposing sweep in front of a stately mansion, and as the carriage stopped, a tall figure, in the deepest mourning, came from the drawing-room window upon the wide verandah to meet me.

Even in the excitement of meeting my hostess for the first time, I could not avoid the start of surprise her appearance caused.

Without one spot or line to break the black of her dress, her face, rising from the heavy crape ruffle at the throat, was utterly colourless, and her hair, banded in waving masses, was white as snow.

Large, black eyes, soft as velvet and deeply mournful, looked out from the deathly white face, giving it a startling appearance. The features, as I knew later, were perfect, and as she took my hands and drew me into a close, tender embrace, her lips parted in a smile, very sad, but very loving.

"You have come," she said, in a low voice, deep, but musical. "How very kind! We are strangers yet, but I hope you will learn to love me."

"It is you who are kind," I said quickly, "to give me a summer holiday in this lovely spot, and so near the sea. I love the sea."

A strong shudder shook the tall, erect figure still holding my girlish one in a close embrace; but my hostess only said:

"You must be very tired, and Nancy shall show you to your room to rest before dinner. I hope you are hungry, too, dear, for I have ordered our midday dinner to wait for your arrival. Jerome has taken your box in, and Nancy is waiting."

As she spoke I noticed for the first time a servant waiting in the doorway a woman past middle age, who curtesied as I looked at her.

"Show Miss Maxwell her room, Nancy," her mistress said, "and make her comfortable until dinner-time."

I had been too much bewildered to say much, and had still a dazed feeling as Nancy led the way to a large room, most beautifully furnished, from whose wide open windows I could see the ocean rolling in, to break in great crested waves upon the rocks, that lined the coast, while below me stretched to the shore a garden full of July bloom, carefully tended, and with only a delicate wire fence to separate it from the rocks beyond.

Nancy made me most thoroughly comfortable, unpacking my clean linen while I was in the bath she had prepared, brushing out my hair and braiding it loosely, bringing me a cup of tea and some biscuits, and finally settling me in a deep armchair by the window, with the advice to take a nap until she came to dress me for dinner.

But I was far too much excited at first to sleep, and curled up in my chair to think over once more the strange circumstances that had brought me to Fairview.

Two years before I had lost my father, and from a life of luxury and self-indulgence was suddenly called upon to earn the bread I ate, or starve. I was but nineteen, and motherless from a child, my father's idol, with no idea of economy, household affairs or bread-winning in any sense of the word.

As a heroine, I am aware I should have been slighted by my friends as well, but truth compels me to acknowledge that I never knew what good friends I had until I needed them. All my burdens were shared by tender sympathy, a class of music scholars made for me, a pleasant boarding-house found, and I was set afloat in my new life by kindest care.

For two years my life was tranquil and busy, and I learnt many of the lessons poverty only teaches. But when my second summer holiday came, I was counting my spare cash to see if I could get a week or two of country air, when a letter came to me from "Fairview," signed by "Hesba Lovering," a strange letter, that cost me many hours of anxious thought before I answered it.

She wrote to me that my father had been her friend many long years before, but that the news of his death had just reached her.

She wanted to know, to love the only child of her old friend and begged me to spend my summer holiday at Fairview as her guest.

Very delicately she told me that she knew of my altered circumstances, and suggested that, if I could be happy with her, I was to remain as her companion at a salary more than double the income I was able to make by teaching.

Kindness itself was in every line of the letter, but not one word of patronage. On the contrary, Miss Lovering wrote of her own lonely, loveless life, as if the kindness was all to come from me in the acceptance of her offer.

After much deliberation I accepted the invitation for the summer only, and found myself, on a hot July day, curled up in an armchair in a luxurious room looking at the ocean, and dreamily wondering "what would come next?"

What did come was a profound sleep, from which Nancy roused me to dress for dinner. Oh, the luxury of having a maid once more, of resigning my heavy, troublesome hair to skilled fingers, to be daintily attired without an effort of my own, and see a fluffy mass of white muslin, with little black bows here and there, in place of my travelling-dress, and yet take no thought of myself!

Nancy seemed to be as delighted at exercising her taste and skill as lady's-maid as I was to have her, and gave me a last finishing stroke, with the remark:

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"There, miss, you are all right, and the prettiest thing we've had in Fairview for many a long year."

My hostess was in the drawing-room, waiting for me, and the dinner-bell, and I saw that, although she had changed her dress, it was still of black, unbroken by line or spot of white; but, in spite of the appearance of age given by her snow-white hair, I noticed that the ghastly pale complexion was smooth as a child's, without one wrinkle upon the broad, white brow.

Her step was light and firm, her teeth perfect, her form erect and vigorous. To look in her face, one might guess her age to be sixty or seventy; to see her move, or hear her speak, one would readily believe her to be twenty-five.

She was an enigma to me in every way, but nothing could exceed her kindness; and I had not been her guest a week before I loved her with the enthusiastic devotion only possible in young, ardent natures.

We had no society—literally none; but every other pleasure was placed before me. A trained saddle-horse carried me for long, breezy rides, with Jerome for a protector and guide; a low pony-carriage, Miss Lovering driving, took me inland to all the pretty spots within miles of our home.

A grand piano had been tuned for me, and piles of new music placed beside it; an ample library was always open, and a perfect storehouse of materials and patterns invited me to all the newest devices in fancy-work.

I was very happy, singing about the house, reading aloud to my kind friend, trying my skill at needlework, without a care or a tear. But every day, in sunshine or in storm, I had an hour or two of actual terror in trying to meet Miss Lovering's wishes in what seemed to me a strange whim.

I have already spoken of the rocks that lined the coast near Fairview; in one of these, the largest of all, there was a deep cave, like a vast room, some seven feet high, but stretching back to gloomy depths of shadow.

At low tide the floor was hard and dry as a board, but there were great rocks scattered all about, like chairs and footstools.

At high tide the entire cave was filled with water, and it was impossible to escape from it as the shore lay below the entrance.

To me it was a gloomy, dangerous place, to be avoided with shuddering terror. But here I found myself every day when the tide was low, watching Miss Lovering with a sort of fascinated horror. She never asked me to go, but she led the way and I followed.

She sat upon one of the rocks facing the ocean, and looking with her dark, mournful eyes out upon the waves, as if they held her by some mysterious spell. Never speaking, her lips often moved silently, while her hands were clasped in a rigid, strained fashion, as if to suppress cries of agony.

Often the water touched our feet before she roused herself, and we had to wade through it knee-deep back to safety. It terrified me, but it fascinated me.

We were there in the heaviest thunderstorms, when the reverberations were deafening; we were there in soft summer showers; we were there when the sunlight lay like glittering diamonds on the dancing waves, seeming to mock the weary, white face turned towards it.

This cave had a weird fascination for Miss Lovering. One of her bedroom windows commanded a view of it, and there she would sit for hours, her hands idly folded, gazing at the entrance, for she could not see beyond that, while the look of agony on her face was like that of a person in intense bodily pain.

It will easily be understood from what I have already written that Hesba Lovering was not the companion to be chosen by a girl, young and full of activity; but with all her sadness, and the mystery of her strange loneliness, she was charming.

She had the rarest powers of conversation, and, having lived many years abroad, could bring into vivid light the scenes she had witnessed, the people she had met, the adventures she had shared, often caressing my hand while she talked, and giving me the rare, sad smile that was the nearest approach to pleasure her face ever expressed.

It was one of her peculiarities that she was entirely idle.

She made me sing or play for her, and showed her knowledge of music by correction or criticism, but she never touched the piano.

She left her house entirely to the care of a housekeeper, her grounds to the direction of a head gardener; her sewing was done by a resident seamstress, under Nancy's direction, and she never touched fancy work.

She was the only person not an invalid I ever saw who sat with her hands folded or clasped entirely empty at all times.

Occupation would have seemed a necessity to one so lonely, for, excepting myself, she saw no one but her servants, and it was impossible for her to make a companion of a servant.

A tall figure . . came from the drawing-room window.

The summer was gone, when, one morning, we were seated in the cave, I crouched on the sands at Miss Lovering's feet, and I said—

"My holiday ends this week."

To my amazement she drew me into her arms in a strong clasp, crying out in a tone I never heard from her lips before:

"You will not leave me! You will not go! I cannot bear the agony of my life alone again! You will stay!"

"But," I said, "you must have relatives or dearer friends who will come to you?"

"None! My relatives are dead, my friends are scattered. Listen! I did not mean to tell you, but I will. All this is yours."

"All what?" I asked wonderingly.

"Fairview and an income of two thousand pounds a year. I made my will before you came, and when I die you are my sole heiress. If you leave me you will come back after my death, for I will never alter that will, but, oh, my child, I implore you to stay!"

"Yes," I said, "yes; but I cannot understand. Why should I, a total stranger, inherit your fortune?"

"I will tell you all!

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Yes," she cried fiercely, as if answering some unheard voice, "I *will* tell you. But Bessie, your father, did he *never* speak of me, or of Fairview?"

The pleading passion in her voice was hard to answer, but I said:

"Never. I never heard of Fairview until I received your letter. But I once heard him speak of an Aunt Lovering and a cousin that——"

"Hush! Hush! Do not speak her name! Did he tell you," and her voice sank to a shuddering whisper, "how she died?"

"No."

"I must tell you! It will turn all your love to hate."

"Nothing can do that!" I cried.

"But I must tell you. Something drives me on and on to speak! No one has ever heard, no one knows! I might carry my secret to the grave, but I will tell *you*, Gerald Maxwell's child, the child of the only man I ever loved."

"Do not tell me now," I said. "You are not able. You are trembling from head to foot."

"Yes, now—now, with the great, hungry waves calling me! Oh, how I hate the ocean—how I fear and hate it! That was the beginning of what I am going to tell you. Uncle Arthur Lovering owned Fairview, built it, and chose this spot because he had an adoration for the sea. In locked rooms I never open you will find priceless treasures of marine life, collected for years from all parts of the world; they represented my uncle Arthur's life.

"Ethel, your father's cousin and mine, was as enthusiastic as he was, while I shrank and shuddered like a fool at all the slimy horrors, and would not admire even the shells. We were orphans—Ethel and I—children of uncle Arthur's two brothers, with equal claim upon him; but I was sent away to a boarding-school, and Ethel kept at Fairview with a governess and when he died he left me a hundred pounds a year, and Ethel all else he possessed. It was not just—even now I say it was not just."

"It was not," I said, as she waited for me to speak.

"I had been banished from Fairview for years when uncle Arthur died, and soon after Ethel wrote to me to come and share her home. There was one provision in the will that, if Ethel died unmarried, I was to be my uncle's heiress, and Ethel thought I ought to share her home.

"Why did I come? Why did I ever enter the house? For listen! I loved your father, and he loved me. I was living with my mother's aunt, and Gerald Maxwell was my dearest friend. He did love me, and yet I came to Fairview.

"I had been here through a long dreary winter before I knew that Gerald Maxwell was Ethel's cousin—her mother's nephew. There were other guests in the house, and Ethel's governess was chaperon when Gerald came to Fairview.

"Then there awoke in my heart a jealousy and envy that were little short of insanity. To my eyes, distorted by this unworthy passion, Gerald was wooing the heiress. He was the same to me, but I would not see that he had not changed, and I drew back in angry pride to leave the field to Ethel. She was so pretty—a living sunbeam—with golden hair and blue eyes, not tall and dark as I was; and she was winsome and gentle, full of tender, loving ways that I could never have. I was cold and grave.

"Gerald shared all her pleasure in adding to uncle Arthur's collection of sea treasures, and they spent hours together amongst the rocks, gathering what the waves had left there, finding anenomes, selecting sea-weeds, and then coming home to spend hours again in preparing what they had collected for the shelves of the museum.

"I never shared their rambles. I hated the sea, and, above all, I hated this cave, where they would find many wonderful shells and rare weeds. Did you ever notice the anenomes here, Bessie? They say they are wonderful!"

I confessed my ignorance, never having been much on the coast.

"Those anenomes," said Miss Lovering, "they drew Ethel here as if they had some magic power. As soon as the tide was low she took her basket and her knife to come to see what the sea had brought her, or to seek the anenomes far back in the shadows of the cave. Sometimes she begged me to come but I never would. I was afraid of being caught in the cave and drowned. My terror of the sea was inborn and utterly unreasonable, but it was too deeply rooted for me to conquer.

"All that summer the house was full of guests. We drove and rode, we danced and sang as if uncle Arthur had been a century in his grave instead of eleven months. It shocked me, who scarcely knew him, but Ethel was her own mistress, past twenty-one, and her word was law in the household. I did not suffer from want of attention, for I was a very handsome woman in those days, and Ethel was liberal in her gifts of pretty articles for my wardrobe.

"But I loved Gerald while I was driving him away from me by my bitter, jealous suspicions. I would not see that he gave Ethel a cousin's love, paid her the attentions due to his hostess. Excepting that he shared her love of the ocean, he paid her no more attention than the other gentlemen in the household did; but I was wilfully blind to that fact.

"To my jealous fancy he was courting the heiress of Fairview, and setting aside any claim I might have. He had never asked me to be his wife, so there was nothing to bind him, and I was too proud to try to win a love that was taken from me. Bessie! Bessie! How can I tell you the rest? Oh, will my heart never break? Will this weary life never end?"

She was rocking herself to and fro on her seat of stone, her hands clasped over her knees, her face working with agitation. I implored her to cease trying to tell me her story. I begged her to come home, but I might as well have talked to the roaring waves beating on the rocks at our feet.

"I must tell you!" she cried. "See, do you understand? One life stood between me and Fairview. One life stood between me and Gerald Maxwell. If Ethel died I would be heiress of Fairview, and Gerald would return to me.

"It was in September—— Hush! Hush! Don't tell me it was on this very day—the third of September! I was at my window—you know where I sit—I was looking out, thinking my own wicked thoughts, when I saw Ethel go into the cave alone.

"I scarcely noticed her, it was so common a thing to see her go upon the same errand; but when the tide began to rise, Ethel did not come out. You understand, Bessie, she did not come out, and I sat and watched the tide rise!"

She shivered as she spoke, her voice almost a scream.

Presently, in a low tone, almost a whisper, she continued:

"When the tide went out they found her. She had fallen over one of the rocks and broken her leg. Probably she fainted; but she was lying on her face, drowned by the cruel waves she loved so much. Only one word, one cry from me would have sent strong arms to rescue her at any moment after I saw her danger.

"But I did not move or speak. I saw Gerald Maxwell enter the cave when the tide went out. I saw his face of horror as he hurried to the house for help. I saw the men carry the light hall sofa to the shore and stand it below the cave, while they climbed up and with much hard work lowered the body.

"I saw them bring Ethel to her home for the last time, and still I never moved. I could hear voices calling me, hands shaking my door, but I did not stir. It was night when I staggered down to the library, where Ethel lay, in a dim twilight, upon a long table.

"She was dead and Fairview was mine, and I knelt down and prayed to die too, reviling the hour I was born. All the guests remained for the funeral, and I was pitied and caressed as one utterly overcome by the shock of my cousin's death.

"Gerald was tenderly kind to me as a father to a sick child, but he went away with the others after the funeral.

"A few days later he wrote to me, telling me how deeply he had ever loved me, how he had hoped to make me his wife until this fortune came between us. He was going abroad, he wrote, to conquer his love, if he could, for he would never place himself in the position of a fortune-hunter.

"Every line told me his love. Every line told me this was

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farewell. I was a murderer for his sake, and my punishment was that I lost him for ever.

"I lay all winter praying yet fearing to die, and in the spring I went to Europe. I travelled everywhere, yet ever the sea was calling me back to Fairview. I saw Gerald Maxwell's marriage in a newspaper, and did not die; I could not die, for I was strong and well, and I was afraid to take my own life.

"So the years dragged on and on, and ever the sea was drawing me back to Fairview, until I came here, to live over, day after day, that fatal scene that made me accursed in the sight of Heaven, although no living man or woman has ever suspected me. See!" she cried, standing erect suddenly, "the tide has come now for *me!* See it rise!"

And then for the first time I noticed it, creeping up and up on the slippery shelf of rock that lay between the entrance to the cave and the land. It was already in the cave, and escape over the slippery rocks, under water, was always difficult.

"Go!" Miss Lovering cried; "they have not come for *you!* Go!"

"Not without you!" I screamed, clinging to her; "you must come."

"No; I will never leave the cave again! See! Ethel mocks me—your father is beside her!"

"Oh!" I murmured as the awful truth smote upon me, "she is mad!"

"The tide comes for me," she said, "but not for you!"

She caught my wrists as she spoke, in a strong grasp, so far beyond my power to resist, that I was like a child in her hands. Before I could prevent her, even if I had had the power, she pushed me from the mouth of the cave, and let me fall to the rocks below.

Half stunned, drenched from head to foot, I staggered to my feet, and tried to climb up again, only to slip back every time. I could see her sitting in her old attitude, deaf to my cries, gazing out upon the water, that was already covering her feet.

I could see her sitting in her old attitude.

I ran along the shore, screaming for help, until I came to a group of fishermen, to whom I appealed frantically.

"In yon cave?" one said; "then she's drowned for sure."

"But she is not drowned yet," I cried; "bring a boat and save her."

"There's not a boat could get there, miss. The waves would dash any boat to atoms on them rocks, with the tide coming in."

"Come yourselves, then," I cried; "you shall be paid anything you ask. You can climb up and save her."

"Why didn't she come out?" asked one. "There was time enough afore you could o' run here."

"Oh, please come," I said; "while you are talking, she is drowning."

"Who is it?" asked one.

"Miss Lovering, of Fairview."

"Eh! The madwoman?"

"She is not mad!"

"Well, they do be saying she is! But she is rich?"

"Yes! yes!" I cried eagerly. "Very, very rich. You will be well paid if you save her."

Greed conquered, and they rose to their feet, five strong fishermen, whose bare, muscular arms and legs gave me fresh courage. I sped along ahead of them, my wet garments hampering me, but nerved by a new hope.

When the cave came in sight, I dropped like a stone to the ground. The whole entrance was under water!

"Don't take on so," one of the men said, not unkindly; "she could have got out, and she's but a poor crazy body. Everybody down to the harbour knows she's been crazy for years. Don't take on, now. We'll get her out for you as soon as the tide goes out, if you will go up to the house and wait."

But I would not stir. It seemed to be years before the tide turned, and crept out slowly, slowly, until a white rigid face, with staring eyes, could be seen above the waters; crept down, slowly, slowly, until I could see the still, motionless figure, as I had left it, looking out upon the hungry waves.

They said afterwards she must have died of heart-disease before the waves reached her face, or the death struggle would have thrown her from her seat. I cannot tell! I only know how we found her, rigid and motionless, as I had seen her sitting for hours through the long summer, only that the weary heart had ceased to throb, the sin-shadowed life was ended.

S. A. Sheilds.

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His Former Friends.

Should a Man Drop All His Old Chums When He Becomes Engaged?

"Congratulations, old chap, and all the rest of it!"

"Thanks, Jack, I hope to say the same to you soon."

"Not much, you won't catch me getting tied up, at least not for a few years at any rate."

The speakers were Sidney Weston and Jack Carthropp. The former had become engaged only a day previously.

"I suppose we sha'n't see you at all now, Sid?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't suppose Ethel will want me every evening; I'm sure to have one or two evenings free for a game of bridge or a cycle ride."

"Good! Then you won't be altogether beyond the pale."

So time went on, but Sidney Weston only very occasionally met his erstwhile chums. Before he was engaged he had been one of a faithful band of four. Very often they would go away for week-ends; they went together to almost every play in the London theatres that was well spoken of, and generally had dinner together before. Two of the four lived in "diggings," and very often they would give a bridge or a whist party continuing until early in the morning.

Then Sydney Weston met Ethel Thornleigh and fell in love with her. His outings with the other men grew less frequent, and to finish it all he became engaged.

The other three congratulated him, but secretly thought it was a very silly thing to do. Whenever they had a love affair it only lasted two or three weeks, and this they pointed out to Weston, and suggested that he should do the same. He laughed and told them they did not know what love meant.

On his way home from the station one evening, Weston met Jack Carthropp.

"By the way, Sid," said the latter after the usual commonplaces, "I was going to look you up to-night. I want you to come round to my rooms to-morrow night and make a fourth at bridge. Miss Thornleigh will spare you for one evening, won't she?"

"I don't much expect I shall be seeing her to-morrow night, she's going with her mother somewhere. So I'll come round."

"Don't forget, then, eight o'clock," were Jack Carthropp's parting words.

Later on that evening Sidney Weston met his *fiancée* as usual. They were walking slowly along in that apparently aimless manner peculiar to lovers.

"I'm going round to Jack Carthropp's place to play bridge to-morrow night, Ethel."

"Why, you're always going there."

"My dear girl, I've been twice since we have been engaged. Besides, you know I sha'n't be seeing you to-morrow night, you had already arranged that."

"I suppose you are only too glad to avail yourself of an opportunity of a change from my society," rejoined Ethel in a pettish tone. Any mention of Weston's former chums was to her like a red rag is supposed to be to a bull.

"Why can't you stay at home when you're not seeing me? I don't rush off and see people immediately, supposing you don't happen to be coming round," she went on.

"Well, dear, surely there's no harm in my going round to play bridge at Carthropp's place. What can I do if I stay at home?"

"You can read. I don't know why you do not take up some hobby to employ your spare time."

"But when I come home," replied Sid, "I want enjoyment. And if I can't see you, I take what else I can, and that happens to be my male friends."

"I suppose that is how it will be when we are married. I sha'n't be sufficient, you'll always be wanting those nasty fellows in, or else going out with them and leaving me alone."

"Why, Ethel, how can you say such things? You know you come first in all my thoughts. You know I'd sooner be with you than with any one else. It's only when I can't see you that I meet my old chums. And you know how occasionally that is."

The end of it was that Sid went home with a heavy heart, and a feeling that Ethel was very unreasonable. Whilst Miss Thornleigh cried herself to sleep in the belief that she did not occupy the whole of Sidney's heart.

"I'm having a few of the fellows in to dinner next week, Ethel," said Weston some few nights after.

"Are you?" was the not very gracious reply.

"Yes, dear. You know I promised before I was engaged that I'd give a dinner to the fellows when I got my promotion, so I'll do it next week and get it over."

"Will there only be men there?"

"Yes, it will only be an informal affair. The mater has promised to see that there's a good spread, though."

"I think you ought to say that as you're engaged you cannot have the dinner now."

"Why, Ethel?" cried Sidney in surprised tones. "What ever for? I promised it, and I cannot break my word. 'Twill be the last I shall ever have of the sort, surely there's no harm in it?"

"Why can't you have girls? I don't like being left out in the cold."

"But don't you see, dear? I promised this before I hardly knew you, just for the fellows, and I cannot back out of it now."

"It's always the same, you and those wretched men friends. You always put them before me."

"My dear girl, I don't. You are always first in my thoughts, and, knowing how much I care for you, I wonder how you can say such things to me."

"I think you ought to put them off," said Ethel in a persistent manner.

"But, Ethel, I cannot break my word."

There was no reply.

"You see, if I'd known you before, I should not have made such an arrangement."

This sort of conversation occurred almost every evening until the night of the dinner came round. On the evening previous to it, Ethel worked herself into quite a fever heat over it.

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself to-morrow night," she said in a cold, hard manner.

"Ethel, are you going to be nice at all about it? You know you've made me sorry I ever made any arrangement for the dinner at all, and I shall not enjoy it anything like I should have done."

"Yes you will, you'll forget all about me with your men friends, and enjoy yourself as much as possible."

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"How can you be so cruel, Ethel?"

"How can *I* be cruel?" she repeated.

"Yes, you."

"But I'm not, it's you that are cruel. I don't know why you became engaged to me when you prefer the society of your men friends."

"Why will you harp on that subject, Ethel, when you know I'd sooner have you with me than anyone else on earth? It's only when I can't have you that I see other men. You see, you haven't any particular chums, so you can't see things in the same light as I do."

"It's a good thing I haven't," she replied. "For if I went out like you do we should never see each other."

"Like I do?" he repeated. "During the three months we have been engaged I have spent three nights in the society of the fellows."

"But you wanted to spend more, two or three times you suggested going to the theatre with them."

"But that was some evening when I was not seeing you."

"If you want to go to the theatre, why cannot we go together?"

"You know you are not particularly fond of it, and very likely you wouldn't have gone. At any rate, I did not go when I saw you did not like the idea of my going out without you."

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself to-morrow evening."

"I shall try to by not thinking of you if I can help it," was his bitter reply.

"I expect that will be very easy when you're with those fellows," was her equally bitter retort.

"Oh, why are you so like this, Ethel? You do so misunderstand me."

"Do I?"

"Yes; knowing how much I love you to think that I put others before you."

There was no reply. The couple were now outside Ethel Thornleigh's home. She turned to go in.

"Good-night, Sidney." Then she shut the gate.

He gazed at her in sad surprise, she had never left him like this before. Slowly he turned and walked away. Suddenly there was a rustle of skirts and the patter of running feet.

"Oh, Sidney, I can't let you go like this!" her voice cried in his ear. Then he turned and caught her in his arms, and there was no heartache that night.

So the night of the dinner went by, and for some little time all was clear sailing again.

"Sidney, I'm going down to Mabel Horton's for the week-end next week. She's home for the holidays and has written asking me to spend the week-end there. I always go once a year, you know."

"All right, dear," cheerfully responded Sidney. "Still, I'll see you don't go when you are Mrs. Weston."

"You silly old dear, I sha'n't want to then. I'd sooner you came with me now, but you know they cannot put you up as they have only one spare room."

"That's all right, Ethel. You enjoy yourself, I don't mind."

It was three nights after this that Sidney Weston was with Ethel Thornleigh, and in a gleeful tone exclaimed:

"What luck, dear! You know you'll be away next week-end?"

"Yes."

"Well, the fellows are going to Hastings for the week-end, so I shall be able to join them."

"Do you mean you'll go to Hastings with them?"

"Yes, dear."

"I thought that's how it would be! Directly there's an opportunity of rushing about with those fellows, off you go."

"But why shouldn't I, Ethel? You'll be away and enjoying yourself."

"Why cannot you stop at home for once?"

"Great Scott, Ethel! I'm always at home. Ever so much more than I used to be."

"It makes me wonder how things will be when we are married. You won't be content to stay at home and take things easy, and go in for quiet amusements. You'll want to be running about all over the place, that's how it will be."

"You don't understand, Ethel, or else you won't, that when I've got you I shall want nothing else besides. I sha'n't want any men friends or that sort of thing when we are married and I can have you always. And as to going about without you, why, I shouldn't think of such a thing. I should always want to be with you as much as possible."

At any rate both went away to their separate rendezvous, and they managed to enjoy themselves. Though the same thought, that they would have enjoyed themselves more together, occurred to each.

The short absence brought a great longing for reunion, and in consequence they were too much taken up with each other to quarrel about the week-end subject again.

"I'm going to meet Dolly Hewett next Friday, Sid. So I sha'n't be seeing you," announced Ethel one evening.

"All right, old girl," was Sidney's response, "I'll clean my bike that evening; it can do with it."

Next week Ethel stated she was seeing Dolly Hewett both on Tuesday and Friday. Sidney Weston was somewhat surprised, but still he good-naturedly raised no objection.

The week after she announced that she had asked Dolly Hewett to go shopping up West with her on Saturday. Now Saturday was always kept most religiously to themselve In consequence Weston was somewhat annoyed.

"That's a little rough on me, isn't it, Ethel?"

"But I've promised Dolly Hewett."

"Hang Dolly Hewett!" growled Weston.

"Don't say 'Hang Dolly Hewett,' Sid, it's not nice."

"Well, I'd like to do something to get her out of the way," he grimly replied.

"Why should you be so hard on her, Sidney?"

"Well, why should she interfere between you and me?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, as you allowed your friends to interfere between you and me."

"But they didn't; you know I always saw them on evenings when you could not see me."

"Still, you knew I disliked your going with them. But, Sid, do you mind much about my going out with Dolly Hewett?"

"Oh, no," he retorted bitterly. "If you'd sooner go with her than with me, do so by all means."

"Oh, Sid!" she cried, and then the tears came into her eyes. In a second he was by her side.

"My dear," he whispered, as he held her in his arms, "I did not mean it; you know I want you with me always."

"Then I won't go with her, Sid, if you do not like it," and she smiled through her tears.

"And I'll give up going with the fellows," he cried.

"But sometimes," she said with a smile, when her lips were free, "I'll set the prisoner at liberty for a time and give him permission to go out, won't that be good of me?"

"Yes, dear. But the only real way will be to see each other every evening except under very special circumstances."

And that, after all, seemed the best way out of the difficulty. Therefore, young man and young maiden, take this to heart, and when you become engaged don't have any chums, they are apt to cause jealousy, and jealousy generally leads to quarrels.

Wenton.

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

THE FIRST SIX EPISODES.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d.

This sum meant a great deal to me, and I wondered how I was ever to pay it. I made friends with Mr. Taskot, and learnt from him that I was supposed to be an heiress. When I told him how matters really stood he promised to help me.

We met the following morning, Sunday, before breakfast at the spot where we had previously encountered one another. Mr. Taskot told me that I had only been asked to Vernon Towers that my friends, as I thought them, might fleece me. He promised to lend me the £11 7s. 10d., and we fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Grainger, on her way to early service at church, saw us together. I then knew that I should hear more of the meeting.

In the afternoon, while the other members of the party occupied themselves with cards, I went for a walk, during which I was rescued from a mad dog by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who gave vent to an expression almost of surprise when he learnt where I was staying.

On the Monday I sat down to the card-table with delight, looking forward to having my revenge.

To my horror, however, at the end of a most successful game for me, I discovered that my signals had been suspected and Mr. Vernon had succeeded in taking snapshots of all the signs my partner and I had made to each other.

EPISODE NINE.

Some Terrible Alternatives.

"Come, Miss Beresford, you have been allowed ample time to lament the failure of your plot, and I now await your attention."

At these words, spoken in a cold, sarcastic tone by Harry Vernon, I was stung into something like recovered self-possession, and, hurriedly dashing the futile tears from my cheeks, I stood up to face my denouncers, knowing full well that I need expect neither pity nor mercy from them.

"As you please," I said, in an almost inaudible voice. "I am ready to listen."

"And to *heed*," added Annabel. "Otherwise, you will live in Queer Street for the rest of your life."

"Look here, darling, let me manage this business now. I think I know better how to deal with our treacherous guest than you do, and I would prefer not to risk such interference as your tender little heart might dictate."

So said my host, and I could almost have laughed at the idea of Annabel Vernon being accused of possessing too tender a heart to deal with a lonely girl whom her own evil trickery had stung into reprisals. But I was in too terrible a position to pay lengthened attention to anything but my own woes, and I hardly realised the full sting of her answer until afterwards.

"Poor boy," she cooed, kissing her husband with an affectation of innocence which was in ghastly contrast to her black nature. Poor, dear boy! What a shame it is to have such ingratitude displayed towards you, after trying your best to make other people happy. Never mind. However badly other people may behave, we have each other, eh?"

"Oh, what a hypocrite!" I thought, clenching my hands still tighter together, in the tremendous effort that was required to enable me to retain a comparatively calm demeanour. "How dare she pretend to have been trying to make me happy!"

Mr. Vernon smiled affectionately at his wife as she passed out of the room, leaving him to "deal with their treacherous guest," upon whom he now bent a look as hard as adamant.

"Don't let me keep you standing," he said, with a mock politeness which contrasted forcibly with his determined manner. "I should be sorry to cause you unnecessary fatigue."

I was shaking so much that I was glad to sit down, and I am afraid the true inwardness of the case did nothing to mitigate my sense of guilt or of coming disaster. Mr. Taskot's specious reasonings lost all their fatal glamour, and I felt that nobody would believe the excuses which previously seemed so convincing.

"A curious little series, isn't it?" observed Mr. Vernon, sitting down near me, and manipulating the tell-tale photographs in such a way as to bring each one, in turn, under my notice. "When these are reproduced in various papers, accompanied by the story of their origin, I fancy they will make a great sensation. 'Country House Scandal. Lady guest cheats at cards. Plot to swindle the host and hostess.' What fine headlines these will make! And what a reception Miss Beresford will meet with when she tries to mix with her old associates as a respectable person! Quite interesting, isn't it?"

Goaded to speech by these cowardly words, I made a vain effort to regain the position my nervelessness had lost me.

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"You forget," I said, "that there is another side of the story. How about the cards which I saw Mrs. Vernon put up her sleeve?"

"Yes, I just thought you would try that sort of a dodge on! Happily, nobody is likely to believe a wild tale, concocted after detection, by a person whose own misdeeds are proved beyond possibility of denial."

These dreadful words turned me absolutely sick with horror, for, though they were so wide of the truth, I knew very well that the man who spoke them was right in his opinion, that whatever I said against the Vernons now would be construed into a feeble and vile attempt to put the guilt on to the wrong shoulders.

"You don't answer me," he continued. "That means that you have not a word to say in excuse of your ungrateful conduct, and that you see no reason why we should not denounce you to the police as a swindling adventuress."

"For Heaven's sake, don't do that!" I gasped. "I couldn't live under the disgrace."

"I see nothing else for it, unless——"

"Unless what? Unless what?"

"Unless you pursue your recent tactics with more caution."

"I shall never adopt them again! The lesson they have given me will suffice for all time."

"A lesson in caution—yes. But your little device for winning other people's money is too valuable to be allowed to drop. You have shown yourself very clever in your own interests. You must now display equal cleverness in ours."

"I do not understand you."

"Yet it is not difficult to grasp my meaning. Instead of playing with Mr. Taskot for your partner, you will henceforth prove useful to my wife and me. So I give you your choice. Either you will repay us for our trouble and forbearance by winning for us, or you will go to prison. You can please yourself which you do. But there is no doubt as to the course that will prove least disastrous to you."

"I am going home. I do not want to touch a card again."

"That is a great pity, Miss Beresford, for you are not going home, and you will have to touch hundreds of cards before we have done with you, unless you choose the alternative penalties of ruin, exposure, prison, and perpetual disgrace."

"But even if you compel me to accede to your terms, there is still Mr. Taskot. He knows everything."

"But he will keep the knowledge to himself, for his own sake. He is even less able to afford disgrace than you are, for he is a well-known personage in society, so he has chosen the wiser course. He has agreed to pay a sum down as indemnity; to leave Vernon Towers at once; and to keep a still tongue in his head for ever, if you agree to do likewise."

I do not seek to excuse myself for not having the moral power to defy Harry Vernon, and take the threatened consequences of my previous folly. But I never had quite my share of courage, and I was terrified into submission by the prospect of evils which I dared not face. I was also vaguely hopeful of some unexpected way out of my difficulty, and, seeking to stave off disaster, I tearfully consented to do whatever the Vernons commanded me to do.

"You agree to my terms?" demanded Mr. Vernon.

And my answer, low spoken though it was, satisfied him.

"I must!" were the words I quivered. "I have no help for it."

EPISODE TEN.

I Make a Desperate Resolve.

Mr. Taskot must have left The Towers immediately after his interview with Mr. Dean Fisher, for he did not make his appearance at dinner, and we were informed, with many expressed regrets, that "dear Mr. Taskot" had had a telegram, which had compelled him to rush off to catch the first train up to town, without having time to say good-bye to anybody.

"Happily," continued Annabel, "we have persuaded Olive to stay on for a while. She is her own mistress, so we are not interfering with anybody else's comfort by having her here, and I'm sure I hope she'll stop with us for many a week. It's so nice to have a girl friend in the house."

To this deceitful speech I gave no answer, but, mindful of certain lessons which had been impressed upon me, I did nothing to betray its true value. Nor did I offer any contradiction when my former school friend went on to say that she must insist on my taking more fresh air and outdoor exercise than I had done during the last few days, to dispel the nasty headache which late hours seemed to have brought on.

Mrs. Grainger was already making preparations for departure, and when Annabel suggested that she also should prolong her visit, the negative answer was so emphatic that I concluded the poor lady had lost a great deal more money than she liked.

But, before leaving, she gave me a very cordial invitation to visit her after I left Vernon Towers, and I promised to do so.

That same evening, the Bainbrigs and a couple of friends of theirs came in for a game at Bridge. The strangers were brothers, named Garford, who were made very welcome when it transpired that they were fairly wealthy.

"How nice of you to make our party up into two sets," smiled Annabel to Miss Bainbrig, who replied: "To tell the truth, we wanted another rubber. But the boys haven't played yet, although they want to learn, so we thought they couldn't do better than learn from somebody with more experience of Bridge than we have."

"That makes five novices in the party," mused Annabel, "so we don't quite know how to parcel ourselves out. The best way will be to cut for partners."

Everybody agreed to this, and I had a wild hope that my punishment was to be staved off for the present. But my hope was soon belied, for Harry Vernon and I were cast as partners, and though I felt sure that this result had been obtained by trickery, I could not help myself. Our opponents were Mr. Bainbrig and one of the Garfords, and I sat down to the table with such a feeling of despair at the idea of deliberately cheating people who had never injured me, that there was actual truth in my sudden plea of illness.

"Oh, I cannot play!" I faltered, letting my hands fall nervelessly into my lap. "I—I feel so ill."

"Ill!" exclaimed Annabel, from the other table. "There, what a forgetful little wretch I am! I promised you a splendid cure for your kind of complaint, and I had forgotten all about it. Harry, do you mind fetching it? It is in the third left-hand drawer of your bureau, where you locked it, to be safe until I asked you for it."

Harry rose from his seat with a show of alacrity, and nobody but myself understood the meaning of the searching

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look he bent upon my face. Neither did they guess that Annabel's words veiled a dreadful threat.

But they were not obscure to me. For it was in the third left-hand drawer of the bureau in Harry's "den" that the fatal photographs had been locked, and as I dared not risk their production, I made a desperate attempt to recover myself.

"No, don't trouble to fetch the medicine," I stammered. "I am nearly well again, and I would not take it if you fetched it."

"But you might have a relapse," suggested Mr. Vernon, who with difficulty repressed the smile which his knowledge of fresh victory evoked.

"It was only a passing faintness, and 'relapse' is too strong a word to use."

My host was now sure that he had quelled my feeble attempt at rebellion. But he had no mind to trust to a partner whose nerves were all ashake, so he solicitously fetched me a glass of champagne, and his outward manner was kindness itself as he whispered: "There, Miss Beresford, I daresay this will prove more agreeable than the medicine Annabel believes in."

I drank the wine, and having satisfied the guests that my indisposition had really been only a passing one, I lifted the cards dealt out to me. I was dummy this time, so had nothing to do, and before my right-hand opponent had become the dealer, I was possessed by the glamour of the game we had started.

Nevertheless, I failed to give the required signals, and my heart quaked when, it being now my turn to deal, I caught the threatening look bent upon me by my partner.

"You still look very shaky," he murmured significantly. "Don't you think I had better fetch Annabel's remedy?"

After that I became desperate, and Mr. Vernon had no cause to accuse his partner of lack of *rapport*. We played far into the night, and when I went to bed I was the sharer in a large sum of money won from our unsuspecting opponents.

The attractions of the game itself, and the excitement of making big scores, together with the knowledge of what lay in store for me if I refused to obey orders, were all conducive to the temporary lulling of my conscience, and my laughter rang out more than once clearly enough to provoke a swift glance of intelligence between the rapacious couple into whose toils I had fallen

But, once in my own room, influenced by neither the glamour of play nor the threats of exposure, I threw myself on the bed, and wept a heartbroken requiem to my own self-respect.

"You are a deliberate cheat!" I told myself. "You could find excuses for retaliating upon the people who only brought you here to swindle you out of the money they thought you possessed. But what excuse have you for helping to cheat honourable persons who have never done you any wrong?"

So spoke the voice of Conscience. But the voice of Fear interposed.

"You dare not face exposure," it said. "And you know very well that you are in a trap from which your captors will only allow you to escape after you have served their purpose. Dare to defy them, or refuse to do their bidding, and you are lost for ever."

Then came Desperation to advise me.

"Are you sure," it said, "that there is no way of escape? Are you going to resign yourself to a life of constant fear and ignominy? And do you forget that even after you have helped these people to rob others of their fortunes, they will still hold those photographs as a weapon of terror over you?"

Ah! That was where the worst sting came in! It was not a case of speedy liberation from thraldom, but of more abject plunging into slavery. Why, then, should I not make an effort to free myself from the power of my cruel enemies?

"The third left-hand drawer of the bureau."

Was it quite inaccessible to me? And was it quite beyond the bounds of possibility for me to abstract and destroy the proofs of my former folly?

Anxious deliberation convinced me that my position, even in the case of detection in the attempt, could not be much worse than it was. If I failed, and if the Vernons guessed that I had tried to free myself from their power, they could but impose weightier penalties upon me, and as I knew by this time that they subordinated everything to their greed, I did not think that they would utterly destroy the goose through whose agency they hoped to gather so many golden eggs.

"Yes, I will risk it!" I determined at last. "I will wait until three o'clock. Everybody is sure to be in bed and asleep by that time. Then I will try to secure the photographs, and, if I succeed, I will leave Vernon Towers to-morrow."

EPISODE ELEVEN.

The Third Left-Hand Drawer of the Bureau.

I wonder how a burglar, not yet accustomed to his work, feels? I am sure his first experience in his chosen profession must be a terrifying one. But it cannot be half so trying as was my midnight adventure at Vernon Towers. The burglar, whatever may be the privations that drive him originally into theft, deliberately selects the locale of his operations, and no doubt weighs up very carefully the respective attractions of several dwellings.

But to me, whose task was equally dangerous and underhand, there was no choice of venue, and I would almost have given my life to be free from the necessity of doing that which stress of circumstances was now compelling me to do. Yet it was my only hope, and I made my preparations with a caution born of the most desperate anxiety to rid myself of a deadly incubus.

Carefully selecting my apparel, I prepared myself to avoid all unnecessary risks of detection. My dark tea-gown was lined with nun's-veiling, and would not give the slightest rustle. Neither would my bedroom slippers betray me, and there was no fear that I should make more noise than I could help.

I had noticed the kind of key used by Mr. Vernon when he locked the drawer of the bureau, and fancied that it was rather like one that figured on my own bunch. But, though I took the precaution of carrying my own keys with me, I had little hope that they would prove useful. Failing a key to fit the lock, I meant to prise the drawer open, provided I could find a suitable implement to do it with.

"I shall of course remove nothing but the photographs of me which were taken without my permission," I argued, "But their removal will at once inform the Vernons who it is that has tampered with the bureau. The question is—Will they make a fuss? Or will they understand the danger of provoking me to explain that they compelled me to cheat

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for them, under threat of exposure? The very fact that they played with me after taking those snap-shots ought to show that they were ready to condone whatever I did, so long as they were able to make an ultimate profit by it. Anyhow, I can only save myself by fighting my enemies in the dark."

To reach Mr. Vernon's little sanctum, it was necessary to pass several bedrooms, and I quaked a good deal as I did so. But I passed down to the first floor without being apparently either seen or heard, and was thankful to find that the door of the room was not locked. Hastily turning the door handle I passed in, shutting myself up with little fear now of being interrupted at my work, even though I turned up the electric light.

Greatly to my dismay, the flap of the bureau was locked, and I had thus two difficulties to overcome instead of one. The piece of furniture was quite of modern make, and its lock was not particularly complicated. But my keys proved quite useless to serve my purpose, and I looked round for something powerful enough to force the flap open. A strong steel paper-knife lay on the mantelpiece, and I eagerly seized it.

Gliding back to the bureau, I was inserting the knife beneath the flap, when I heard that which made my heart almost stop beating. There was a noise in the corridor outside, as of swiftly advancing footsteps, and I looked wildly round for a possible hiding place. To turn down the light was the work of a second, and to squeeze myself behind a huge easy-chair did not take a minute.

But I had barely done so much when the door was hurriedly opened, and my horror can be imagined when I realised that both Harry and Annabel Vernon had followed me!

If the light had been seen shining under the door I was lost, even if I had not been already suspected of being here, and I positively quivered with dread of what the near future had in store for me.

With what relief therefore did I gather that this nocturnal visit to Harry Vernon's den had nothing to do with the fact that I was there first. Probably the door was too well made to allow a chink of light to shine through, and I was glad that my operations had not gone far enough to betray my presence.

The lock of the bureau was as its owners had left it. The keys with which I had tried to open it were in my pocket. And it was hardly likely that either husband or wife would notice that the paper knife was not on the mantelpiece still. If only they did not look behind the chair, I was saved!

"A most stupid thing to do," observed Annabel. "But it is not too late to prevent mischief."

"I don't know that it was stupid," contradicted Harry. "In fact, I think it was exceedingly clever of you to mention the exact place in which she saw 'the medicine' deposited. Anyhow it gave her a fright, and instantly brought her to reason."

"Yes, but if I had not remembered about it, our plans might have been upset. The girl is not so simple as she looks, and I believe he quite capable of trying to ruin our beautiful little scheme by abstracting the photographs."

"So do I. But we are rather too clever for her. If she does attempt to take the proofs out of the third left-hand drawer of the bureau, she will find her trouble wasted. I'll slip them behind the overmantel. Nobody would dream of looking there for them, and I'll duplicate them to-morrow. We shall then be secure against accidents."

The next two minutes were about the most anxious ones of my life. Everything now depended upon which side of the overmantel Harry Vernon selected as a hiding place. If he came to the side on which I was hidden, all hope of rescue was at an end for me, and I should be in his evil power as long as he chose to exercise it.

With my heart beating almost to suffocation, I listened and quaked while the bureau was denuded of its fatal proofs, and while these were transferred to the back of the overmantel. And with what thankfulness did I observe that the opposite side of the fireplace afforded a readier means of access than the one which sheltered me!

(Another instalment next week.)

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

I have received the following letter from a married lady reader of Short Stories:

"*Dear Sir,—A short time ago in your paper,* Short Stories, *there was a love problem, entitled, "A Matter of Course; or, Should a Husband be a Complacent Person?" and I want, through your paper, to thank the author of that story for a deal of happiness it has brought me. We have been married three years, and I have one of the best of husbands in every possible way, only in the one thing he was exactly like the husband in that tale, and therefore unknowingly caused me many an unhappy hour, the reason being that he did not understand how much those little words 'I love you,' mean to a woman, be she either wife or sweetheart.*

"*I never had the strength of will to try to give him the lesson the wife in the tale did, and instead of us drawing closer together, I expect I should have grown in time heartily tired of it all, and we would have gradually drifted apart. But now all is altered, we are really the happiest couple in the kingdom, for one day he took that paper away with him, read the tale, and wrote asking me if that was really how I felt over the matter, and, if so, that in future everything would be different, for, 'like the man in the tale,' he had always cared ever such a lot for me, but did not think it necessary to simply tell me so. He thought I ought to know, and for three long years I was often very unhappy and never cared to tell him why. My husband asked me to write and give both our heartiest thanks to the author for the happy chance that caused him to write, and us to read, 'A Matter of Course.'—Yours gratefully,*

"A Very Happy Wife."

[I am delighted to hear that at least one married couple have benefited by reading a story in Short Stories. Do any other readers know of similar experiences?]

I would take this opportunity of reminding competitors in First Juggled Letters competition that all attempts must reach this office not later than by first post on Thursday this week, August 27th, and I would again draw your attention to the sentence in last week's "Your Editor Chats," which reads: "The attempts of competitors who do not address their envelopes correctly are liable to be disqualified." The proper way to address the envelope containing your attempts is: The Editor, Short Stories, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., with the words "Juggled Letters" in the top left-hand corner.

I have been glad to learn from the many letters received that both the new series and new serial are popular, and I expect that as further instalments of "The Bridge of Ruin" are published general surprise at the revelations will be expressed. Anyone who has not already started to read them should do so at once; they will be sorry to have missed any of the incidents that appear each week.

Though the summer is drawing to a close it is not yet too late for contributions to the Fresh Air Fund to be sent, and I would ask all those who have not already forwarded a donation to remember that in the heart of our big cities there are thousands of small children pining for a breath of pure, fresh air. To these children the boon of a whole day in the country is inestimable. With the sum of ninepence, laid out by the Fresh Air Fund, one child can have this coveted boon. Wouldn't you like to feel that you had helped to make one little life happier?

All contributions should be sent to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly.*

Your Editor.

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The Conversion of Colonel Crackenthorpe.

Telling of How a Cycling Picnic Started the Wedding Bells Ringing.

"*The Secretary of the Witheram Cycling Club presents his compliments to Col. Crackenthorpe, and wishes to know whether he would be so very kind as to accord to the Members of the Club permission to pass through his grounds on the afternoon of the 27th inst., and to visit the ruins of Crackenthorpe Abbey. The Secretary would undertake to promise that no damage or injury of any kind shall be done to the ruins by any member of the club.*"

"What infernal impudence!" cried the Colonel, after reading the above epistle at the breakfast-table. "As if I were likely to allow a whole lot of tag, rag, and bob-tail on cycles to come into the park. The Secretary of the Witheram Cycling Club indeed. I like his impudence! What's the fellow's name? Ah! here it is—Mr. Arthur K. Brandon. Now who on earth is Mr. Arthur K. Brandon?"

"Brandon!" cried Lucille, the eldest girl. "Why, Connie, wasn't that the name of the man you met when you were staying with the Hampdens'?"

"Just look at Connie's face, it's nearly as red as Aunt Clara's cap-ribbons!" began Madge, the irrepressible, and only very vigorous treatment from Lucille under the table, stopped that young damsel's further remarks before their father's attention was aroused.

"Yes," said Connie calmly, though a little tell-tale colour had certainly risen in her face when the name was mentioned. "He was a great friend of the Hampdens, and Witheram is not far from their place."

"Well, *I* don't know the man from Adam," cried the Colonel, "and I call it great cheek on his part to write to me. Why, I should have a lot of these tiresome cyclists careering madly about in my grounds I don't know. It's bad enough to meet them suddenly in the roads."

Colonel Crackenthorpe was one of the few remaining bigoted opponents of the wheel. When the craze first set in among the fashionable world, he had set his face rigorously against it, and had forbidden his daughters to learn. A good many fathers of families in the neighbourhood had started with the same idea, but by degrees all had given in to the force of circumstances, except the Colonel, who prided himself on his consistency; and though his daughters might sigh with envy when their friends described the delights of a glorious spin, he remained firm in his determination.

"Our ruins, of course, are one of the most interesting sights of the county, and one can hardly wonder at people wanting to see them," put in Lucille, who was a clever girl, and knew her father's weak points.

But an unexpected and quite unintentional ally sprang up in the shape of Aunt Clara.

"Of course you will refuse," said that lady, in her decided, dogmatic way, "you can easily write and say that you dislike to have your privacy invaded by a number of strangers."

Now, though Colonel Crackenthorpe hated cyclists, there was something he hated with a yet more bitter hatred, and that was the sister-in-law who was at present honouring him with a visit.

Nothing rubbed him so severely the wrong way as the manner in which she invariably tried to settle all his affairs for him, and no arguments in favour of the Secretary's request would have been of so much avail as Aunt Clara's opposition.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he said testily. "As Lucille says, the ruins are one of the sights of the county, and the possession of them entails a sort of public duty. So long as this secretary man can guarantee that they won't go and cut their names on the old trees, or do any of the other idiotic things tourists are given to, I don't mind their coming for once in a way. Connie"—turning to his second daughter—"you can write him a civil note from me and say I consent to their coming."

"Well, I am surprised at you, George," said Aunt Clara, "but surely you will at least impose some restrictions upon them, tell them what part of the ground they may go through, and at what hour the place must be clear of them."

"Nonsense, my dear Clara. If I do a thing at all, I like to do it properly. Tell them to let me know how many are coming, and some refreshments shall be provided for them in the old refectory. I dare say there may be some among them who will be interested in the historical associations of the place."

The girls looked at one another in open-eyed astonishment, and Madge, who was still in the short frock stage of girlhood, clapped her hands and cried out: "What fun! And may we go and see them feed?"

"Madge!" cried her aunt, raising her hands in horror. "How can you dream of such a thing? I think we had better all go out for the day, or shut ourselves up in our rooms."

"There will be no occasion to do that," said the Colonel stiffly, "the cyclists will not come near the house, and if I think fit to take my daughters to see our guests—mind, I do not say I will—but *if* I think fit, I shall certainly do so."

It dawned at last upon Aunt Clara that her interposition had quite a contrary effect from what she intended, so she turned the conversation into another channel, and no more was said upon the subject of the Witheram Cycling Club, which, however, did not drop so speedily out of the mind of one member of the party.

Connie Crackenthorpe had not forgotten the delightful talks she had with the young lawyer she had met when staying at the Hampdens, nor the earnest hope he had expressed that they might meet again soon; a hope that seemed little likely of fulfilment, since Witheram was in the next county, twenty miles from Crackenthorpe Abbey, and the Hampdens only invited her to visit them once a year.

The thought arose in her mind that the eagerness of the Witheram Cycling Club to behold the Crackenthorpe ruins might be prompted by the desire of its secretary to see her, and though she chid herself for the preposterous idea, it still lay under the surface of her thoughts, gladdening her unconsciously, as a hidden warmer under-current enlivens the waters of a stream.

The Witheram Cycling Club were fortunate in their weather when the day fixed for their trip to Crackenthorpe Abbey arrived—a day after a cyclist's own heart, bright, yet fresh and cool.

Arthur Brandon congratulated himself on the success of his bold step in writing to Colonel Crackenthorpe, for he had done it with very little hope of a favourable reply, knowing from report that gentleman's obstinate dislike of the gentle wheel.

He put it down in his heart to the persuasions of the Colonel's fair daughter, not being behind the scenes as the reader is; and the thought that perhaps she too might rejoice at

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this opportunity of meeting again, lent wings to his feet, so that in the exuberance of his joy he was very nearly being "run in" for scorching on the public high road.

The run to Crackenthorpe passed off without any special incident, and hot and thirsty as the riders were, when they reached the Abbey, the sight of the cold collation spread under the shade of the moss-grown walls was exceedingly welcome.

The Colonel had almost forgotten his idea of going to see his guests, when a chance word from his sister-in-law fanned into flame his love of opposition.

"I'll just go and have a look at them," he said. "Lucille, you come with me."

"Oh, father, I promised to go over and practise archery with Mabel Turnbull," said Lucille, who was as good-natured as she was clever. "Connie might just as well make herself useful for once. She has been mooning about doing nothing all day."

"Well, then Connie, I insist upon your coming," said her father. "I won't listen to any excuses." And Connie went up to put on her hat with dutiful submission—and a heart bounding with delight.

They found the repast in the old refectory on the point of conclusion, and the Colonel, when the "secretary fellow" had been made known to him by his daughter, was much surprised to find him a man of well-bred appearance and perfect manners. "The fellow actually seems to be a gentleman," was his inward comment.

He stepped out swiftly, and caught the bicycle with its wobbling rider.

Pleased with the thorough appreciation of his hospitality shown by the club and by the deference of the secretary, the old gentleman actually condescended to go up and inspect the row of obnoxious machines that reposed against a fence, and to ask a few questions about their peculiarities.

Presently one of the owners, an elderly member of the club, came up to adjust something in his machine, and looked at the Colonel closely. Then he approached him, hat in hand.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but surely you must be Master Harry—leastways that used to be Master Harry at Headon House, where I was under-gardener? Don't you remember Bill Thorpe, sir?"

The Colonel turned and looked at him closely. "Of course I do," he cried, "why, Bill, it was you first taught me to handle a gun."

"Aye, sir, I did," said the other with a grin, "and do you remember that day with Farmer Stockem's rabbits?"

"I should think I did. I believe it was the proudest day of my life. And do you remember the trouble we got into about that hen-pheasant? Why, it's like going back to the old days to see you again!" And the two men rambled on into recollections of boyish sports and scrapes they had enjoyed together.

And then Thorpe explained how he had now settled down as market gardener in the little town of Witheram, and had allowed himself this one day's holiday to enjoy his favourite amusement of cycling. And the Colonel recapitulated briefly the succession of deaths that had resulted in making him, the younger son of a small squire, the owner of the large domain of Crackenthorpe Abbey.

Meanwhile, Arthur Brandon, with a culpable neglect of his duties to the club, had managed to get to the side of Connie Crackenthorpe, and almost unconsciously they found their steps straying from the ruins, which the tourists were inspecting at their leisure, into a moss-carpeted glade, where in the sunshine and the stillness, Arthur Brandon found words in which to pour out his tale of love and longing, his hopes and fears, his own unworthiness of such an inestimable treasure.

As he stood there, stumbling through his broken sentences with the unmistakable ring of true sincerity in his voice, his dark eyes aflame with feeling, and his clear-cut, resolute lips trembling with eagerness, he looked a lover of whom any woman might be proud.

And so Connie seemed to think, for though she kept on saying, "No, it could never be, she was sure her father would never consent," her own views on the subject did not transpire, except in so far as her lover could discern them in the soft flush on her cheek, and the shy, happy glance of her blue eyes, and in the fact that she did not withdraw her hands from his eager clasp.

He was urgent to obtain more definite confirmation of his hopes, when the sound of voices close by startled them. They were standing near a clump of elder bushes, and he hastily drew her behind it as the footsteps came nearer.

Down the path that led through the middle of the glade came her father, accompanied by an elderly man trundling his wheel, and talking to him with a familiarity such as very few could have ventured on with the master of Crackenthorpe Abbey.

"And so you really find this cycling enjoyable?" the Colonel was saying.

"I assure you, sir, it's the next best thing to flying. When you have a gentle incline before you and can slip along it without any exertion, why it's heavenly; and as for the difficulties, they just increase the pleasure as soon as you have mastered 'em. You just have a try here, sir, where

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there's nobody looking. I'll hold you on just at first. Do 'ee now, Master Harry!"

Whether it was that the revival of old associations roused again in the Colonel's bosom the venturesome feelings of boyhood, or that the habit of obeying this mentor and guide in all matters pertaining to sport, insensibly returned to him, it is impossible to say; but the fact remains that he let himself be persuaded to mount the old man's bicycle, and Connie and Brandon held their breath in astonishment as they saw him zig-zagging about the path in the manner common to beginners, upheld by the stalwart arms of the ex-gardener.

Their glances met in irrespressible amusement, but they dared not move or make a sound, lest the Colonel should discover that this utterly unexpected performance on his part was not without spectators.

Bill Thorpe took him on some way and then turned him back again. "That's famous, Master Harry," he cried. "why, you'd learn it in no time," and up and down they went. "Do you know, I left you quite alone that time and you went on all right?"

"Did I really, Bill?" cried the Colonel, delighted—"leave me alone now, and I'll try."

But, alas! this time self-confidence came to grief, and Colonel Crackenthorpe soon measured his length upon the turf.

"A fall or two at first," said his teacher cheerily, "is all in the day's work." And he had the Colonel up and on the machine again before he had realised his disaster.

The lovers dared not issue from the friendly shelter of the elder, but as this arrangement brought them into very close proximity, Arthur Brandon was nothing loth to be thus detained.

A few more turns and the Colonel, emboldened by success, again insisted upon trying alone. This time he made—or rather his wilful wheel made for a tree close by the elder clump, and Arthur Brandon foresaw that a fall among the gnarled roots was almost inevitable.

He stepped out swiftly and caught the bicycle with its wobbling rider, but he had the tact to appear as apologetic aggressor and not as rescuer.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Crackenthorpe," he said. "I must have startled you coming out suddenly like that. I thought that to stop you like this was the only way to prevent a collision in which one of us might have been hurt."

The Colonel dismounted and mopped his brow. He *was* startled at the sudden appearance of Brandon on the scene and of his daughter, who now came forward, calm outwardly, but with inward quaking. He looked at them both scrutinisingly, but there was no trace of a smile on either face, so he concluded they had not seen him until just now.

"I did not know," continued Brandon, "that you were cyclist too, and I am delighted to discover the fact."

"Oh!—er—I can't really call myself a cyclist—*yet*; I was only just trying—in fact, it is the first time I have ever been on in my life."

"Really!" said Brandon, "yet you were riding quite alone when I—so nearly ran into you."

"Yes," said the Colonel complacently, "I think I should learn it pretty quickly if I had any one to help me just at first."

"That you would, sir," remarked Thorpe, "and if I had the time to spare I'd gladly come over and help you."

"If you would allow *me*," said Brandon eagerly, "it would be nothing of a ride for me to come over here and help you, and I should consider it a privilege——"

"Oh! I should not like to take up your time," began the Colonel, but Brandon assured him that he would positively enjoy it, and that it was the only return he could make for the Colonel's princely hospitality to the Witheram Club.

"I am wondering what Aunt Clara will say," suggested Connie, with a mischievous glance at her father.

"You little puss!" said the Colonel, who was in high good humour, "don't you tell her a word about it, till I have mastered it, and then we will take her by surprise."

"Would it suit you if I came next Saturday?" inquired Brandon, determined to strike while the iron was hot.

"Do," said the Colonel, "come over to lunch if you can. The ladies will excuse your bicycling costume, I am sure. And, by-the-way, I must get a machine. What kind would you recommend, Thorpe?"

Thorpe, like every other cyclist, had his favourite make, and waxed eloquent upon its merits, and in the enthusiasm of his new departure, Colonel Crackenthorpe walked off with him eagerly discussing details, and leaving the lovers to follow at their leisure.

But Fate, which had befriended Arthur Brandon so conspicuously hitherto, was determined to prevent his getting quite a satisfactory answer from Connie that day.

He had just got again to the same point in his wooing at which he had been interrupted before, when as they emerged from the glade in suspiciously low converse, they suddenly came face to face with Aunt Clara, who had thought it her duty to come and look after her niece, whose father was so culpably careless as to be capable of letting his daughter talk with these common people who were invading the park on wheels.

Her worst fears were realised when she caught sight of the pair, and she hurried Connie off into the house as quickly as possible.

After dinner that night she took her brother-in-law seriously to task.

"Do you know," she began, with an unconscious imitation of Penley in the *Private Secretary*, "I was quite upset to-day by something I saw. I thought your admitting those strange men into the Park was rather rash, but when I met Connie, actually Connie, coming out of a shrubbery path in earnest conversation with the secretary, if gave me quite a turn. Why, it positively looked as if he had been making love to her."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said the Colonel. "I had been with them myself just before. And even if it had been, the man is a gentleman. Bill Thorpe was telling me about him, a well-connected man, and rising in his profession. Really, Connie might do worse."

Aunt Clara had already fully-formed matrimonial projects in her head for her two elder nieces, and she proceeded to argue and to irritate the old man till he was worked up into a thoroughly bad state of temper, when she left him, declaring that she washed her hands of him and his daughters, who would all come to a bad end if he had his way.

She expatiated to his daughters upon the terrible temper he was in, so that when poor Connie received a summons to the study, she entered it in fear and trembling, not knowing what was before her.

It reassured her a little to see what his occupation had been. Various advertisements of cycles, brakes, saddles, pumps, and other accessories, strewed the table. The Colonel had been poring over a handbook on cycling.

"Tell me, Connie," he said, "this young man who is so anxious to help me in riding—is there—is there anything between you?"

Emboldened by his tone Connie took her courage in both hands. "There is nothing, papa—*yet*, but—but he wants there to be something, only—only it depends upon *you*."

"And what is *your* opinion?"

"My opinion," said Connie, laughing and blushing, and pressing her cheek against her father's arm. "My opinion is—that he will make you an excellent teacher of cycling!"

Her father stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead, pleased with her unwonted caress.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, "we will see. It's not a thing to be decided lightly. I shall have the opportunity now of getting to know the young man."

And so it came to pass that the irrepressible bicycle found its way into Crackenthorpe Abbey, and the Colonel became such an enthusiastic wheelman, that Arthur Brandon gave up the idea he had formed of making his honeymoon journey a cycling trip from the well-founded fear that his father-in-law might insist upon accompanying the bridal pair.

Gilbert Stanhope.

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The Man Milliner.

A Love Story with the Usual Happy Ending.

My father had never brought me up to work. He had always given me an ample allowance and taught me to consider myself his heir.

My mother was long since dead, and when my only sister a few years back had married a wealthy silk merchant, she had received a handsome dowry, and it had always been understood that that represented her share of my father's fortune and that I was to have the rest.

Now, upon our father's death and within a few weeks of my thirtieth birthday, I found myself confronted, for the first time, with the necessity of earning my own living.

My father had died at a moment when he was heavily involved in speculations of which I knew nothing, and the legacy that should have stood between me and the world was practically worthless.

In a few months, by which time his affairs would be finally settled, there might be a small balance to the good for me, but meanwhile my capital and income alike were meagrely represented by a few hundreds still in hand from my half year's allowance.

My father's sudden and unexpected death was in itself sufficient to have unmanned me, for we had always been the best of friends, but the additional blow which had fallen on me in the loss of my prospects roused me to action, and I wearied my brains puzzling how I might best meet the emergency.

I was staying for the time being with my sister, having received a cordial invitation from her and her husband.

None of the many plans they had proposed to me seemed specially adapted to my capacity, and I was sitting in the drawing-room somewhat dismally discussing my future with my sister whilst she pulled to pieces a very elaborate headstructure, which she declared did not suit her in the least though she owned to its being a very expensive creation by Madame Modiste.

"I don't seem to get it right, somehow, Jack," she said despairingly, after half an hour's wrestling with various bits of chiffon, lace and ribbon. "Just leave off talking of the Gold Coast for a minute and bring your great mind to bear on the subject that occupies my attention. You have excellent taste. Now, tell me, dare I add this bit of pink in the front. It was at the side; is it an improvement here. And what about these flowers? Don't you think a feather is perhaps more becoming to my style of beauty?"

Cis is very pretty; at least I am very fond of her, and I admire her awfully, so I collected my wits and told her to put on the hat.

She did so.

"You're right; it's all wrong for you," I said critically. "It doesn't want pink at all; anyway that's much too deep a colour for you. And you ought to pull down the brim in front a little more. And I tell you what, just take out those flowers and if you've got a feather I'll stick it in for you scientifically just where it wants to go."

Cis jumped up. "I'll fetch you a feather. I've got one I know. Now, don't budge; I won't be a second!"

She ran off and I examined the hat with much interest. It was a large picture hat, but Cis is on an imposing scale and can carry off a good deal in that way. I began to decorate the hat according to my idea; Cis returned in a few minutes with the feather and I showed her where to put it in.

"Why, you've altered the whole thing!" she cried.

"Yes; just pin the things in place; I can't do that part; then put it on and see how it looks."

She proceeded to carry out my instructions, and I watched her operations with some excitement as to result. When she finally tried it on she uttered an exclamation of delight.

"It suits you down to the ground," I said. "Upon my word, I've never seen you look better in anything!"

"Jack! you are clever! I'll have it made up and wear it exactly as it is. It looks just as if it came out of a Bond Street shop."

Her words gave me an inspiration.

"Cis!" I cried, "you've cut the Gordian knot! I know what I'm going to do now. I'll open a bonnet shop."

"A bonnet shop!" she echoed.

"Yes. You say I've got taste. I believe I have. I believe I could plan a hat to suit any face, provided it was not surpassingly ugly. I'll design and group all the hats like I did yours and employ girls to sew them. I shall be the rage, you see. I'll put a fancy name over the shop like they all do. What's the feminine of Jack, Joan? Jennie?"

"Oh!" gasped Cis, "I think it's a splendid idea. I'll put some money in it to give you a good start, and Tom will, too, I know. But you mustn't take refuge behind a woman's name. No! Just write up large 'J A C K,' and let everyone know it's managed by a man. It's such a popular name, and the women will flock to the shop. Besides, with those pleading dark eyes of yours, you could make a woman buy anything."

The long and the short of it was that in a few weeks' time I found myself establisfied with a mild flourish of trumpets as a man milliner.

"Jack's" hats were speedily the rage. I made a point of giving each client personal attention wherever possible, and I became the fashion. Need I say more?

One Saturday afternoon my sister and I were having ices in some very smart tea-rooms when she nudged me.

"Jack," she whispered, "I'm certain that's one of your bonnets. It looks like you all over."

I started. It was a simple white straw hat wreathed with forget-me-nots and tied under the chin with pale blue strings, but the face—the face that its broad brim shaded! it was the face of my dreams, tender, delicate, womanly.

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"Yes," I responded in some confusion, "I remember grouping that very hat, but I didn't make the sale. Miss Perry did last week, I believe. I wonder who the fair client is? I must look her up in the books."

"Why, don't you know," rejoined Cis, "it's Lady Laura Lovel; she was in here yesterday with another girl, and Mrs. Bracebridge pointed her out to me. Oh, Jack, you *are* doing splendidly. Think of the connection you have got already!"

I could not think, I could not reply, I could only look across the room and see as in a mist a fair face with a wealth of clustering pale gold hair wreathed in forget-me-nots.

She lifted her face as we passed. Eyes like the summer sky, a smile of heavenly sweetness, that was the picture that impressed itself on my mind. I repeated over and over again her name, "Lady Laura Lovel! Lady Laura Lovel!" She was far beyond me now, beyond the dreams of nobly ambitious love. In the old days I might have had hope.

When I got home I looked through the books and found an entry of her purchase. Yes, my sister was right; the blue bonnet had found an owner in Lady Laura Lovel. I knew her already by repute as one of the season's belles.

I was not surprised now at the furore she had created nor at the train of wooers she was credited with; I was as madly in love with her myself as any of them could be.

I went then and there out and bought a dozen society journals on the chance of finding some scraps of more or less reliable gossip concerning her. The descriptions of her scarcely tallied with the impression I had received of her delicate, ethereal beauty.

One of the magazines even contained a portrait of her, which I could not at all reconcile with the picture enshrined in my heart. It did not do her justice by any means, in fact could scarcely in my opinion be termed a likeness!

I should never have recognised her from it; her fair hair appeared much darker in the photo which was very misleading, and her features had suffered considerably in the touching-up process. Nevertheless, I carefully cut out the reproduction, kissed it and stowed it away in my pocket-book.

Many, many times during the ensuing week did I condemn myself for my folly, my worse than useless infatuation. For what chance was there for me? I had not even the honour of her acquaintance nor dared seek it. Yet, in spite of my telling myself this over and over again, I rarely now left the show-rooms during the fashionable hours for shopping.

One day whilst I was still building my flimsy castles in the air I was confronted with an announcement in one of the dailies that a marriage had been arranged between Lady Laura Lovel and Major-General Willoughby-Cave and would shortly take place.

My brain reeled; it was all over then! But I would not believe it possible. She was my destiny, my Fate! Assuredly there must be some mistake, the statement would be contradicted later. I would get the early edition of the evening papers presently and see.

I worked through the rest of the morning mechanically. In the afternoon a bevy of lovely young girls came in and clamoured to see "Jack." They would not be put off; they must have his personal and undivided attention.

I came to them and they explained they wanted me to suggest a scheme for bridesmaids' hats. They described their costumes and showed me patterns. One of them remarked: "It's Lady Laura Lovel's wedding, you know."

Her words dashed my last hope to the ground. In the face of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary, I could no longer cling to the belief that a miracle was going to be wrought on my behalf to give me my love.

I tried to rally myself and to study the eager faces round me in order to evolve a curve that should be equally becoming to them all. Finally they went away, delighted with my suggestions and leaving the order with me.

They had not been gone very long and I had retired to my desk, hidden behind a large folding screen, where I was trying to realise the cruel blow that had fallen on me when Miss Perry came up softly and said: "Lady Laura Lovel is here and would much like to see you."

There was no help for it. I must go. I should be face to face with her at last. I did not know whether to be glad or sorry.

Of course directly I saw her my eyes became riveted on her. She wore the same forget-me-not blue bonnet that had emanated from me, and I noticed as in a dream that she was accompanied by a young girl of about her own age. I bowed and addressed myself attentively to her. She hesitated and drew back, and the darker girl leant forward and said rather haughtily:

"I want to choose some hats to complete a trousseau. I don't want colours. Please show me only white and cream."

She was a pretty, graceful girl, nut brown in colouring and her face seemed to strike me as familiar; but I was disappointed to have to concentrate my attention on her as I should have much preferred to listen deferentially to Lady Laura's ideas and fancies.

I found my new client very hard to please and much more disposed to be guided by Lady Laura's opinion than mine. It was not the sort of thing I was accustomed to; however, I did not mind at all in this particular case.

I grouped a picture hat roughly with trails of flowers and leaves composed of hand-painted chiffon, and asked her how she liked it. She seemed pleased with the idea and turned to Lady Laura.

"How do you like it, Amy?" she asked.

"*Amy?*" I queried to myself; "some pet name, I suppose."

"I think it ought to suit you to perfection, Laura," she answered.

This one Laura, the other Amy! Was it a case of mistaken identity, I was asking myself in bewilderment.

Evidently; for the darker beauty decided on the chiffon hat and requested it to be entered to Lady Laura Lovel. I also succeeded in pleasing her with several other designs, and it was arranged between them that *Amy* was to come in in a couple of days time and see what she thought of them.

After that I put everything else aside, even the bridesmaids hats, to get on with the trousseau order. On the day appointed I was quite unnerved with excitement, dying to see *Amy*, and to learn who she was in reality.

Presently Miss Perry put her head round the screen and announced: "Miss Duchesne."

I jumped up; the name of Duchesne was almost an introduction of itself. Before her marriage my mother had been a Miss Duchesne, and I also bore the name among a long string of baptismal ones.

I told Miss Perry to show Miss Duchesne into the best reception-room, and to say that I would wait upon her there.

I did so without delay, and in the long conversation that ensued our talk was not only hats nor even mainly hats.

I learnt the connection Miss Duchesne had with our family which was remote enough truly, but she seemed prepared to accept me as a semi-relation, "having no real ones to call by the name," she said, with a rather plaintive little smile.

Later, when the acquaintance thus begun had ripened under my sister's gentle auspices, Miss Duchesne confided to me that Lady Laura Lovel was an old school-friend of hers in days of former prosperity, and that she had since been very good to her when the wheel of fortune had gone round.

The forget-me-not bonnet had really been purchased by Lady Laura, but she had almost immediately pressed it on Miss Duchesne's acceptance, because her *fiancé* had happened to remark he disliked her in blue. Miss Duchesne herself, she further confided to me, was on the stage, "But I do not think," she finished, with a little sigh, "I shall ever be a success."

"I know one *rôle* in which you would be perfect!" I said.

"What is that?" She lifted her eyes to mine.

"As my wife," I said. "Would you take that part in life? Would it content you to be merely loving and beloved on the world's stage?"

"I think it would," she murmured, "you are such a convincing lover!"

Ellice Beere.

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A Good Deal of "Pretty."

"Miss Giggleton is pretty plain, isn't she?" "Yes, she is pretty plain, but her younger sister is pretty pretty."

He could be the Sun.

"You are the world to me," he whispered. "All right," she answered; "you can be the sun. I'm going to marry your father."

Troubles would Soon Come.

He: "It would be a pleasure for me to share your troubles and anxieties." She: "But I haven't any." He: "Oh! you will have when we are married."

Must Make Allowances.

Belle: "Would you allow a man to kiss you?" Maude: "Um—well, I think it is our duty to—er—make allowances for the weakness of mankind, you know."

Oscular Demonstration.

Melinda: "Pa, that young man, Mr. Charley, is very fond of kissing." Papa: "How did you find that out, you naughty girl?" Melinda: "I had it from his own lips, pa."

A Plausible Reason.

He: "I have read over a hundred novels during the past year." She: "Indeed! Probably that accounts for it." He: "Accounts for what?" She: "Your ability to talk fiction."

Curiosity Conquered.

Claribel: "You told me you were never going to write to young Hankinson again." Angie: "He's written me a dozen letters I haven't answered, but in his last one he left a page out, and I had to write and ask him what it was about."

A Fight to a Finish.

"Waiter," said a young civil engineer, after vainly struggling with knife and fork for fully ten minutes on an alleged spring chicken, "bring me a chisel, a steel wedge, and a heavy hammer, for I'm interested now, and am determined to see of what material this thing is made."

Winning her Favour.

"I hope you will excuse my delay, Mr. Jones," she said sweetly; "but I must confess I ran up to my room to look into the mirror a moment before seeing you." "That's quite excusable, Miss Fair. A lady with a face so attractive may well be excused for wanting to look at it occasionally." Miss Fair is never out to Mr. Jones when he calls.

Anything to Oblige.

Augustus Edward found his beloved weeping bitterly when he called. On asking the cause she explained: "Ma has no respect for my feelings at all. The servant was giving my sweet pet Fido a ride in the baby carriage, when ma lifted it out by the neck, and put the baby in its place. Wasn't it cruel?" "Aw, it was dreadful, don't-cher-know? Just say the word—aw—and I will lift the baby out by the neck—aw—and replace the dawg!"

Just why he Wanted her.

She: "I don't want to marry you. I don't even want to talk to you!" He (a widower) eagerly: "That's the very reason I want you to marry me!"

Her Only True Love.

He: "Are you sure that I am the only man you ever really and truly loved?" She: "Perfectly sure. I went over the whole list only yesterday."

Caught on the Links.

Beatrice: "You know, Will said he'd like to be caught playing golf?" Patience: "Yes." "Well, I caught him on the links this afternoon. We're engaged."

The Pangs he Felt.

The Sweet Young Thing: "I wonder if you ever felt the pangs of love?" The Savage Bachelor: "I had a deep and abiding love for green apples when I was a small boy."

Very Punctual.

Smith: "Your friend Wheeler is keen on punctuality, isn't he?" Brown: "I should say he is. Why, he even carries his watch in the hip-pocket of his trousers, just to prevent his ever being behind time."

From Bad to Worse.

Harris: "Walters has been looking pretty bad since his daughter got married, hasn't he?" Correll: "Yes; you see, he had no sooner got his daughter off his hands than he found he would have to put her husband on his feet."

Spoiling the Sentiment.

Naomi: "George, I believe that love brings us anguish as well as bliss." "So do I." "Do you ever experience that restlessness, that anxiety, that positive pain, that——?" "Certainly, love." "And what do you think causes it?" "Cucumbers."

Sweetly Filled.

Tommy: "I'se got de toofake, awfully." Visitor: "You should have the tooth filled, Tommy." Tommy: "I did have it filled. That's what makes it ache so." Visitor: "I never heard of such a thing. Did you have it filled with gold?" Tommy: "No; only sweets."

Put his Foot into it.

"Oh, Miss Brown, who was that plain young lady you were out with this afternoon?" "That, sir? That was my sister." "Oh—ah—I beg ten thousand pardons! I ought to have noticed the great resemblance! That is—that is——" Then he wished an earthquake would happen there and then.

A Proposal was Expected.

Mr. Green: "Now, I'm going to tell you something, Ethel. Do you know that last night, at our party, your sister promised to marry me? I hope you'll forgive me for taking her away." Little Ethel: "Forgive you, Mr. Green! Of course, I will. Why, that's what the party was arranged for, you know."

No Chance Now.

"Has George ever hinted that he had thought of you as a possible wife?" asked the anxious mother. "No," replied the girl, a far-away look in her eyes, "and I'm afraid he never will." "Why," said the mother, "I thought——" "It doesn't matter what you thought, mamma, dear," interrupted the daughter. "Only last night he complained of feeling drowsy, and it wasn't nine o'clock."

A New Way of Proposing.

"Edith." "Yes, Tom?" "I—I have a very important question to ask you. And—" "Yes, Tom?" "Now, don't play any sister games on me." "What is your question, Tom?" "I—I—well, the fact is, my name is going to be printed in the paper soon—in the paper, next to the advertisements, don't you know; and I was wondering whether it would be all alone among the deaths, or with yours among the marriages." "Oh, Tom!"

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER. (*continued*).

"You are not very lucky in getting your birds to hop into your net, Chase!" said Digby Scarlett. "Let me help you. If it is Ivy Strange you want, then I saw her step out of the London train, not half an hour ago. She was not alone, being accompanied by a cavalier in the person of Mr. Jack Maitland!" and he laughed harshly.

"You mean Sir John Maitland, Mr. Scarlett!" replied the detective gravely. "I will go and see Miss Strange."

But Digby Scarlett did not hear him. "Sir John," he snarled; "then the old squire is dead! Don't let that girl marry Sir John, Chase!" he laughed. "Arrest her—anything, rather than let her marry him!"

"Do you want to marry her yourself, sir?" said Gilbert Chase quietly.

The other smiled strangely. "I both wish and intend to! But rather than see her another man's wife, I would put a rope round her neck!" And his mouth grew cruelly vindictive. "I always get my own back—her ladyship—that boy—Heriot——" He stopped suddenly, aware that his tongue was running away with him. "Don't listen to my rot!" he said hastily. "I've been drinking! Go and arrest the girl. And find out when the widow of the late squire intends marrying *again*."

Gilbert Chase looked at him strangely. "I don't fancy Mr. Scarlett, that her ladyship will marry—a *third* time!"

A curious expression crept into the man's eyes—half fear, half joy; as, with another reckless laugh he put his spurs into his horse and galloped away.

Then, breaking into a quick run, the detective presently found himself back at the Manor, inquiring for the elder son of the dead squire, for he could not yet frame the words "Sir John."

He was shown into the library, and two figures stepped forward to receive him. They were Jack Maitland and the girl wanted by the police. There was a pause, then the detective spoke:

"I'm very sorry, sir, to intrude at a time like this, when you are suffering from a bereavement in your family; but the law will not stand still for joy or pain, and it is my disagreeable duty to take your companion away with me!"

"I quite admit the justice of your proceeding, Chase," said the grave voice of Jack Maitland, "and am sure neither of us bear you any ill-will for doing your duty. But," and his hand drew the silent figure of the girl closer to him, with a protecting yet proud gesture, "I must correct you on one point. This lady is not 'Ivy Strange' any longer; she never was 'Ivy Strange'; her real name being Dolores Grant. She has lately changed it to that of Dolores Maitland—my wife. We are both prepared to produce an *alibi* to prove she was in the Manor that night of the murder."

Gilbert Chase was silent from astonishment and chagrin. Astonishment that the secret he was so carefully working out should have been discovered by the girl most interested, and chagrin that instead of effecting a sensational arrest, the "suspect" should have returned voluntarily to give herself up to justice, backed by the presence of her husband.

Her husband! His thoughts suddenly went to another woman—the widow of the late Sir Trevor Maitland! How would she enjoy the situation, he wondered cynically? Did the new Lady Maitland guess who her mother was?

The door opened suddenly, and the wife of the late squire entered. She was dressed in dead black, but the three in the room noticed that she had not seized the chance of making herself alluring in widow's weeds. Her face was colourless, but she held herself with the same old pride as formerly.

FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

"I Will Repay."

"I have just learnt that you had returned," she said, addressing herself to Jack. "You were too late to see your father; he was unconscious, so perhaps it is better so! But," and she clenched her white teeth over her lips suddenly, "your brother, little Woolf, is fatally hurt, and the stranger who tried to save him from the motor is also dangerously injured!"

Jack stepped forward, touched by the apathetic expression of her voice.

"Mater! Let me tell you that I have discovered the parentage of—of my wife!" and he drew Ivy proudly forward.

"Your wife!" and her face contracted suddenly as with pain. The eyes of the woman and the girl met; then Lady Maitland turned away.

"Ivy" stepped forward impulsively. "Tell me," she murmured. "May I see the—stranger who tried to save little Woolf? He is—I mean," she said hastily, "I think I may know him."

The detective, a silent watcher of each expression and turn of speech, saw Lady Maitland hesitate, a curious change cross her face, then she said coldly:

"You may come; only do not excite him. It is better so."

Silently she led the way to the room where the stranger lay—a man who was already being looked upon as a hero.

With one fearful glance of terror and apprehension young Lady Maitland flung herself down by the bed of the man.

"Father! Oh, my noble-hearted father!" she moaned. "Don't let me lose you when I have only just found you!"

Moved by a sudden instinct, Jack and the detective had stayed outside the room—only Lady Maitland and the younger woman having entered it.

The man opened his eyes. "Sweetheart, is it you? I am glad you are here. The little boy—who was he?"

"Lady Maitland's only son!" Ivy whispered. "You gave your life for him, and he no longer knows it! Oh, father, father, the pity of it—the pity of it!"

A spasm crossed the man's face. He stroked her hair gently.

"I want to speak to *his* mother—to Lady Maitland! The mother of the boy!"

Filled with a sudden fear, Ivy beckoned the silent woman to the bedside.

"Come! He wants you! Don't turn your back!" she whispered passionately. "He knows you—as I know you—at least play your part worthily—mother!"

The eyes of the woman and the girl met, both haughty, proud, and defiant; but in those of the younger woman a gleam of pity shone.

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The widowed woman approached the bed, her face as white as the sheets that covered the man lying on it.

"You want to speak to me?" she murmured. "I am here."

He motioned her lower. "I vowed vengeance when I first learnt the treachery of the past," he said, hoarsely. "I have given my life for *your* child, willingly and gladly, poor little chap, but—" and he raised himself in the bed—"how did you treat my daughter? By hounding her down and casting suspicion on her for what she did not do!

"Look back and remember one kindly word or action you bestowed upon the child that was *ours*. When I discovered this at first, I was only bent on killing him—Scarlett—or you, for having forgotten so lightly. But now I see that vengeance has passed into a Higher Hand than mine, and I have done with hate—for He will repay—not one score will be left unpaid. Only a great pity—remains for you—for you are more lonely than I ever was. You will never know the love of a daughter!" and his hand touched the bright tresses of the girl he called child.

A quiver parted the lips of the late Sir Trevor's wife.

"You are right. I am more lonely than you—for I have the memory of a bitter wrong always with me, and the knowledge that I have ruined many lives and lost the boy who was everything to me! And the awful bitterness is," she continued in a deep, trembling voice, "that the hand I had most wounded should have been the one to stretch out salvation to my son! That I should have sinned, to have coals of fire heaped upon my head. Is not that gall and wormwood enough!"

A gentle knock at the door heralded the entrance of Jack and the detective.

Jack bent over the man whose hand he had so recently clasped.

"Mr. Grant, I never expected to find you in this house. I want to tell you something that will make you very happy, I think. Ivy—your Dolores and myself were married two days ago. She is safe, and will always have someone to protect her—and love her!"

The eyes of the dying man brightened.

"But—but that charge!" he murmured.

"We will face that together," Jack answered. "I know it will not hold water when once I speak out what I know. I am afraid of nothing for her but peace and honour."

The detective moved forward gently. "You are Vernon Grant," he said, slowly. "The man who was convicted and found guilty of forgery eighteen years ago?"

The man flushed, and a look of fear shot from his eyes that revealed the uncertainty a once convicted felon always feels in the presence of a man who, by law, has the right to interrogate him.

"I am," he murmured. "Why this question—now?"

"Because it is my painful duty to ask you whether you recognise this lady, known by the title of 'Lady Maitland' for more than fifteen years, as the same person who was your wife at the time of your arrest," said the detective gravely.

The dying man raised his eyes to the impassive face of the woman who stood near his bed. He noted the glint of gold still in her rich hair, the soft curves of her mouth and chin, and the shadow her long lashes cast upon her cheeks.

Above all, he remembered that she had once been his honoured wife, and although a veil had fallen between them for all eternity, she was still the mother of the child who had all his heart's love—and that disgrace brought on her would recoil on the innocent head of their child—the wife now of the new Squire of Melton.

And with the knowledge of all the pain his recognition would cost, the man lied—deliberately and nobly perverted the truth—for the sake of the living.

"No," he said, slowly, "I do not remember ever having seen her ladyship before. She is a stranger to me—quite a stranger, I say. The woman I married died some years ago."

Gilbert Chase crept out of the room, a sense of his own littleness in the presence of so much courage and nobility making him forget his professional instincts.

With a sudden gesture Lady Maitland flung out her hand to the man lying on the bed, exhausted and unseeing. Jack drew his girl-wife aside—a sense of delicacy making them both wish to leave these two souls—the sinned against and the sinner—to speak their last words on this earth.

"Tell me," she murmured, "you forgive me. Tell me I have not lost the privilege of praying for pardon! You will remember my weakness and forget my wrong-doing?"

Their eyes met. And the veil seemed to lift for a breathless second, and husband and wife read each other's souls.

"As I hope to be forgiven, so I forgive!" he murmured "Go in peace!"

Ivy ran to her father's side with a cry, and flung her young arms round him; but she was too late to do more than shower soft, tearful kisses on his hand. The weary, strenuous soul had left the cage in which it had been confined for so long. The author, Vernon Vivyan, had begun a New Book, and the mother and his child looked into each other's eyes as strangers.

"Mother," said the girl, timidly, her voice trembling with tears, "let me take the place of poor little Woolf; let me, in some humble way, be something to you. I know you did not like me before—but then you did not guess!"

"Stop!" the older woman cried. "I will tell you that I did know who you were—later; but I refused to believe it, because I hated the idea. I hated you then—but now," and she smiled bitterly, "you have your revenge. You are the mistress of the Manor—the honoured, courted, and tenderly-loved creature, while I—I seem to carry a blight with me—I bring devastation in my wake to those silly enough to love me!"

The girl caught her fingers hungrily. "Mother, don't spurn me, don't call yourself hard names. I can't bear it. For his sake—the sake of the noble man who belonged to us both—don't revile yourself. Let us both begin together a new life of trust and honour."

The woman put the tender, clinging fingers aside, not roughly but firmly.

"Our ways lie far apart, child. I cannot pretend the farce of knitting my played-out life with that of a girl who is a stranger to me. My affection will be buried with my boy. Besides," she added, a cold smile touching her lips, "you would not be so eager to forgive and forget if you knew everything! *Your* life will be riveting new links, daily, while mine will be snapping off old ones!"

"What can there be that I do not already know now?" cried the girl. "Mother—mother, don't keep me in the outer circle of your confidence. Tell me what can send our lives apart?"

Casting a hasty glance round, Lady Maitland leant forward, and seizing the trembling girl by the shoulders, whispered something in her ear.

The girl's face blanched, and she recoiled in sudden horror.

"No, no! Oh, mother! Not *that!*" she murmured. "Not *that!*" and then she fell, an unconscious heap at the feet of her new-found parent.

FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Eleventh Hour.

Two days later Sir Trevor Maitland and Woolf—the "Joseph" of his old age—were laid reverently side by side in the family vault of the Maitlands in Melton Church, and the stranger, who had given his life for the boy, was laid in a neat plot beneath a weeping willow, and on the simple headstone that was afterwards replaced by an imposing marble cross, were the words:

VERNON GRANT,
AUTHOR,
AGED 48.

And underneath—

"*Vengeance is Mine—saith the Lord.*"

The widow of Sir Trevor, Pearl Maitland—the woman whose beauty had brought low so many lives and made waste of so much honourable ambition in those over whom her meretricious beauty had wielded a power more potent than the

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

deadliest poison — stood alone in her boudoir, a shadowy figure in black, with haunted eyes and quivering mouth.

"That girl—Jack's wife—knows. Will she—will she *use* her knowledge?" she murmured. "It would be a sweet revenge for her to play upon me. In her place I would not hesitate—no, for my nature is lower than that of *his* daughter!"

She rose swiftly, and going to the dressing table looked at herself in the glass with a sadly bitter smile.

"*Your* day is ended; very soon now you will throw up the sponge—and you won't regret it—not one little bit! All the heart to which you could lay claim was buried this morning in the grave of a little boy. Fate has taken him from you, and you have no right to protest. It is your punishment that you should lose the one creature for whom you sold even your chances of salvation. And now it does not matter—nothing matters! And very soon you will not matter."

She smiled again, and drew from the bosom of her dress a small phial. As she looked at it her face grew curiously rigid, and a listening expression flickered into her eyes.

"I must be quick!" she murmured. "They may come now my loved one is buried. There is no reason to defer their errand. But they will be here too late!"

She raised the ominous phial to her lips, but, as she opened her mouth a hand suddenly grasped her wrist, and the bottle fell to the floor. With a startled exclamation she turned an saw the girl she had tried so hard to wrong.

"You here!" she said, harshly. "Cannot you leave me in my downfall while you glory in your new-found happiness? Must I be tortured by your interference even here? Or"—and her eyes contracted suddenly—"have you come to say that—it is too late? That they know? If that is so, then pick up that bottle and let me escape my own way."

"No—no!" the girl said, in a low, sobbing voice—"not that way; you must not. For my sake, mother—for the sake of—of *he* who is gone—don't leave like that."

The woman repulsed her coldly, with a searching glance at the white, tearful face.

"Surely, since you know what I told you the other day, you will agree that *this* way"—with a gesture towards the bottle—"will be preferable to the other!"

A shiver shook the slight frame of the new Sir John Maitland's girl-bride, and she pressed nearer the woman who had wrought so much pain in her young life.

"No, no!" she gasped. "In spite of everything—even what you said—about—that, don't dream of such a wrong, of letting so wild an act crown your despair. You did not know—you must have been mad—when *that* happened."

"Mad!" murmured Lady Maitland quickly. "Yes, I have been mad—and am only just realising how mad, now that I have forfeited all the love I once possessed." She turned harshly upon the girl. "Why don't you go and leave me? I am still entitled to my privacy."

The arms of the girl she had wronged for so long stole round her gently. "I cannot and will not leave you in trouble," she said softly. "Think what *he* would have said had I deserted you in your loneliness. Even with his last breath he shielded you at the expense of a lie; and oh, mother," she cried passionately, "won't you take his place for me? May I not have a little of the love that poor little Woolf had—the right to comfort and shield you."

"You say all this to me?" said the low, tense voice of the older woman, beautiful in her ruin as in her pride of life; "to me, when you know that I did all I could to harm you and throw suspicion on your shoulders?"

"Yes," said Ivy bravely, "because I want your love, mother, to know that the parent for whom I have always yearned will have a little tenderness for me, and let me come into her life, even at the eleventh hour."

A curious light shone in the violet eyes gazing at the face so like her own.

"The eleventh hour!" she murmured—"the eleventh hour! You are right, child! I have reached that hour of my life. It comes to us all—some late in the day, some early—with me it is the mid-day."

"Dear mother," the girl continued, moved by the note of sorrow in the lovely voice. "Won't you kiss me—once—this once—as a mother? Only you"—she went on quickly—"Jack, and myself will know the secret, and we will never divulge it to anyone. I am content to pass as the village foundling so long as my mother acknowledges me when we are alone."

Lady Maitland put her hand out slowly—a sad, mocking smile touching her lips.

"Child, we cannot retrace the path we have once trod! The road I have chosen I must tread alone. But I thank you for the words your generosity has prompted you to say, and ask you to forgive; but, believe me, it is impossible to make such a past as mine, and a future as yours, meet on equal terms."

"Then you refuse——" Ivy began, when Félice, Lady Maitland's French maid, entered the room, looking bewildered and frightened.

"Milady! Milady!" she stammered. "Two *gentilhommes* 'ave sent me to say you are desired *dans le salon*."

The violet eyes flashed for a moment, and the ex-mistress of Maitland Manor grew suddenly very pale. A soft touch on her arm roused her, and she heard Ivy's voice saying:

"We will be there immediately. Felice, you may go."

The door closed, and the two women faced each other with trembling lips.

"You know what this means?" said Sir Trevor's widow slowly.

Ivy wound her arm protectingly around her mother's waist.

"I think I do," she answered, with misty eyes; "but come, mother—for so I will call you for the last time—we will face it together."

A swift gleam of pride shone in her ladyship's eyes.

"I am proud of your courage, Dolores," she said simply, and, bending forward, the lips of mother and child met for the first—the last—time. Then slowly they wended their way downstairs.

In the drawing-room Gilbert Chase and another man rose, as the two stately figures, that might have been those of twin-sisters rather than what the elder detective knew them to be, came into the room.

"Lady Maitland," he said gravely, addressing himself to the woman who had posed as Sir Trevor's wife for nearly sixteen years, "it has transpired, after due inquiry, that the warrant for the arrest of Ivy Strange was wrongfully taken out, her *alibi* having proved successful. But it is my unpleasant and painful duty," he continued slowly, "to inform your ladyship that I hold a new warrant for your arrest, on the charge of being guilty of the murder of the man Mike Holland in the spinny. I must also warn you that anything you say now, may be used in evidence against you."

There was a pause, then, in a curiously even voice, Lady Maitland said:

"Will you give an order for my carriage—I mean," correcting herself with a slight smile, "my step-son, Sir John's carriage, to be ready for me? I am prepared to go!"

A wave of admiration swept over the two men and the silent girl at the wonderful calm of a woman who, in the hour of her defeat, could so gracefully yield to the inevitable.

Gilbert Chase moved to the bell, when a rumble of wheels coming nearer and nearer up the drive, as though tearing on a matter of life and death, arrested his hand.

After a pregnant pause, in which each moment seemed an hour, the door was flung open to admit the young squire and another man, who cried loudly:

"Stop! Stop!"

It was Ernest Heath, and in his hand he waved triumphantly an envelope.

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FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Nemesis.

"Stop!" cried Ernest Heath again. "I have important news to tell you that will prove the absolute innocence of Sir John's wife—Ivy Strange that was"—and he put his hand gently on that of the girl whose story he knew.

"You are mistaken, sir," said Gilbert Chase coolly, "our arrest concerns another lady."

Slowly and with much significance the eyes of the woman who had been a laughing petulant girl when last he saw her as Margaret Heath, his cousin, met those of Ernest Heath, and the disguise fell away with all other pretence, as they recognised each other.

"I do not understand," he said slowly. "This lady—the widow of the late Sir Trevor Maitland—can have no connection with the murdered man in the spinny.for I hold the confession of the murderer in my hand."

"What?" cried three voices, those of the two detectives and Ivy—"the confession of the murderer."

Ernest Heath gazed at them gravely. "Yes, the confession not only of the greater charge, but also of a cruel perjury that ruined an innocent man's life; and lastly, a foul attempt to murder by burning the house that contained an enemy!"

A glance of intelligence dawned in the eyes of those standing round. Only the white, tense face of the accused woman remained unmoved, as her gaze rested intently on the man whose words had caused a respite in her fate.

Ernest Heath was speaking quickly to the small crowd that seemed to have grown since he and Sir John had dashed into the room on the heels of justice.

"I had reason to wish to clear the honour of a recently dead friend," he said impressively, "who died giving his life for another, and whose career had been blighted in youth by the man who was his false friend. I possessed a strange gift which I had cultivated in former days, and which I had used sometimes in jest. But, on this occasion, I utilised it on a matter of honour for my friend.

"After much trouble and waiting I obtained an interview with the man I sought, and finding him in a semi-intoxicated condition, very speedily had him under the influence of hypnotism. I gradually drew from him a confession of perjury in a forgery case against the dead Vernon Grant, nearly nineteen years ago; then——" He paused, and his eyes rested on the white, rigid face of the ex-Lady Maitland. "Then I suddenly thought I would sound him on something else, and, under the power of hypnotism and my skilful questioning, he committed to paper a confession that it was *his* hand that had laid the death-trap for the owner of the 'Hollies;' and, lastly—but most importantly—that it was his revolver that had killed the man in the spinny! I left him gradually reviving, and outside I met Sir John on his way to see the man, but prevailed upon him to return with me."

"And his name is?" said Gilbert Chase, loudly, prepared for the answer.

"Digby Scarlett!" replied the other gravely. "This is his confession," and he handed the envelope to the detective, who opened it and read:

"*I, Digby Scarlett, of the 'Rest,' wilfully perjured myself to secure a conviction against Vernon Grant on a charge of forgery, nineteen years ago. He was innocent. I also attempted to burn down the 'Hollies.' And it was my hand that fired the fatal shot that killed the man in the spinny. He interfered with me, and in a rage, before I realised what I was doing, I had shot him in the head. I bent over him to see if he was dead, and, finding he was, I left him there.*"

Gilbert Chase sighed. He understood the meaning of the half-burnt havana now, and realised that if he had pursued

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

his idea then he might have made a sensational capture, and gone up a step in his profession. It was too bad, just when he had imagined he had made a *grand coup* in getting out a warrant for the arrest of Lady Maitland. And yet he could not understand her attitude; it had been such a tacit acknowledgment of guilt, so he thought.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Of course this confession squashes all other arrests on the head. It has brought the whole affair down to a *prima facie* case."

He looked round the room thoughtfully.

"You will excuse me, ladies and gentlemen; I have an important visit to pay."

As he and his partner left the Manor, Gilbert Chase laughed grimly.

"Well, they say the third time brings luck! But I could eat my hat if her ladyship did not have a very good shot at the man too! So at heart she is as bad as the other. I can guess that the 'interference' of the poor beggar was on behalf of Mr.—now Sir John—Maitland!"

Ivy turned to her husband when the room had emptied:

"Dearest! I am so glad this has happened. I was afraid—afraid, and yet—I felt she could not have done—that!"

Her adoring young husband kissed her tenderly. He did not speak; he was thinking of a look he caught in his stepmother's face as she had left the room.

That evening a woman, heavily cloaked, stood in the churchyard by the family vault of the Maitlands.

"Good-bye!" she said softly. "I am going away for ever; but the memory of this churchyard will be always with me!"

She paused at the new-made grave under the willow.

"Forgive!" she whispered; then moved swiftly on.

At the churchyard-gate a man met her. It was Heriot North.

"I know everything!" he said simply. "I want to apologise that I should have wronged you by thinking——"

"Don't!" she said sharply. "I was a murderess in heart. I went out to kill, only bad marksmanship made me wound instead. But in God's eyes I am the same!"

He came closer. "Is it any use my telling you that in spite of all the past that has gone—the wrong that has been done—I am still devoted to you in heart and soul? May I hope that when time has softened your present hurts, the bond between us may be rivetted into a closer and dearer one than that of shame?"

She shook her head gently.

"I have done with life. In that churchyard I have buried every human desire and hope. From henceforth I will expiate my sin in seeking my peace with God!" She held out her hand. "Good-bye! and forgive me for bringing pain and sorrow to you—you are a noble man, Mr. North!"

His fingers closed on hers, and the chilly contact made him feel that it was already the hand of a dead woman.

"Farewell, and God bless you!" he murmured brokenly. "I shall always remember!"

* * * * *

That night Digby Scarlett sat in his study. The blinds were up, and the moon had risen high in the clear sky.

Presently he rose and walked to the window.

"I don't know," he muttered uneasily, "whether it's imagination or not, but I feel that there is something close to me—something that will soon be upon me, crushing me and making me helpless! I wonder what that chap called for this afternoon! I can't remember him going away!"

He pressed his face to the glass, then started back with a cry.

Two men were walking up to the door, and a certain air about them, sent a sinister thrill through the master of the "Rest," and he knew that the end had come! That his day would soon set!

He went to his desk, and, sitting down, poured out a glass of neat brandy, which he half drank; then, with fierce eyes on the door of the study, he gently pricked his finger under the nail with something. It did not hurt much, and he smiled grimly.

"I am glad I always kept that hemel by me. It has proved my best friend!"

He drained his glass; then, still smiling, with twitching lips, waited for his guests to be announced.

The two men who entered the "Rest," shortly left again, but not with the man they had expected to take away. Again had Fate cheated Gilbert Chase! The third chance had been won by the man who lay, with smiling lips, on the bed in the guest room of the "Rest."

FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

In Memory's Garden.

Five years later.

The squire of Melton, Sir John Maitland, looked up from a letter he had read three times.

Outside on the lawn the dainty figure of his wife, the beloved lady of the Manor, played with their son and heir, Vernon Grant Maitland, the pride of Melton; and a smile lit the squire's face as he watched them. Presently he opened the window.

"Sweetheart, come here for a moment!" he called.

Carrying the boy in her arms, Lady Maitland came.

Something in his face told her that he had heard an echo from that past they had fought to forget.

"What is it, Jack?" she said, in a hushed voice, letting the child scramble out of her arms. "Is it about *her?*"

He nodded, and putting his arms round her shoulders, they read together a letter.

"*The Convent of the Sacred Heart,*

"*Amiens, France.*

"*Dear Sir,—At the dying request of one of our revered Sisters, who, after five years of stringent piety, died of consumption, caught from doing the roughest of out-door nursing; we are sending you the inclosed locket, which was round her neck at her death. Sister Margaret was loved by all. Faithfully yours,*

"The Mother Superior."

Together they opened the locket. There were two photos in it, one of a little boy, and the other of a woman in the zenith of imperious beauty.

Tears fell from the eyes of Lady Maitland.

"Oh, Jack!" she whispered, "she has expiated all by this time!"

"Yes," he said gravely. "She has paid the debt."

For a time neither spoke, busy with the ghosts of the past.

"We must show this to Ernest Heath," Jack said presently. "He and Muriel are coming down to stay with us next week."

"Yes," his wife answered. "I am glad Ernest and Muriel fell in love. In spite of his being so much older, they are very happy."

"Agnes isn't," smiled Jack; "she was obliged to bury her broken heart in the management of a home for incurables, where she is certain to keep them 'incurable' out of spite!"

Ivy looked at her son, the light of her life.

"Look, darling!" she said tenderly, with tears gleaming in her eyes. "This is a beautiful lady—mummie loved her!"

"Vernie love booful lady, too," responded the child simply, as he kissed the photograph of the woman.

* * * * *

In a dreary station situated in the plains of India, a man with a bitterly sad face and gray hair works at a desk. He is lonely, obscure; and people wonder at his sudden fall from a brilliant journalist into the plodding editor of a third-rate paper. But the man knows the reason.

On the top of the desk, in a silver frame, is the photo of a woman, strangely beautiful and alluring. And the man would sometimes lift his head from his work, and, looking at the face in the frame, murmur: "You will never forget—and I shall never forget. None knew but ourselves that once we were knit by a Bond of Silence and Shame—the Bond Between!"

The End.

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FACTS ABOUT CATARRH.

Some interesting facts about the success of the Drouet Method in Catarrh where operations have failed are given in the last **REVIEW OF EAR NOSE, & THROAT DISEASES.** Those who wish to read the details of the cured cases can obtain a free copy of this Medical Journal by addressing The Editor, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Should Boys Propose?

"I AM seventeen and very fond of a girl a year younger," writes GUS. "Should I propose to her now, or do you think we might want to break it off when we grow older?"

* * * * *

Propose, by all means, GUS, if you feel you must. As to the future, well, that will take care of itself. If you remain on the same intimate terms when you are twenty-one, then depend on it, she is the girl for you. If not, then I have no doubt both of you will be well satisfied to break off the engagement by mutual consent.

❦❦❦

Should She Give Him Presents?

"ELSIE" is in a situation, and is very much in love with a young man there. Would it be wrong for her to give him cigars, or cigarettes, as a small gift? "ELSIE" is sixteen, and he is twenty-two.

* * * * *

Well, I think "ELSIE" ought to wait until the young gentleman has shown that he returns her feeling towards him. It is usual for the man to give the presents first, and the girl is not expected to always return them. Now and again some little gift can be given, but it is not usual for them to be too frequent.

❦❦❦

Haunted By a Young Man.

"FOR years," writes SYLVIA (Leeds), "I have been haunted by a certain young man. He travels by the same train, takes the same suburban walks, and often has his tea at the same shop as myself, but I have never formed an acquaintance with him. I don't know that I wanted to, as we have rather grown tired of gaping at each other. However, this year we are staying at Tynemouth, and to my surprise the first person I met on the sands was this young man.

"On seeing me he smiled and raised his hat, and I am afraid, in sheer confusion, I returned the salute. Now, what I want to know is, ought we to have recognised each other, and, on returning home, shall we have to be acquainted with one another?"

* * * * *

I think it is quite natural that he should have saluted you. After all, manners unbend at the seaside, thank goodness, and we lose that foolish reserve that we keep up in towns. You did no harm in returning his bow—I should have done the same. However, let him take the first steps in claiming your acquaintance, and when he speaks to you, be nice and agreeable, and introduce him to your parents. If, on returning home, you see each other as frequently as before, well, if one has to encounter another person everywhere one goes, it is just as well to be on bowing or speaking terms as not.

Is it Love?

"I ACCIDENTALLY became acquainted with a young man," writes "MAIDA," "who was staying here for a week's holiday. We met every day, and he professed to be very happy with me. He came to my home, and met my mother and sisters, and also brought me two very nice presents, and kept me supplied with chocolates. When he left our town, he appeared very upset at parting, and I have since received postcards, letters, and flowers from him. Do you think these attentions mean that he has a regard for me?"

* * * * *

Well, he seems to have done the things a man usually does when he has a regard for a girl. I might even say he has gone beyond the "regard" stage, for his constant attentions to you suggest that he is very far gone indeed. Depend on it, if he is able, he will very soon turn up again, as he has evidently taken more than a mere fancy to you.

❦❦❦

Newspaper as a Co-Respondent.

"I AM annoyed with my husband," writes ETHEL. "We have only been married six months and something has come between us. He has ordered a newspaper to be sent every morning, and instead of talking to me at breakfast, he reads it and never says a word. Besides, he props it up against the cruet stand and uses cross language if anybody removes it."

* * * * *

Poor ETHEL! To have love's young dream shattered so easily and by a newspaper! Well I am afraid that is a very frequent cause of trouble which disturbs sooner or later the happiest of unions. I advise you to get used to it. A man at breakfast time is often more like a bear than anything else, and perhaps it is as well that he should vent his ferocity on the money market or the policy of the Government than on the way the breakfast has been cooked. Let him alone, ETHEL. News, like music, has charms which soothe the savage breast, so don't interfere with it. And if you want a little mild revenge try reading *Short Stories* when he comes home to tea, and see how it works.

❦❦❦

Marrying Beneath Him.

"I AM not engaged," writes ADOLPH, "but think it is more than likely that I shall be very soon—I don't know to whom. What troubles me is this: My people are well connected, and my mother has a positive horror of my marrying beneath me. I have met scores of girls in our own set, but find them affected, cold, and proud. They seem to despise any intimacy with me.

* * * * *

"The trouble is that I have also met a great many girls in a lower social position, and always get on far better with them than with the others. They seem to understand me better. Now, what do you think of this question? Am I the kind of man that ought to marry beneath him?"

* * * * *

ADOLPH's complaint is that of a great many other young men. Girls of a certain social position, certainly, do rather assume an attitude of reserve towards men—that is part of their breeding. Quite naturally, the result is often to drive really eligible fellows either into the society of their own sex entirely, or of girls of a lower social standing. Such girls as the latter often *do* attract men above them by their natural manners and candid speech. And very often they make far better wives. After all, a woman who is a lady at heart, will very soon become one in name if properly cared for, and if ADOLPH should be attracted by a girl beneath him, I cannot see why he should not marry her.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 766. Week Ending September 5, 1903. ONE PENNY.

"THE CAPTAIN PUSHED UP THE PICTURE. BEHIND THE CANVAS WAS A FLIGHT OF STONE STEPS, AT THE FOOT OF WHICH WAS—A LITTLE PINK SLIPPER!" (SEE FIRST PAGE.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 766.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending September 5th, 1903.

THE LITTLE PINK SLIPPER.

A Story of a Romantic Evening and Morning.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

The Evening.

"My dear, dear brother!"

Two girlish white arms clung about a pair of broad shoulders, and two soft lips met a bronzed cheek. The author of this impulsive greeting was caught up and held in the silent embrace which says so much more than words. Then Captain Leopold Carleton, V.C., D.S.O., set down his sister and looked at her.

She was slender, dark, and pretty—the prettiness of the girl who has almost ripened out of girlhood. Even in the moonlight that illuminated the front of the rambling, irregularly-roofed house before which they stood, the likeness between brother and sister was striking. But Leopold Carleton was taller and graver. Young as he was, travel and hard fighting had left their mark upon him.

"Good-bye to my baby sister, Joan," he said laughingly, "and 'How are you?' to Joan the woman. You have grown up, kiddie, with a vengeance!"

"Well," retorted Joan Carleton, blushing, "I had to do something while you were away. But never mind me, come and be introduced. You'll like the Admiral and he'll like you. As for Lady M., her bark's worse than her bite, and you're not the same old Leo if you can't wheedle her a bit. You ought to, for you are shockingly late, you know."

So saying, she took him by the hand and led him up the steps to the open hall-door that showed brightly in the scented summer evening. A ramshackle conveyance of the "fly" order had halted hard by, and out of it the Captain's servant was already removing his master's "traps."

The house their owner was approaching was quaint and high-gabled, a salt sea breeze fanned it, and from some point not far away stole fitfully the murmur of waves on a shingly beach.

"My brother, Lady Majendie," said Joan Carleton; and her brother, passing into a cool, flagged hall, bowed low over the plump, ringed fingers of a stout, black-browed woman of distinctly formidable appearance.

"What you must think of me, Lady Majendie," he remarked seriously, "I dare not ask myself. But I was assured that I could connect at Exeter with a train that would get me here by six o'clock. Instead of which, I was left on a junction platform to kick my heels for more than two hours. I would have stayed over and come on in the morning but that I feared a telegraphed excuse might alarm Joan. So I have trespassed on your tolerance by arriving at this unconscionable hour."

Leopold Carleton made his apology with simple frankness, yet with a certain formal elegance. Also, he was undoubtedly a handsome man and without a trace of self-consciousness in his pleasantly youthful bearing. His hostess softened.

"You did quite right," she replied graciously, "for Joan has been on tenter-hooks all day. Besides, as the Admiral says, who comes to The Hollies comes to Liberty Hall."

"That's so, my boy," put in a ringing, cheerful voice. A ruddy, blue-eyed personage had stepped up to Leopold Carleton and his hands were seized in a vigorous grasp.

"I'm glad to see you again, my lad," he was told. "I'll be sworn you don't remember our first meeting. By Jove, I little thought when I poked you in the ribs as a toothless infant, that I was touching the spot where a Victoria Cross was to hang. Dash it, we're proud of you, my lad, and I only wished your dad had lived to know of your exploits."

Admiral Sir John Majendie frowned and blew his nose loudly. Leo Carleton's heart warmed to the genial old sea-dog who had been his father's friend.

"I'm afraid everybody makes too much of my doing what was only my duty," he said modestly; "but I ought to thank Lady Majendie and yourself, Sir John, for taking Joan under your wing. I can't think what she would have done but for your kindness, for she and I are practically the last of the Carletons."

The Admiral coughed. "There may be more than enough one of these days, for all that," he rejoined mischievously. "But as for Joan, Pollie and she are just sisters, and have been since they went to school together. You'll see Pollie in the morning, she—she——"

Sir John hesitated suddenly; his wife completed his sentence.

"My daughter is subject to headaches, Captain Carleton," added Lady Majendie, with a kind of embarrassment, "she retired quite early."

As if to emphasise this observation a series of sonorous strokes fell upon their ears. A large clock in a corner of the hall was striking the half hour after midnight. Leo Carleton put his hands to his ears.

"Silence that accusing crime!" he exclaimed. "Lady Majendie, I shall never really expect to be forgiven."

His hostess laughed; she was thoroughly appeased. "Indeed, there's nothing to forgive," she declared; "and now you'll be ready for some supper, I've no doubt."

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Her guest made a protesting gesture. "Frankly," he replied, "I dined at the junction, and so did my man. So there is no excuse for my keeping your people up any further. Pray let me hide my diminished head as speedily as possible; I could not survive hearing that clock strike one."

The Admiral chuckled. "You're your dad all over," Leo was informed. "He couldn't bear to put the ladies about. Not that you've put Lady Majendie about in the least. But, anyhow, you'll have a biscuit and a nightcap with me, and we'll smoke a cigar before we turn in. Then, since you're so anxious about it, Lady Majendie and Joan can have their beauty-sleep, after all."

"Certainly, if it will ease Captain Carleton's mind," said his wife. "Come along, Joan—you can admire your brother ever so much better by daylight. And he will look more of a soldier when he looks less penitent."

With which Parthian shot Lady Majendie retired. Joan Carleton lingered, to be folded once more in her brother's arms.

"Good night, little woman," he murmured; "if you knew how often I have thought of you when I heard 'Lights out.' It seems quite strange to be under the same roof with you."

Joan kissed him fondly and tripped away up the long staircase. The Admiral took his visitor's arm and carried him off into the smoke-room. Here they disposed of the promised biscuit and "nightcaps," and the old veteran and the young soldier lost themselves in the charms of professional gossip.

Their cigars smoked out, the Admiral looked at his watch.

"You won't hear that clock strike one," he said, "not till to-morrow afternoon. How the time has flown, it's nearly two. I expect you'll not be sorry to get to bye-bye. I'll show you the way to your berth—unless you'd like another peg?"

Declining this technical invitation to an additional whisky-and-soda, Leo Carleton accompanied his host through the corridors of the rambling old house, and was finally ushered into his apartment, or rather his apartments, for his sleeping chamber proved to be a panelled cabinet off a fine antique room hung with dusty oil-paintings. The room was already lighted, and the Captain's man was dozing in a chair.

The Admiral went to look out at a window. The moon rode high, and far off, at the foot of a wooded cliff beyond, the garden of The Hollies glittered the sea.

"You'll have a pretty picture to wake up to," he remarked; "that's why I put you on this side of the house. It was your dad's favourite room, too, when he and I were your age. Good night, my lad, you're very like him."

He shook hands with his guest once more and departed. Leo got into his pyjamas, dismissed his sleepy servant, and, throwing open the window, stood a moment to breathe the delicate night air.

The day had been sultry, even the young soldier, fresh from the East, had felt it warm for travelling purposes.

It was pleasant to be in England once again, pleasant to look upon the waves that lapped an English coast, pleasant, for a while, to have done with work and danger and to take his well-earned ease.

A sudden long breath warned him that he was beginning to feel the coolness of the night, and, closing the window, he stepped back into the room. As he did so he trod upon something and glanced down.

At his foot lay a tiny golden trifle, evidently an ornament of some kind. He stooped and picked it up; it was a locket and fell wide in his hand, gaping on a loose hinge.

Within were a couple of portrait-heads, one obviously that of his host, the Admiral. Opposite to this, in the other side of the locket, was the face of a pleasant, rather good-looking woman of middle age.

"Humph!" said Leo Carleton, "the first Lady Majendie, I presume; she must have been a much more agreeable person than her successor. Heigho! I wonder if the second Lady M. henpecks her husband—she is just the sort. Poor old boy! he should have remained a lorn widower, as I intend to do a bachelor."

He snapped the locket to close it, but it sprang open again. To the Captain's surprise the faces revealed were no longer those of the Admiral and his presumable consort.

The portraits which confronted Leo Carleton were counterfeit presentments of himself. One was a faded amateur print, one a "carbon" head, an excellent likeness, in spite of its diminutive proportions.

The Captain whistled softly.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "this must be Joan's. Yes, the faded one must have been cut out of the group that newspaper fellow did of us, after that brush with the Wazaris, when I got the Cross. I did send it to her, I remember. And this other is out of a regimental dinner thing. So she carries me about with her, does she, poor child—it's more than I deserve."

He examined the locket. It was small and old-fashioned, and, thin though it felt, opened in two places, which accounted for his discovery of the second couple of portraits. But he did not recollect that such a locket had ever been among his sister's possessions.

Laying it on his dressing-table, he brushed his curly hair for a moment to foster a drowsy disposition, put out the lights, passed into his little sleeping chamber and, ten minutes later, was in the arms of Morpheus.

Another ten minutes elapsed, or it may have been a quarter of an hour, and then he sprang up. His man had forgotten to draw the blinds and the room was flooded with moonlight. He glanced around and laughed.

"By Jove," he said, half-aloud, "I thought I was in the hills again and that the camp was being rushed. Instead of which I am in peaceful old England. *Phew*, for this relief much thanks."

He was about to lie down once more when a singular noise—part rattle, part whine—penetrated from the adjoining dressing-room.

"Humph!" he observed. "What is that?" And he got up, thrust his feet into a pair of shoes, and went through.

The moonlight showed him that the neighbouring room was empty also. And yet a vague sound, soft, indefinable, not unlike the rustle of skirts, reached his ear. He groped for some matches and lit the gas. There was no sign of an intruder. Yet, subdued and not far off, he distinguished a dull echo, suggestive of a cautiously closed door.

Leo Carleton knitted his brows. "Some ghost-trick," he said. "Is Joan playing pranks?"

Receiving no answer to the query, he turned back towards his bedroom, and stopped suddenly. It seemed as if an icy wind had suddenly blown upon his feet. But he was not near the door of the apartment.

He glanced about him and started. Beside him was a tall oil-painting in a massive frame. And at the bottom of the canvas was a black gap of an inch or two inches in depth; from this gap there blew undoubtedly the cold draught that had attracted his attention.

The Captain put in his hand; the picture was on a species of panel and he could push it up. As it rose it made the rattling, whining noise he had heard before, and a prominent

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decorated gilt boss in the frame descended along a narrow groove in the moulding.

Beyond the painted panel was a recess, and in the recess a curving stone staircase. And on the bottom step of the stair lay a little heelless slipper of wadded pink silk.

Leo Carleton took up the dainty thing and handled it. Then he struck a match and investigated the recess; it was dark and cold, evidently being contrived in the thickness of a huge old party wall.

There were candles on his dressing-table; he lit one and ascended the curving stairs. They led to a heavy door, handleless and locked. The Captain contemplated it for a moment and proceeded to descend to his own quarters. Passing into his dressing-room from the recess he paused to lower the painted panel. It clicked sharply as it was shot home.

He crossed to his toilet-table to set down his candle. Doing so, he perceived that the small gold locket he had deposited there half an hour earlier was gone. He stood, looking from the spot where it had lain to the pink slipper he held in his hand.

In the end, the riddle represented by this dainty article of apparel proving insoluble, he extinguished the candle, turned out the gas, and went to bed again.

The Morning.

In spite of his odd adventure, Captain Leopold Carleton slept soundly throughout the remainder of the night and for a considerable period subsequent to the dawn of a new day.

When he awoke the yellow rays of the summer morning had taken the place of the moonbeams which had lighted his apartment when he had last opened his eyes upon it.

He yawned, got up, and glanced from his window. The Admiral had been right. Beyond the neat, if not large, grounds of The Hollies, the white beach, green-topped cliffs, and blue waters of the bay, made a delightful picture for a newly-awakened sleeper.

The Captain plunged into his toilet forthwith, and a moment later his man knocked at the door with his shaving-water. Leo Carleton had but a second to realise that he had left the little pink slipper on one of the boxes of the dressing-table. Snatching up his mysterious prize of the night before, he thrust it into the pocket of a lounge-jacket that his attendant had laid out ready for wear.

"Hurry up, you rascal," he said cheerily, as the man entered. "I want a cigarette in the garden before breakfast." The servant, an old soldier, saluted and fell to work upon the Captain's firmly-modelled chin.

This done, Leo dispatched him into the inner room in search of a cigarette-case, and profited by his attendant's absence to put on the jacket into a pocket of which he had whisked the slipper.

Then, duly provided with the cigarette-case, he sallied forth, not to seek the garden, but deliberately to "lose" himself in the ramifications of the quaint and antiquated house.

Mounting to an upper storey, he strolled along a wide corridor, glancing occasionally at a compass on his watch-chain, occasionally from a window of the lofty passage. At length his saunter reached its slowest.

"Now," he said to himself, "that confounded stair should come out somewhere here. If only I dare examine those doors!"

As he spoke one of the portals referred to swung ajar, and there emerged a very fresh and dainty young person in a smart and creamy linen frock. She was blue-eyed and fair-headed and the foot that peeped from under her gown was small and well-shaped. The Captain stepped aside politely, then he bowed, and accosted her with much self-possession.

"As a fellow-resident under this roof," he remarked, "may I throw myself on your mercy? I have been trying to find my way into the garden, and as I only got here last night, the house is a trifle bewildering to me. I have even come upstairs in the hope of finding a more obvious way down."

The other glanced up at him and her eyes fell—fell to scan shyly the tip of her small tan shoe. Suddenly she drew it in and blushed. The blush did not escape the Captain.

"Oh," she said calmly, "you must be Captain Carleton: I am a Majendie whom you did not see last night. Pray let me show you the way to the garden."

"I have then the pleasure of meeting my sister's dearest friend," answered Leopold Carleton. "I ought to be jealous. Joan and I used to be inseparables when we were kiddies. But there, I can only consent to be grateful that you have reconciled Joan to my absence."

He moved along the corridor at her side, studying her covertly.

"By the way, Miss Majendie," he observed abruptly, "you will be able to tell me if there happens to be a ghost story connected with the Hollies."

His escort flushed again. "N-not that I am aware of," she faltered. "Why do you ask?"

"I scarcely know," replied Leo with an air of abstraction "I am a light sleeper, and I thought I heard a rustle of garments in the night."

"A soldier," said the other scornfully, "and startled."

Leo shrugged his shoulders; he and his companion were descending the stair by which he had gained the upper corridor.

"Not exactly startled," he answered, "but the experience—if experience it were—made me dream. I—I dreamt of Cinderella. You remember Cinderella, the lady who lost a slipper.

Miss Mary—otherwise Pollie—Majendie halted and put a trembling little hand on the banister-rail at her elbow. The Captain felt that she was determinedly refraining from encountering his gaze.

"I—I have forgotten all my nursery stories," she said; "but if you will go along that passage and down the next staircase into the hall, you will easily reach the garden, and be able to blow every one of your dreams out of your head."

Another of our regular readers is this fair-haired lassie.

"You think I ought to?" queried Leopold Carleton gravely.

"I—I am sure of it," stammered the other, and though her head was bowed, he could see that her cheeks were crimson.

"Very well," he said, "I will take your advice. *Au revoir* till breakfast-time."

And, without looking back, he went on downstairs. When he was safely outside the house and in the sunny old garden, he burst into a fit of silent laughter. But for all that, he wrinkled his brows a good deal as he strolled to and fro with his cigarette, and the shadow of perplexity still brooded on his handsome face.

At last he heard a step behind him, and turning, saw his sister, a graceful, girlish figure, in fluttering white muslin. He kissed her affectionately, and put her arm through his own.

"What a lovely corner of the world this is," he observed. "Do you know, I haven't enjoyed a cigarette so much for years?"

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Joan peeped up at him, her young face was even more shadowed than his.

"Leo," she asked, "what have you been saying to Pollie Majendie?—that was she you met upstairs just now. She says you are perfectly horrid, and that she wishes she'd never seen you."

"Oh, does she?" rejoined the Captain warily. "What an odd thing—I rather liked her."

"And so did she you," said Joan impulsively, "till she saw you this morning. Why, when we were at school together she used to read all your letters, and she begged two of your portraits from me and carried them in a locket with her mother's and father's. And she just worshipped you over the way you won the Victoria Cross."

"Dear little enthusiast!" commented Leopold Carleton. But a curious light had sprung into his dark eyes, a light that was as much sudden tenderness as amused intelligence.

"Yesterday," added his sister warmly, "she put those flowers in your room herself, and you only didn't see her last night because Lady M. grumbled at your being so late and made a scene when Pollie defended you. Pollie's headaches only come after her step-mother's scenes. And now she says that you're one of her lost illusions."

The Captain winced.

"I'm—I'm sorry," he exclaimed. "I suppose I was a bit blunt and grumpy; I—I only asked the way to the garden. But I'll see if I can't remove any bad impression I happened to make. Won't you introduce me formally and let me try?"

"Oh, yes," said Joan delightedly. "I'll go and coax her out here." And she hurried off.

Leo Carleton twisted his moustaches.

"I was a bit rough on her," he murmured to himself; "poor little soul!" And he, too, went off in hot haste.

His goal was his own dressing-room. Luckily it was empty; his servant had descended, and it had not yet been invaded by house or chambermaid.

He found the spring in the picture, pressed it, pushed up the panel, and laid the small pink slipper where he had discovered it. But before he did so, he—well, not to put too fine a point upon the fact—he kissed it. Then the panel clicked into position and he went back to the garden.

* * * * *

Joan never knew what was the reason of her friend's sudden change of demeanour towards the gallant Captain, or for her equally sudden conversion. But Leo does, for soon after Joan's formal introduction he contrived to whisper to Miss Pollie Majendie—unheard by his sister. Had, however, his words been audible to that person, she would have been more puzzled than enlightened.

"If Cinderella will look again on the—ahem!—the back-staircase of the palace," he said, "she will, I am sure, find her missing slipper."

Pollie Majendie glanced up quickly, blushed, and smiled. Like her step-mother, she had become of opinion that the Captain was a very handsome young soldier. But on her part the opinion was no new one.

That opinion she did not change again, nor has she changed it yet. The only thing she has changed is her name.

Leo wears a certain old-fashioned gold locket on his watch-chain. Pollie had dropped it when presiding over the final decoration of his dressing-room, and only ascertained her loss too late to rescue it before he had taken possession of the apartment.

Horrified at the thought that he might find it and discover himself enshrined in it, she had sought to regain the little ornament by stealing to the room, after all was quiet, down the old secret staircase, the upper door of which led to a cupboard in an unoccupied room near her own.

R. Norman Silver.

The Rebellion of Pat.

Telling of a Wife's Repentance.

"Oh, Geoffrey," said young Mrs. Crayne one morning, as she sat at breakfast with her husband. "I quite forgot to tell you last night that Stanley has a couple of stalls for the Lyceum this afternoon, and he asked me to go with him. I promised I would; I knew you would not mind."

Geoffrey Crayne did not answer for a moment, then he said quietly:

"I would rather you did not go, Pat."

"Oh, but I have promised!" replied Patricia.

"In spite of that, I am sure, to please me, you will not go, Pat, dear."

"But it's absurd, Geoff!"

This was the first difference of opinion they had had during their brief married life, and Pat did not understand it.

"Really, Geoffrey," she continued, "I am bound to go. What reason can I give for withdrawing? Besides, Stanley is your cousin, so that I cannot see why you should object."

"Nevertheless," said Geoffrey, "I do object, and I must ask you not to go."

"But why?" persisted Pat.

"Because," answered Geoffrey slowly, "although Stanley Forrest is my cousin, I have never yet known anything to his credit, and should not wish my wife to be in his company."

"But, my dear Geoffrey, he is universally liked, I am sure, and I cannot possibly refuse to go now. I should look simply absurd! Really, Geoffrey, I am obliged to go," concluded Pat decidedly.

"Patricia!" said her husband, in a tone she had never heard before, "I forbid you to go."

Pat's Irish eyes flamed, and her cheeks flushed crimson, but she did not reply.

"You understand?" continued Geoffrey, noting her silence. "I am sorry to have to deny you any pleasure, but in this case I must forbid it!"

Breakfast was finished in silence.

When Geoffrey left the house, he kissed his wife as lovingly as usual, but did not receive the accustomed caress in return, and he left home with a heavy heart. He knew he was perfectly right, but he felt that his wife failed to see it in that light, and he was grieved to have been obliged to disappoint and annoy her.

All the morning Pat wandered aimlessly about the house. Although most lovable and sweet, she was unaccustomed to being crossed in any way, and she strongly rebelled at being forbidden to do anything for the first time in her life.

Should she stay at home, she wondered, or should she go in spite of Geoffrey? And one moment she was arguing to herself in favour of the former course, and the next the latter.

After all, she finally decided, why should she not go? There would be no harm in it, and if she could not be seen with Geoffrey's own cousin, with whom might she appear?

Besides, she was not a school-girl to obediently do just as she was told for no reason at all. She had never heard anything against Stanley Forrest before, and probably it was

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merely jealousy or something of the kind which made Geoffery speak in such a way. It would be different if there were really any cause.

So, after many arguments with herself, she decided to go. If Geoffrey should be angry, she could soon bring him round.

She judged, in this respect, by former experience, for Pat's mother had died when she was very young indeed, and her father could never be angry with her for more than a moment or two.

Pat enjoyed the play immensely, although now and then unpleasant thoughts of Geoffrey would intrude themselves upon her. Would he be very angry, she found herself wondering. But no, of course not! All men were like her father. Geoffrey might blaze for a moment, but then he would cool down again in no time, with a little gentle coaxing.

At length the performance was over, and Pat, having dressed more carefully than usual for dinner, found herself awaiting Geoffrey's coming with a tiny, unacknowledged fear at her heart.

She saw him coming up the path to the house, and, after a moment's hesitation, decided that it would be best to go and open the door for him, as usual, just as though nothing out of the common had occurred.

Geoffrey kissed her even more affectionately than usual, and Pat saw at once that he fully believed she had obeyed his wishes.

Her heart sank, for she felt that she could not allow him to remain in ignorance, and yet she knew that it would be far harder to bring up the subject herself than to answer a question from him as to whether she had been to the theatre or not. She returned his greeting bravely, however, determined to carry it off with a high hand.

So dinner passed off with much talking and laughter, but when dessert came and they were alone, Pat felt that now or never she must confess.

"Geoffrey!" she said suddenly, and then stopped short.

"Well, dear?" he inquired.

Mentally bracing herself up, Pat made a bold plunge.

"Geoffrey, I went with Stanley this afternoon!"

A walnut which Geoffrey had been busy peeling for her fell from his fingers, and, just missing his plate, rolled on to the table-cloth.

After one sharp glance at her, Geoffrey picked up the nut, and silently went on peeling it.

Pat was puzzled.

"Geoffrey, did you hear?" she asked.

"Certainly!" he replied.

"Well?" said Pat, seeing that he did not intend to remark further, and feeling, to tell the truth, a trifle nettled, "have you nothing to say at all?"

"Nothing!" replied Geoffrey, without even looking up.

Pat gazed at him in astonishment. She had expected at least some word of reproach, and found Geoffrey's attitude quite unintelligible.

Dinner was finished without a word being spoken, for Geoffrey made no attempt at conversation, and Pat, although angry with herself for it, did not quite know what to say.

Bedtime came without a single remark having passed between them. Geoffrey was seated by the fire, apparently deep in a book, and as Pat rose to retire, she looked at him uncertainly.

"Good-night, Geoffrey!" she said, in a hesitating voice.

"Good-night, Patricia!" replied her husband, without so much as glancing up from his book.

The hot tears rose to Pat's eyes, but she forced them back, also a lump of unpleasantly large dimensions, which threatened to choke her on the spot, and raising her head proudly, she walked from the room.

A week passed away. Geoffrey continued to treat Patricia with a cold politeness which was worse to her than open rupture.

She felt that the breach between them was widening daily, and she longed to throw her arms around her husband, and ask his forgiveness; but Pat, warm-hearted and sweet, had still within her a pride which forbade surrender without what she termed to be sufficient reason.

If Geoffrey had told her definitely of any wrong action of Stanley Forrest, and if she had then accompanied him to the theatre in spite of that, it would be different, but under the circumstances, she would not believe that Geoffrey knew anything definite, and therefore she considered that he was as much in the wrong as herself.

On the seventh day of their estrangement, however, something occurred which changed Pat's view entirely.

She and Geoffrey were at a ball. Nobody watching them could have seen any difference in their demeanour towards each other, this being one of the exceptions which prove the rule that onlookers see most of the game.

Pat was resting alone in the conservatory, having dispatched her partner on some slight errand. She was miserably wondering whether Geoffrey and she would ever again be to each other what they had been before that fateful afternoon, when her husband's voice fell upon her ear.

She could see no one, but could distinctly hear all the conversation, and although an unintentional eavesdropper, she shrank from passing her husband, which she knew, from the direction of the sound, she would be obliged to do to leave the conservatory.

"Look here, Stanley!" she heard her husband say, in an angry tone, "you promised me that you would leave the country in a week, and now a fortnight has passed, and you are still here."

"Well," answered the voice of Stanley Forrest, "why should I not be here? You have no right to command my actions!"

"Indeed!" said Geoffrey Crayne. "On that point, we must differ. Since you were good enough to forge my name to a cheque for a large amount, I consider you have given me some considerable claim upon you!"

Pat, her hands grasping the arms of the chair, leant forward, listening eagerly, with an expression of horror on her face.

"And when," continued Geoffrey, "in addition to that, and after committing such an action, you ask my wife to accompany you, a forger, to the theatre, I think matters have gone too far! Now, either you clear out in twenty-four hours from now, or I make the whole affair public!"

"Pooh! You daren't, for the sake of the honour of the family, of which you are so infernally proud!" came the sneering reply. "Rather a come-down, though, for your wife to have gone to the theatre with a forger, as you so affectionately term me, wasn't it? Wonder you allowed it, old man! I never dreamt you would when I asked her."

"By Heaven," cried Geoffrey hoarsely, "if you were not my cousin——"

"Ah, Mr. Forrest, we have been looking for you. Do come! We want to arrange with you about——"

And the voices died away in the distance, as the party left the conservatory.

Pat rose stiffly. Her knees trembled under her, and she felt suffocated.

She moved a few steps forward, then suddenly stopped, for a few yards away Geoffrey was sitting, with his face buried in his hands.

Pat watched him hesitatingly for a moment, with a whole world of contrition and love in her eyes. Then she went swiftly forward, and, kneeling beside him, she gently touched his fingers.

"Geoffrey!" she whispered. "Forgive me—forgive me!"

For a second his eyes met hers, and then his arms were clasping her tightly to his breast.

"Pat!" he said joyously, "my wife!"

Norah Caryll.

"Auntie," said Polly, ruefully rubbing her forehead, "that big photograph of you is a striking likeness, isn't it?" "Do you think so, dearie?" "Yes," said Polly, "it just fell off the mantelpiece and hit me on the forehead."

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Those People Next Door.

The Romance of a Semi-Detached Villa.

I CAN'T think what has come over Maisie lately. She was the sweetest little thing imaginable when I married her two years ago, and now she's at loggerheads with everybody. Of course, I know Westbourne is a little quiet for her when I am in town all day, but that is no reason whatever why she should become quarrelsome and be always finding fault.

The people next door are Maisie's pet aversion. I thought the Gregsons were rather nice at first, although we had never spoken to them. They are a young couple, like ourselves, and Mrs. Gregson somewhat resembles Maisie. I told Maisie so one day, and she was so upset that she wouldn't speak to me for a week. Whenever she has anything to say, such as mentioning a visit from the tax collector, she said it to the cat so that I could hear.

However, we concluded a treaty of peace at last, but it didn't alter Maisie's feelings towards those people next door.

A state of war seems to exist between her and Mrs. Gregson, and Maisie—the old, sweet-tempered Maisie—would sell her soul, I believe, to get the better of Mrs. G.

Whenever I come in at night she drags me straight into the dining-room before I can get my coat off, and, pushing me into an armchair, pours into my unwilling ears an account of all the imaginary things her enemy has done against her during the day. My belief is that the man who wrote "Home, sweet Home," couldn't have been married.

Just what I expected happened one morning. Maisie keeps a few fowls at the bottom of the garden, and the people next door have a cat. That cat was responsible for the first bloodshed, and carried the war into the enemy's country.

On the morning in question, when Maisie went down to feed the chickens before breakfast, as she always does, she found the cat in the fowl-shed, and all that remained of a couple of her pets were a few bunches of feathers.

When I happened to look out of the window I saw that she had caught the Gregson's cat by the scruff of the neck, and was hurrying the unfortunate beast towards the water tub.

I ran out to prevent the murder, and found Maisie in a state of frenzy absolutely unprecedented.

As ill-luck would have it, Mrs. G. had watched the whole affair from her window, and rushing into the garden half climbed the apple tree and propped herself up on the fence just in time to see her cat thrown into the tub with a splash.

By the time I arrived on the scene Maisie and Mrs. Gregson were standing glaring at one another with only the fence between them. Maisie was purple with passion, and Mrs. Gregson was so infuriated that I thought she would have fallen from her perch, while compliments were flying about like leaves in an autumn wind.

I went up to Maisie, and, taking her arm, tried to lead her indoors, but wrenching herself free she returned to the fray. I implored, threatened, promised her everything a model husband could do, but it was of no avail; she meant to have her say, and she didn't come in until she'd said every word of it.

The campaign thus opened proceeded briskly. If Maisie played "The Last Rose of Summer" on the piano, Mrs. Gregson played it with variations; one day she put up a pair of pink curtains in the drawing-room, and the people next door followed with crushed strawberry; then when Mrs. Gregson appeared in a bright green hat with flowers in it, Maisie went one better, and blossomed out with headgear that would have given points to the most accomplished botanist.

This victory cost me just two guineas, and from that time forward I was dragged into the campaign by the heels.

Five servants left in three weeks; I got into trouble with the post-office because of the way in which Maisie had insulted a postman, and I had to leave half a crown for the coal porter every time he replenished the cellar owing to the way she abused him for dirtying the newly hearth-stoned coal shoot.

Then I had to spend £5 in increasing the height of the fence, because Maisie insisted that Mrs. Gregson sat in the little side window all day so as to keep a diary of what we had for dinner.

The summer sales at Barker's about finished me. I had been kept late in town, and got home in about the worst of possible tempers to find a man waiting on my doorstep, Maisie having flatly declined to let him in. It is Barker who has the monopoly of the drapery trade in Westbourne.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "I have just called to see you about a little matter concerning Mrs. Tomlinson."

"Oh, I'm not responsible for anything my wife does," I answered irritably. "However, come in; I will give you five minutes."

I took him into the study and turned up the gas. I thought he seemed rather nervous, and he fidgeted with his hat.

"You will excuse me, sir, as of course I don't wish to offend any of my patrons, but there was a fight in my shop today."

"A fight? Why, man alive, what's that to do with me? You had better go to the police."

"No, sir, I'd rather not do that until I have explained fully. The fact is, sir, you won't mind my saying it, but—er—it was your wife."

"My wife! What do you mean, you scoundrel?" I went up to him and took him roughly by the shoulders. I felt perilously near knocking him down.

"Yes, sir, you see it was this way. Mrs. Gregson, whom, perhaps you know, sir——"

My hands dropped to my side like lightning. He held the ace, and he knew it. I was prepared for any revelation bar murder, and I don't think even that would have been a very great surprise. I nodded as he paused.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Gregson was just buying a piece of very choice Lyons silk at five shillings the yard, when Mrs. Tomlinson ran up and said she'd had her eye on it and meant to have it, and as it was the only remnant I had, I couldn't accommodate both of them, could I? Well, sir, there was words, only words, but presently the ladies became put out, just a little put out, sir, if you will excuse my saying it—and unfortunately for me the silk was between them. They both dragged at it, and the best silk won't stand that, sir. It tore into ribbons, and then——"

"Well?"

"They both declined to have it, and walked out of the shop."

"And what was the value of the silk?"

"Two pounds, sir; not a penny less."

I was just producing this sum when the door opened and Maisie appeared.

"Oh, you've come about that silly silk, Mr. Barker. I should have thought that after all I bought in your shop—why I've simply made your business by recommending you to my friends—you could have been lenient. Jack, I forbid you to pay for the silk. It was all Mrs. Gregson's fault."

'Pardon me, madam——"

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"Well, Barker, I don't want to leave you, as your gloves at 2s. 11½d. are really good, but if my husband submits to this blackmail, I must."

It *was* blackmail—I knew it, Maisie knew it, Barker knew it, and he played the same suit again.

"Then I suggest that we settle it amicably," he said. "If you will continue to patronise my establishment I will forego this little loss."

"Of course Mrs. Tomlinson will do that," I interposed, grasping at a straw like a drowning man, but the straw proved unsupportable, as it invariably does.

"Now I have some very pretty study furniture in my furnishing department," resumed Barker. "I sold Mrs. Gregson a suite of it to-day."

"Study furniture, did you say?" asked Maisie eagerly. "Why, Jack, that's just what we want, this is getting so shabby."

I tried to convince Maisie that our furniture was barely two years old, but she had dismissed Barker with a promise to call and purchase something to-morrow before I had time to get a word in edgewise.

When he had gone I began to talk to Maisie seriously. I impressed upon her that I should soon be in a state bordering on bankruptcy if she persevered in her silly attempts to get the better of those people next door, but she only cried, and said I always would knuckle under to everyone, so I went off to the study in a tiff and chewed the cud of my anger and the stem of an old clay pipe. Would to Heaven I had never got married!

Next day I met Gregson in town. I was demolishing a chop in the club, when he entered and walked straight to where I was sitting.

"Excuse me," he said. "But isn't your name Tomlinson?"

"Yes. And yours is Gregson?" I replied.

"Glad to meet you." We shook hands. "I say, couldn't something be done to make our wives reconciled to one another? Can't we put dog-collars round their necks and bring them together just out of scratching distance? It's getting so beastly expensive, you know."

Gregson was my brother in adversity. There's nothing like it for breeding real friendship. I told him to sit down, ordered his lunch and a bottle of Moet.

"Look here," I said at last over the coffee and cognac. "Things will never straighten out unless we take the bull by the horns—no personal inference intended. So come round on Sunday and bring your wife. I invite you on my own responsibility."

This arrangement made, I went and bought a diamond and pearl brooch for Maisie as a peace offering, and started for home to break the news. I told the cabman to drive by the longest way, so as to put off the ordeal as long as possible. When I got in, to my utter amazement, Maisie came forward, and, putting her arms round my neck, kissed me in a way she had never done since the honeymoon.

"Oh, Jack, dear, I've such got a lovely surprise for you," she crooned. "Do come and see."

I followed her into the study with a beating heart. The first thing I noticed was a pile of millinery boxes on the table and they all bore the name of Barker. I dropped into a chair and wiped my forehead.

"This *is* a surprise," I groaned. "Quite unexpected, I'm sure, and——"

I paused, for she had begun to open the boxes one by one, and was trying on the hats in front of the mirror. I'll swear that Barker didn't let her have one of those monstrosities under a couple of guineas.

"You see, Jack, Mrs. Gregson can't wear the best hats now, because I've bought all the prettiest Barker had. Don't you think they suit me?"

What can a chap say when his wife looks pretty in a hat, and, worse still, knows it? I simply asked her where she got the money from.

Mrs. Gregson propped herself up on the fence just in time to see her cat thrown into the tub with a splash!

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"Money? Oh, Jack, dear, the bill hasn't come in yet," she replied sweetly. "But I have kept the greatest surprise to the last. Come along."

I followed her into the kitchen like one in a dream. Stocks of unpacked furniture were piled up everywhere, and the cook and housemaid were dodging each other between them as they endeavoured to get the dinner. Glancing through the scullery door the same sight met my eyes, and I looked imploringly at Maisie for an explanation.

"That's the new study, furniture, dear," she said. "And there's a heavenly Chippendale cupboard coming for the drawing-room; it cost quite ten guineas more than Mrs. Gregson gave for hers. Aren't you pleased?"

"Er—yes—it's rather amusing, isn't it?" I stammered like an idiot.

We went back to the dining-room just as a loud knock came at the front door. Maisie opened it herself to admit a man carrying a heavy case.

"Is this the curtains or the dinner service?" she inquired.

"The curtains, mum. The dinner service is coming by special messenger this evening. And Mr. Barker sent his respects, mum, and says the new bedsteads and the drawing-room carpet will be sent up by a van in the morning."

I felt like murder, and when I came out the man must have seen it in my eye, for he hurried off the step.

"Look here," I said, "if you value your life get out of the road as fast as your legs will let you."

"Jack!" half screamed Maisie.

"Go on, you set of thieves!" I roared, like an infuriated bull, and the man went.

I banged the hall door so that the glass panes rattled.

"What is the meaning of this—this insanity?" I gasped.

"Mrs. Gregson——"

"Dash Mrs. Gregson!"—only the epithet was stronger—was the only expression that suited the case, and I bounced into the study and bolted the door, knowing that it was the safest thing I could do.

I sat there for half an hour till I heard the housemaid's squeaky voice telling me through the keyhole that Geoffrey Stretton had called to see me. Geoffrey is an old school chum, and has just bought a practice in Westbourne. I think he cared for Maisie at one time, but somehow Fate deemed that she should marry me, and Geoff threw his heart and soul into medicine to forget.

The next moment he was in my room, and I poured my troubles into his ear. When I had finished he got up and crossed to where I was sitting.

"Jack," he said firmly. "Has it ever struck you that you're a selfish hound?"

"I say, Geoff, old man, the joke's a bit ill-timed, isn't it?"

"I mean what I say," he replied without a smile. "Don't you know what is the matter with Maisie—Mrs. Tomlinson, I mean?"

"Candidly, I don't," I said. "Though now you come to mention it, her mother died in a lunatic asylum."

"My dear Jack, it's nerves—simply nerves! Imagine yourself cooped up in a slow place like this all day with scarce a friend and only the servants to talk to. Latterly you have taken to remaining at your club all hours of the night."

"She drove me to it," I replied, taking a leaf from old Adam's book and shifting the blame on to the woman.

"You do not show her that you care for her. Jack, you idiot, why can't you see that a wife like Maisie is a pearl of great price, and should not be treated like a dog? Have you given her any pocket money for herself lately?"

"I gave her half a crown for a pair of gloves the other day."

"Well, go on."

"And of course she has her housekeeping money, and every woman puts away a nest egg out of that."

"A wife like Maisie doesn't. Now here are a few items you have spent on yourself to my own personal knowledge during the past fortnight." He had drawn a paper from his pocket and began to read: "Cigars from Molstein and Company, £8; new frockcoat, £5 5s.; race meeting, £17; bouquet for the actress who played 'Joan' in 'Sweet and Twenty' at the Novelty, £1 1s.; wine——"

"For Heaven's sake shut up!" I broke out. "Prescribe a remedy and have done with it."

"I will. Show Maisie that you care for her, that she is the best little girl in the world; take her out, study her wants in everything; in short, set to work to make her married life really happy, and begin operations by taking her for a fortnight's holiday—a second honeymoon."

"But it's impossible. I'm so busy just now."

"Yet you've spent seventeen hours at the club since last Sunday."

"Good Heavens, Geoff, what a blessed spy you are! Oh, very well, I'll try it."

"And now I'm going to stay to dinner to smooth down matters. Hark! There's the gong."

* * * * *

Three weeks later Geoff looked in again to welcome us back from our trip to Scotland. Perhaps he detected a look in my face which gave my secret away, at any rate he knew the result of his advice before I told him.

"So you enjoyed yourself, Jack?" he said.

"Never had a better time in my life, old man; nor did I ever realise before what a splendid little companion Maisie really is. Haven't seen a shade of temper on her face all the time, and the tradesmen have begun to breathe again."

"I'm glad of that. I knew I was right after all."

"Yes, and, taking my advice, she's going to begin entertaining a few friends by giving a musical evening on Thursday. She's just made a list of guests. Here it is, I haven't looked over it yet. Of course, you're to be asked, and—good Heavens!—she's actually invited those people next door!"

W. Newman Flower.

. . THE . .

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THE FIRST ELEVEN EPISODES.

THOUGH my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school friend, now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening. Mr. Vernon met me at the station. The house-party was composed of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot, and Mr. Dean Fisher. That evening after dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister dropped in, and a game of bridge was proposed. Neither Miss Bainbrig nor myself could play, so Mr. Fisher volunteered to teach us. The next evening we again played, and when the scores were added up, Annabel told me that I had lost £11 7s. 10d. I was thunderstruck at the magnitude of this sum, and the following morning asked Mr. Taskot what I had better do, for it was impossible for me to pay it. He told me that the Vernons had schemed to fleece me, and offered to lend me the money. We then fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing. We were, however, observed by Mrs. Grainger. In the afternoon I went for a walk, and, being attacked by a mad dog, was rescued by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who was amazed when he learnt where I was staying.

On Monday morning we commenced playing again, and, having won heavily, I was horrified to learn afterwards that my hosts knew of the secret signals between Mr. Taskot and myself. They had managed to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures that had passed between us!

They then blackmailed me into becoming one of their accomplices, threatening to expose me to the world if I did not agree to their plans. I was forced to do so, and had a hand in robbing the Bainbrigs and two wealthy friends of theirs, the brothers Garford, a night later. Earlier in the same day both Mrs. Grainger and Mr. Taskot left Vernon Towers.

I found out that the fateful photographs were kept in a bureau in the study, and, determined to get them at all costs, I stole down at dead of night to the room. While trying to force open the lock I heard footsteps, and crouched behind a chair.

The visitors were my hosts, who had come to remove the photographs to a new hiding-place. They dropped them behind the overmantel. Would they discover me?

EPISODE TWELVE.

A Friend in Need.

"THERE!" observed Annabel. "She'll be sold if she tries the game of abstraction!"

There was a low laugh of amusement from the pair of tricksters. Then the light was switched off, the door was gently closed, and I was once more alone—with the incriminating photographs within my reach.

Five minutes later I was in my own room, burning them one by one. When I put a box of matches with the little spirit lamp which I use for heating my waving irons, I little imagined what splendid service they would render me. With their aid I was able to destroy every scrap of proof of yesterday's folly, and I could have danced with joy when I opened my casement and scattered the carefully-collected ashes to the four winds of Heaven.

Not even a particle of burnt ash remained to tell the story of my midnight achievement, and it was I who had the best of the bargain this time!

"If only my clever friends had been wise enough to take their proofs with them instead of hiding them where I could find them," was my triumphant reflection, "they would not have had to face the failure of their wicked scheme. But the most cunning people overreach themselves habitually, and Mr. and Mrs. Vernon have just exemplified the general rule."

My relief of mind and my fatigue of body were so great that I slept until eight o'clock, and I was barely dressed when the breakfast bell rang. But I had resolved not to eat another crumb in the house of these harpies, and did not hurry downstairs until I was ready to take a walk upon which I had suddenly decided.

There was no train for some hours that would serve my purpose. Even if there had been I could not carry my luggage all the way to the station myself, and I would accept no further service from anybody employed by the Vernons, so I had plenty to do while I was out.

After walking to the village near which I was almost run down by the mad dog, I meant to purchase a breakfast of milk and bread, supplemented by some fruit. This would fortify me to endure the possible prospect of a scene with the Vernons, who would be enraged when they discovered that their intended victim had slipped through their fingers.

I had also to arrange about a conveyance to fetch myself and my luggage. And I had a fancy for calling upon Miss Bainbrig, for I did not want her to think I was quite so bad as the Vernons would be sure to paint me. Finally, the money I had won from the Bainbrigs and the Garfords weighed heavily on my conscience, and I was anxious to devise some means of restoring it without being too explicit about last night's doings.

As I passed through the hall on my way out I met the parlourmaid.

"Breakfast is just ready, miss," she said, noting that I was in walking attire.

"I don't feel equal to taking any breakfast yet. Tell your mistress that I have gone out for a walk to see if the fresh air will do me good."

"Very well, miss," was the maid's assent to these languidly spoken words, and I knew exactly what would follow. She would tell Annabel that I had gone out looking ill, and com-

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plaining of being so out of sorts as to be unable to take my breakfast. Then Annabel would smile to herself, and tell her husband that I was upset by the knowledge that I had no escape from the duties they had assigned to me.

Later on, when they discovered that the pictures which they had held over me as a threat had disappeared, they would put a different construction upon my absence from the breakfast table, and I had no difficulty in picturing their fury.

It was a long walk to the village, but I was all the better pleased at that, for I did not want to call upon Miss Bainbrig until she was presumably ready to receive visitors, and the journey to the village would pass the time away nicely.

The lane I had to traverse was the same one in which Mr. Maurice Ray rendered me such signal service, and my thoughts naturally reverted to him when I came in sight of the torn furze bushes which showed the strain that had been put upon them when I was lifted out of harm's way.

"Of course he had heard something about the doings at Vernon Towers," I thought. "And that accounts for the curious way in which he received my information about where I was staying. Perhaps he thinks I am as bad as the Vernons themselves, so it is just as well that we are not likely to meet again. Good gracious! There's the very man!"

It was true. He was sitting on the bankside, sketching a lovely bit of scenery that was revealed by a bend in the lane, and I hoped that he was too much engrossed with his pleasant task to notice me. The better to evade recognition I put up my parasol, and sedulously kept it on the side which would best hide me from his view.

Perhaps it was because I let the sun blaze on myself instead of on my parasol that I attracted the notice I wished to avoid. Anyhow, I had not gone much further before I heard swift footsteps following mine, and an eager voice exclaimed: "Miss Beresford! You are surely not going to pass me without even saying 'Good morning'?"

After that, what could I do but show that I was really as pleased to see Mr. Ray as he was to see me?

"I saw that you were busy," I said shyly, "and artists do not like being interrupted at their work."

"No," was the smiling reply. "As a rule they do not. But when the interruption is even pleasanter than the work itself they are delighted, just as I am."

This was said in an honest, open way which ought to have won a smile from me. But somehow it had just the reverse effect, and, greatly to Mr. Ray's concern and my own vexation, I burst into a passion of bitter tears.

"Look here, little woman," were the first words to which I was able to give intelligent heed, "you are in trouble, and I am not at all surprised. In fact, I fancy I can make a shrewd guess at what has happened to you."

So spoke Mr. Ray, but my experiences had been so strange that I did not see how he could possibly guess their nature, and I shook my head despondently.

"I don't know why I was silly enough to cry," I said, "unless it is that I felt so utterly alone in the world. As for trouble—yes, I have had plenty of that since I came to visit the Vernons. But I hope the worst is over now, and after this afternoon I do not intend to see them again."

"Believe me, they are difficult people to get rid of, if once they gather anybody into their clutches. If you will not think me presumptuous, I should like to ask you to confide in me. You cannot be too careful in dealing with people like the Vernons, and I may perhaps be able to help you."

It was odd that I should feel such absolute confidence in Mr. Ray as I did. But there was something so open, so honest, and so winning in his manner, that I forgot how little he and I knew of each other, and I forthwith began to tell him what had happened to me since I left home.

"Suppose we sit down on this old tree stump," he said kindly. "You have already walked some distance, and as you can talk just as well sitting as you can standing, there is no reason why you should tire yourself unnecessarily."

A few minutes later we were sitting side by side on the tree stump, and I continued my story, confessing every item of the folly of which I had been guilty. I was sure he would despise me for what I had done, and for being so easily misled. But I was determined not to spare myself the punishment which my folly deserved, and I knew also that half-confidences were hardly a fair tender to the man who had already saved my life, and who now showed himself willing to help me to save my reputation.

He listened without comment until I had finished. Then he said kindly: "Miss Beresford, do not take yourself to task quite so severely. It is difficult for outsiders to judge the virtual impossibility of resisting such influences as have been brought to bear upon you. But I know the Vernons to be a pair of unscrupulous harpies who will hesitate at nothing to serve their wicked ends, and due allowance must be made for your inexperience. Against Mr. Taskot I would have you be on your guard, though I cannot say that I think him very culpable for trying to fight the enemy with their own weapons. But he ought not to have drawn you into so shady a business, and he is much to blame for bringing you into the toils of your opponents."

"If only I could have avoided last night's doings, I would not have been quite so ashamed of myself."

"What do you intend to do about your winnings?"

"I am going to see the Bainbrigs before I go back to the Towers for my luggage. And I shall insist upon their taking the money back. That which was won from the Garfords can be given to them by Mr. Bainbrig. I only hope they will not despise me too much."

"They will not despise you, for they will understand that you were terrorised into doing what you did last night, and the best proof of real honesty that you can give them is to refuse to keep your ill-gotten gains. Apart from everything else, they ought to know what to expect if they go to the Towers again. But how dreadfully pale you look. All this worry is making you ill."

"I do feel rather faint. The fact is, I came out without any breakfast, because I did not want to accept any more of the Vernons' hospitality."

"There is a farm close by where you can get some new milk and bread. Let me take you there this minute."

I was very glad to do as Mr. Ray suggested, and the half-hour that followed was a very blissful one, in spite of the unpleasantness with which my final departure from Vernon Towers was sure to be accompanied. My new friend was so thoroughly at ease that he made me forget everything but that he and I were strangely familiar with each other, and I found the time all too short when it became advisable to start for the residence of Mr. and Miss Bainbrig.

"I'll see you to the door," said Mr. Ray, gathering up the sketching materials which he had brought with him. "Mr. Bainbrig will be sure to escort you back to the Towers,

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and in the meanwhile I will go and make arrangements to transport you and your luggage to the station. It is now eleven o'clock. You ought to leave by the two-fifteen, so you cannot afford to waste much time before you return for your belongings."

I thought it very kind of Mr. Ray to take so much trouble on my behalf, and his comforting presence made me almost forget that I still had one or two unpleasant tasks before me. But when, having escorted me to the door of "The Mullions," he rang the bell and then left me to perform my work of restitution, I immediately felt myself afloat upon a sea of trouble again.

"I wish he could be always with me," I sighed. "Things would never go wrong then, and I should never get into difficulties."

Always with me!

The wish had come unbidden. But, having come, it was a revelation, and I blushed with confusion to think how soon I had lost my heart to a stranger. I was still blushing when Miss Bainbrig's maid opened the door, in answer to the ring.

"Miss Bainbrig?" I asked, my courage sinking into my shoes, for I had a sudden fear that my story might be misconstrued into a malicious attempt to damage the Vernons, in revenge for a fancied slight.

What then was my relief when the maid informed me that both her master and her mistress had gone out.

"There was a telegram," she continued, "and they drove off in a hurry."

"And they are not likely to be back soon?"

"That I can't say, miss. There wasn't anything said about when they were coming back."

Now I had a good sum of money upon me, money to which I did not consider myself to have any right, and I did not want to risk taking it back to the Towers with me. Neither did I want to delay at least partial explanations until after the Bainbrigs had had their minds poisoned against me by the Vernons. So I asked the maid to allow me to write a note, and in a very few minutes I had concocted the following epistle:

"Dear Miss Bainbrig,—*I would have liked to give you some verbal explanations of certain things which occurred last night, so am sorry to have missed you. I will write more fully after I arrive at my own home. In the meantime, I inclose herewith my share of the money that was won from you and your friends when playing Bridge. You will know how much Mr. Vernon and I won from you, and after deducting your share, you will do me a great favour if you will kindly pass the balance on to the two gentlemen who came to the Towers with you. Please understand that I cannot possibly keep any of the money myself, for it was won by unfair means, and it is not honestly mine to keep. I shall have no chance of seeing you again, for I am going home this afternoon, and it is not likely that Vernon Towers will ever again see*

Yours truly,

Olive Beresford.

This letter, with the money, was put in a large envelope, and given into the keeping of the maid, and I now hurried back to ring the curtain upon my unfortunate visit to Vernon Towers.

EPISODE THIRTEEN.

"There is the Thief!"

The scenery hereabouts was very lovely; and the air was full of Nature's most witching music. But I had eyes and ears for very little beyond the contemplation of my own position. I was nervous and ill at ease, and every step that took me nearer to the wicked couple who sought to ruin me seemed also to bring me nearer to some further trouble whose lengthening shadow was gradually casting a witch-like spell over me.

I was assailed by a dreadful foreboding of coming misery, and so strong was the feeling that my footsteps lagged more and more, as if they would fain help me to postpone the evil moment.

Yet, when I at last found myself in the big entrance hall, there was nothing abnormal in its aspect. Nor did Annabel, who saw me come in, look violently aggressive, as I had feared would be the case. She certainly looked scornful, and I felt sure that she knew of the loss of the photographs, though she must have been exceedingly puzzled to understand how I could possibly have guessed at their new hiding place.

"I hear you had a headache this morning," she sneered. "Nocturnal rambles and night air don't agree with you, I suppose?"

"Nothing here agrees with me," was my steadily spoken reply. "So I am leaving this afternoon, and hope to recover my health in the quietude of my own home."

"Would you like some help over packing your clothes? If so, I shall be delighted to expedite your departure."

"Thank you, I can manage without assistance at present. When I have finished packing, I may trouble one of your servants to carry my dress-basket downstairs for me."

"Certainly. You have only to command, and the whole establishment shall be at your service. I have, however, one favour to ask of you. It will hardly be kind or courteous to end your visit without saying good-bye to Harry, and you will find us both in the drawing-room when you come down."

I should have preferred to see neither Annabel nor her husband again. But, when I was quite ready for departure, I felt constrained to be at least outwardly ceremonious, and went into the drawing-room for the final leavetaking.

Very much to my surprise, I saw the Bainbrigs there already, looking so ill at ease that I knew they had been regaled with my real and imaginary delinquencies. Before I had time to say a word, Annabel called out in high, staccato tones: "Has your luggage been brought downstairs, Olive?"

"Yes," I replied. "And I have to thank you for the help given me."

"Pardon me," was the ominous reply. "You refused help, and that was what clinched my suspicions. Constable, come into the hall, and do your duty. You will search this young lady's luggage, and if, as I suspect, she has stolen my jewellery, you must arrest her at once."

So the horror had come!

And it was worse than anything I had dreaded. Of course I knew that the charge was a trumped-up one. But I guessed in an instant that some jewellery had been hidden in my already half-filled dress-basket during my absence, and I sank back in an agony of fear when at last the policeman, who had waited in an inner room until he was ordered to begin the search, brought out of my basket a small jewel-case; and, turning to me, said:

"Miss Beresford, it is my duty to arrest you, at the instance of Mrs. Vernon, on the charge of theft!"

Another long instalment of this fascinating series next week. Be sure you do not miss it.

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THE PERFIDY OF EDITH ALLEYNE.

The Story of a Secret Marriage and a Disappointment.

"I SAY, mother, who is that girl out there? By Jove, she's rather pretty and her figure is grand! Who is she?"

Lady Blackhurst frowned slightly at her son's remarks and questions; the evident admiration in his tones was somewhat disquieting.

"That 'girl' is twenty-four, Ronald! *I* should call her a woman!"

"Oh, we won't quarrel over a term, mother!" laughed the handsome Ronald Blackhurst. "Who is she? That's the main point. Is she staying with you? You didn't tell me you had a visitor!"

"Don't be absurd, Ronald! Of course, you understand that she is Miss Edith Alleyne, the young lady whom I engaged as companion about three months ago. I fancy that she must belong to a very distant branch of the Alleynes; she knows nothing of the members of the family who usually figure in Society. She has been brought up far above her station in life, I should say; certainly her education and manner are superior to her circumstances."

When Lady Blackhurst commenced this little speech she was bent on showing her only son that Miss Alleyne was a nobody; but as she proceeded she forgot this intention and spoke quite fairly about the young lady. As she finished she chanced to catch a glimpse of a peculiar expression in her son's eyes, and she was about to continue when he broke in:

"I should say that she has seen a lot of trouble, in spite of her comparative youth," he observed thoughtfully. "There is a sadness about the face as I saw it just now; a thoughtfulness that comes only with age—the age of years or the age of sorrow! I should like to know something about her, mother. I feel a kind of compassionate interest in your companion."

He sank lazily into a chair. Miss Alleyne had passed out of sight, so it was useless to remain at the window. Lady Blackhurst sat with knitted brows for several seconds, her son watching her with concealed amusement; she had not expected Ronald to be so foolish, and she must stop it at once.

"Ronald," she said impressively, "I do not expect you to make a fool of yourself! Now, my boy, you need not look surprised, for you know perfectly well what I mean! When you fall in love you will find someone more suited to your position in life than Miss Alleyne! I do not like the idea of having to give her notice, and, both for my sake and her own, I hope it will not be necessary."

"You put the matter quite plainly, as you always do, mother!" said Ronald, flushing just a little. "You are wont to go straight to the point. I don't think there is any occasion to worry yourself; surely I can take an interest in a member of the household without being accused of a desire to fall in love with her?"

"I hope so," remarked Lady Blackhurst drily. "What are your plans for to-morrow?" she continued, turning the conversation.

Ronald talked quite unconcernedly, and no further reference was made to Miss Alleyne.

Notwithstanding her customary shrewdness, Lady Blackhurst was deceived by this nonchalance, and felt vexed with herself for having answered Ronald as she had done about the companion; she had probably caused him to take more notice of her than he otherwise would have done. At any rate, Ronald was only home for three weeks, then he would be off to Scotland, and after that he would return to Malta to take up his official duties again.

During the next three or four days Ronald showed no particular interest in Miss Alleyne, and Lady Blackhurst's mind became perfectly easy on that score; she was, in fact, more exercised in mind on another point—one to which his father, Sir Walter Blackhurst, had referred; this was an unfortunate predilection on Ronald's part for card playing.

"Of course," admitted his father, "he doesn't see anything in it, and I don't believe for a moment that he devotes so much attention to it for the mere sake of winning a few pounds. It is merely a pastime. Yet I wish he would find another, for this is apt to prove costly. I had to help him out only a couple of months ago. Perhaps you can influence him, my dear."

However, Ronald had not quite lost sight of Miss Alleyne, although he appeared to have done so. After the first talk with his mother he had several times caught himself watching her and thinking of her; then he had pulled himself up abruptly.

"It's so ordinary, to fall in love with a companion!" he mused. "I simply mustn't do it. There are plenty of other girls. We—or she—would be 'cut' in Society, and that wouldn't mean happiness either for me or her. I believe there's a story behind that grave face, but that isn't *my* business!"

Ronald was a favourite in the homes of the county gentry, and his three weeks' stay at Blackhurst Lodge promised to be a round of amusements outside that residence rather than a holiday with his father and mother. Sometimes they went with him, but often he went alone.

Almost half his holiday was gone. It was a lovely afternoon, and he was walking through a grand old wood, the pride and delight of the district, but he had no eyes for the beauty of Nature. His head was slightly bent, his brows contracted; some uneasy reflections were troubling him.

He had reached an open glade where the rich grass was like a velvet carpet and deadened his footsteps; the sun's rays pierced their way through the trees on one side, thus making the opposite side of the glade bright with light while the rest of the open space was in the shadow.

He walked in this shady part, and had traversed half its width when he stopped just in time to prevent his treading on a pair of small feet incased in dainty boots.

"I beg your pardon!" he cried, making a little spring aside to avoid stumbling. "I was deep in thought, or I—Oh, I am glad it is not a stranger of whom I have to crave forgiveness, Miss Alleyne; it is so much easier to apologise to one with whom you are acquainted, and it doesn't make you feel half so foolish!"

He was quite at home in ladies' society, and the speech amused Miss Alleyne, that was evident. Somehow, she did not feel that she was below him in station—at any rate, she gave no signs of it, but replied quite easily as she sprang quickly to her feet.

"I am afraid it is my fault, Mr. Blackhurst. I was in the

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way; I ought to have taken up a more retired position; but I really didn't think of anyone coming through here."

"It would be quite wrong for you to think of occupying a more retired position," he declared gallantly, bowing to her as he spoke.

There was a significance in his tone which did not escape her notice, and just the least trace of colour appeared on her cheeks. Ronald could not have resisted the impulse to say it; she looked so charming as she stood before him that he uttered the words because they expressed the truth. It was not right that such a woman as Miss Alleyne should occupy the post of a dependent.

Edith Alleyne was about to make some confused response to Ronald's observation when he, remembering that he had placed her in a difficult situation, broke in:

"Pray do not let me disturb you. I should be exceedingly sorry to think that I had deprived you of rest and pleasure."

"Oh, I must get back to the Lodge now, Mr. Blackhurst," said Miss Alleyne deprecatingly. "You have not disturbed me at all."

"You are going back to the Lodge? Then we can go together, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that if you have lost some pleasure by not being able to continue your book, you are affording me the pleasure of having someone to walk back with and keep me from further indulgence in gloomy thoughts."

Why was it that these gallant speeches would rise to his lips? He was powerless to explain it; they were perfectly sincere.

He glanced sideways, to see how Miss Alleyne took it, and he caught her doing the same thing—she wished to ascertain if he were really sincere or simply jesting. They were so nicely caught in the act that they both laughed—just a trifle awkwardly, perhaps, and felt drawn nearer to one another by a subtle sentiment which neither could define.

He stopped just in time to prevent his treading on a pair of small feet incased in dainty boots.

"Are you really troubled about something, Mr. Blackhurst?" inquired Edith sympathetically. The remembrance of her own troubles made her immediately desire to help others. "Is it anything about the party to-morrow? Can I be of any assistance to you?"

He remained silent for several seconds; at the end of the pause he shook his head slowly and said:

"I wish you could!"

He said it so fervently that she was impelled to break in eagerly:

"Who knows? Perhaps I can. Will you tell me? One sometimes gets assistance where one least expects it."

How simply, how naturally, had this conversation come about! Yet it was leading these two, unconsciously, into the very path against which Lady Blackhurst had warned her son.

They were walking side by side; in her eagerness to help him she had bent her head slightly, and was looking at him with an appealing kind of glance. She had forgotten that they were man and woman, that he was the son of Lady Blackhurst, to whom she was acting as companion; the inherent goodness of her nature came uppermost, and other considerations were lost sight of.

Ronald Blackhurst gazed at her longingly; it would be a relief to tell somebody, yet——. Again that impulse seized him.

"I've been making a fool of myself, that's about the truth of it, Miss Alleyne!" he jerked out recklessly. "I've done it before, in the same way, and I ought to have known better. You see, I've been card playing, and have lost! The last time I ran into debt through losing at cards Sir Walter paid up like a Briton, and I was so ashamed that I said I wouldn't get let in again.

"Well, the night before last I began to play and I won—won a great deal! I suppose that excited me, and I went on playing and lost! I had the most infernal luck, and before I could realise it I had lost a considerable amount.

"I didn't know exactly how much till yesterday morning, and this morning the fellow has pressed me for the money. He wants it to pay his own debts! So I suppose I must go to Sir Walter again, as he can't wait long!

"But," he continued, his bronzed cheeks becoming much darker as he flushed under the tan, "I have a suspicion that the fellow didn't play fair! In plain language, he cheated. What's the matter, Miss Alleyne?"

She had uttered a slight cry.

"Oh, nothing! Go on!"

"Of course, I can't say that out loud, you know, because I'm not positive, but I recollect several things that looked queer."

"Who was it?"

"Well, I don't think I ought to say that," he said chivalrously. "I can't prove it, you see, and it isn't fair to blacken a man on suspicion."

The words that were upon Edith's lips died away unuttered as she saw the soldierly figure of Sir Walter approaching them from the direction of the Lodge. She knew that he would not approve of what he saw, and she flushed at the thought that she had been talking to Ronald in quite a sisterly manner.

Sisterly? The query rose in her mind involuntarily; was

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that the correct qualification, or was a stronger word justified? She dared not answer the question fairly, even in the recesses of her heart, but something within her cried out in anguish against the dictates of Fate!

Sir Walter bowed gravely and detained his son; Miss Alleyne returned the salute and passed on. During the finish of the walk to the Lodge she resolved to avoid Ronald as much as possible. "It will not do," she murmured, as if in answer to some question. "It cannot be!"

Whatever Edith intended to do, it was clearly not Ronald's desire to leave her to herself; that short conversation, the companion's sympathetic interest in his troubles, the charm of that grave face—all had exercised a powerful influence over him. "That's the sort of woman who would be a man's guardian angel!" he muttered, hardly understanding the significance of his words. "That is, if he had sense enough to recognise the fact!"

So he seized every opportunity of speaking to Edith, and even made opportunities of having a short walk with her. Edith perceived this and tried to avoid him, although her heart cried out in rebellion. Yet she knew that it must be!

"Miss Alleyne!" he called after her, softly, four or five days later, as she flitted through the private garden. "Ah, at last I have caught you! I have so wanted to tell you—er—the finish of what I began to say the other day. But you're always in such a hurry to get out of my way. Now, why is that? Why do——"

"I hope that the solution of the difficulty was easily found, Mr. Blackhurst!" she said quickly, interrupting him in order to escape from his awkward interrogatory.

But she was not so fortunate; her words gave him another opening.

"I am glad to find that you really do hope that I got well out of that pickle, Miss Alleyne!" he cried, taking her hand in spite of her attempt to prevent him. "I know you would not say 'I hope' if you didn't care a rap! You wouldn't say that in a commonplace manner, like others! Would you?

"Yes, I got out of it. Captain Joyce lent me the money; I simply couldn't face my father! Joyce wouldn't take any promissory note or anything of that; he merely accepted my word of honour that I would repay it and that I wouldn't play again! That kind of thing puts a man on his mettle, you know!"

"I should think so!" replied Edith. She spoke with conviction and her voice was full of significance. "If you failed, in either part of the promise, your conduct would be despicable!"

She looked him straight in the eyes with that look that makes a man stiffen himself and feel possessed of a will of iron.

"You are right, Miss Alleyne!" he cried with quiet decision. "Do you know what I saw when I gave my word of honour to my father's old friend and my godfather, Captain Joyce? I saw your face! I thought how easy it would be to do the right thing always if I had that face to look upon when—— No, don't turn away! Listen to me, Edith!"

"I cannot! I must not!" she moaned. "Oh, spare me! You know that—that I am only your mother's companion!"

The last part of that sentence was not what she had upon her lips to say, but she swiftly changed it. How could she tell him?

"I don't care for your position; it is you for whom I care!" he cried, almost fiercely, as he tried to clasp her to his breast. "If you love me, what does all the rest matter? And you do love me, do you not?" he asked pleadingly.

She shut her eyes to avoid his ardent gaze and, by a sudden twist of her arms, she liberated herself from his grasp and fled towards the house. Her face was hot, a great sob was in her throat, her mind was in a whirl. He gazed after her with an exultant expression; her confusion was his answer, and that answer was the one he desired, so he thought!

That afternoon Ronald announced that he had made arrangements to shorten his holiday in Scotland by one week in order to have another week at home; his parents misunderstood the reason of this change, and were glad that Ronald preferred home to Scotland.

He saw Edith Alleyne lying, unresistingly, in the arms of Lord Gransdene.

He tried to obtain another interview with Edith, but failed. She was suffering from a violent headache and could not appear. He caught a glimpse of her on the following morning, but everyone, including himself, was busy with the details of the party to be given in the evening.

It was a brilliant function, and Ronald's one regret was that Edith could not take her place with the guests. "Not yet," he thought. "But she will do so before long!" On the whole, however, he was inclined to be pleased with her exclusion on that particular evening; it would probably afford him an opportunity of seeing her alone! He could well slip away for a few minutes!

Ronald Blackhurst's face darkened with anger when his eyes fell on the figure of one of the guests; it was Lord Gransdene, the man to whom he had lost so much money and whom he had practically accused of cheating at cards.

Lord Gransdene had succeeded to the title only a year previously, owing to the unexpected deaths of his father and elder brother, who were drowned by the capsizing of a yacht; nobody had known much about him previously, and it was rumoured that he had been roughing it in the Colonies.

One thing at least was certain; he had very little money to support the title, for there was no estate and the personal property of his father had been left to another brother and a sister. This fact was regarded by most people as an injustice; the young lord had probably offended his father in some trivial way, they said.

"I didn't know that the mater had invited him!" muttered Ronald. "I thought he went off the other day; he must have returned and received an invitation at the last moment, somehow. Confound him!"

However, Ronald soon got over his annoyance by ignoring Lord Gransdene's presence; he was watching for an opportunity to look for Edith, and that made him occasionally absent-minded, to the surprise and vexation of some of the young ladies.

At last the opportunity came and he slipped away. He

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hurried hither and thither in search of Edith—he always called her Edith to himself now! His search appeared fruitless, and he gnawed the ends of his military moustache in annoyance.

She must be about somewhere! He must have just one minute with her! It was maddening to be kept apart from the woman with whom he had fallen so hopelessly in love!

He was about to enter a part of the conservatory when that subtle feeling which warns us of the presence of a fellow-creature caused him to halt and peer in. He started in dismay at the sight which met his incredulous gaze. He saw Edith Alleyne lying, unresisting, in the arms of Lord Gransdene, who was kissing her passionately.

Stunned by this spectacle, Ronald's sight failed him, a mist spread itself before his eyes, he raised his hand to his forehead and staggered away with the word "Traitress!" on his lips.

Ronald made his way mechanically back to the immense reception room; all the way he was muttering scornfully that he had been deceived into believing that a false-hearted woman was an angel of goodness; and then he plunged into the vortex of pleasure with reckless gaiety.

Ronald's first impulse, when he arose with a splitting headache on the morning after the party, was to leave Blackhurst Lodge at the earliest moment; he began packing his things with feverish haste, his one anxiety being to get away from Edith Alleyne, but he stopped abruptly in the middle of his task, set his teeth hard and strode from the room.

"Why should I not face her and tell her how she has ruined my life and my trust in women?" he asked himself again and again as he descended the stairs.

He made no scruple about inquiring for her, and was informed that she was in the private garden. "The same place! All the better!" was his secret comment, and he went straight to the garden.

Yes, she was there! She looked rather more careworn than before, but he had no pity for her!

"I am so glad that I have seen you!" she cried, hastening towards him. "I wanted to tell you——"

Something in his look froze the sentence on her tongue.

"I need no telling, Miss Alleyne!" he broke in, speaking with bitter contempt. "What need for explanation when I see you in the arms of another man?"

She recled as if he had struck her a blow. He laughed harshly.

"Yet an explanation is due to me, I think!" he continued with assumed coolness. "After what took place here, at this very spot, only forty-eight hours ago, I ought to be informed of the reason for this perfidy!"

"Be it so!" she replied coldly. Every vestige of colour had faded from her face; even her lips were white. "I will tell you! But first permit me to say that you will receive this morning a cheque from Lord Gransdene for the money you lost at cards the other evening—through his cheating!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded in amazement.

"I am about to give you the explanation of my perfidy!" she replied so coldly that he winced. "I would fain have been spared this story, but you force me to it!

"When I was a mere girl of eighteen, that is nearly six years ago, I was forced into a marriage with a man for whom I entertained not a spark of affection. I was told that my father owed him money and that this was the way to liquidate the debt. It is not an uncommon way; women are often sold into slavery of that nature!

"I was too young to understand; it was a new life that I was about to begin, and the old one had been very sad and dull! I was to be married to the second son of Lord Gransdene, and there was the remote possibility of becoming a peeress!

"But before I had been married many months, I learnt that the man to whom I was bound was a scoundrel. He was bad at heart, a gambler, a cheat! To save him from exposure and disgrace, his father paid a large sum of money and told him to get out of the country. He did not ask me, his wife, to go with him; I would not have gone, in any case, but he gave me no choice—he simply deserted me!

"I refused help from his father, who thought that I had brought him to that pass by reckless extravagance—yes, he thought that, although he knew absolutely nothing about me! My father died of a broken heart and I obtained a situation and earned my living.

"I heard that my husband had come into the title and had returned to England. I fervently hoped that I should never meet him, for I loathed him. Judge of my distress when I found that he was here!

"He met me in the conservatory, recognised me, threatened to tell everybody that I was his wife, and to claim me. He caught hold of me, and I think that I partly fainted. I suppose that you saw me then!

"I recovered and fought him with his own weapons. I told him that I would expose him as a cheat if he molested me, and I boldly accused him of cheating you! I saw that I had hit the mark, and I pressed it till he promised to leave me unmolested and to send you a cheque for the money.

"You spoke of what happened on this very spot two days ago. Heavens, you did not, you do not, understand!"

She ceased speaking; her breath was coming in quick gasps, her whole frame quivered. They looked each other in the eyes, and he understood! He read the secret which she dare not utter, which she had tried to conceal. He knew that, for the first time in her life, she loved and that he was the object of that love! And he knew also that she could not yield to her affection, that Fate compelled her to stifle it!

"I am sorry for my harshness!" he said gently, so gently that she could scarcely endure it. "I was wrong! It was all my fault! Can you forgive me?"

She held out her hand and he kissed it reverently.

"I am going away," he said a moment later, "but I hope that my mother will sometimes send me news of you! He will leave the country, no one will know, so you can remain here?"

"I must tell Lady Blackhurst," she answered, "and perhaps she will not let me stay."

"Yes, she will!" he declared decisively. "She is strict, but she is very good, and she will be kind to one to whom Fate has been so cruel! Good-bye!"

H. Bramley.

"Mrs. Gobang seems to be thoroughly up to date." "Yes; she even has a smokeless husband."

"Did you get back that half-sovereign your little boy swallowed?" "No; the doctor stuck to it for his fee."

"He has broken my heart," wailed the beautiful girl. "There, there! don't take on so," said her friend, in tones of pity; "it might have been your bicycle."

Freddie: "It's always in damp places where mushrooms grow, isn't it, papa?" Papa: "Yes, my boy." Freddie: "Is that the reason they look like umbrellas, papa?"

"There was a strange man here to see you to-day, papa," said little Ethel, who met her father in the hall as he came home on Wednesday night. "Did he have a bill?" "No, papa. He had just a plain nose."

A SPLEND'D SERIAL STORY,

By Mrs. GEORGE CORBETT,

Begins in the September Number of the

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AN OLD TUNE.

A Love Story with a Pathetic Ending.

LEWIS MILWARD and Willie Treglоan had been bosom friends for years — at least, Willie had been Lewis' bosom friend. His was the more clinging nature, and he had an intensely strong sense of gratitude. Lewis, big, rugged, reticent, was a tower of strength unto himself—or seemed to be so.

They had rooms together in a "private temperance hotel" in one of the big, old-fashioned squares. Lewis was a profound mathematical scholar, and Willie performed the duties of secretary for him.

They were middle-aged, and seemed almost elderly because their lives had been saddened and made lonely. Long ago Lewis had loved a girl, very fair, very beautiful; and he had lost her—not through death. There are other ways, more painful; and beautiful women there are, who prefer a handsome man, or a rich one, to the truest gentleman on earth.

Willie's case was sad, too, in other ways.

Sick at heart they had shrunk from the world and buried themselves in books and work, living the lives of hermits and, unconsciously, putting halos round their early memories. They did not observe that Time and Life were slipping by them, because, naturally, they had grown a little self-centred.

Lewis expended all his energies on mathematical studies and Willie devoted himself to Lewis. When Lewis did not want him he painted—for he was an artist of no feeble order; but Lewis' desires were his law, and the fulfilling of them was his pleasure.

He did not forget how, when one awful day, ten years ago, a bank smash had completely ruined him, Lewis, the only friend who had ever protested his goodwill, had provided all for him, asking never a single question.

In return, he gave all of himself—and it was much.

They did not either of them realise, yet, what or how much was lacking in their studious lives. Their days were absorbed in a monotonous round of books and works.

In the evening they went downstairs to have dinner with the other people, presided over by Mrs. Parry, the stout and cheerful mistress of the house. All this had become a routine.

Every day they were shrinking more and more into themselves, and even the evening meal downstairs was becoming irksome to Lewis. Willie endured it better, because he did not dislike new faces, and because his was a gentler spirit.

But Lewis hated them all. They seemed to him—but he judged them from a point of view made painfully, aesthetically fastidious by his mode of life and thought—smug, commonplace, vulgar, and he began to talk of having dinner served up to him. Willie thought it a pity—but, of course, just as Lewis wished!

"There was fresh luggage in the hall as I came up," he added. "New people, I suppose. Let's go down to-night, anyway, and see them——" He was a social soul by nature.

"New people!" exclaimed Lewis in dismay. "No; I'll be hanged if I will. More fat, stupid old spinsters, or American tourists, I suppose!"

"I didn't see them," replied Willie mildly. "But they mostly are."

Lewis snorted in disgust and re-lighted his pipe.

"I'm going down to read Byron in the Square. It's too hot to write. Will you come?"

"No, thanks," said Willie. "I think I'll just finish a few verses I began yesterday. I feel in the mood. I shall be here if you want me."

Lewis picked up his old straw hat and book, procured the key, and went out to the garden—known as the "Square."

As he seated himself under a shady tree, he saw a lady emerge from the house, wherein at present was his home, and wend her way into the garden. She followed the path near him and he watched her idly.

She was young, quite young, and tall and slender, and passing fair. There was a sort of radiance about her, a something which surprised and dazzled you. You felt you wanted to rub your eyes before you looked again, in case they had deceived you.

She had gone by before he could distinguish more than that, and she seated herself too far off for him to see her without putting up his eye-glass; for he was very short-sighted. He speculated about her, wondering at himself; then tried to read. But Byron failed for once to hold his attention.

He would persist in wondering if the girl were really as radiant as she had seemed as she passed. And what was it, this indescribable something? It was like sunshine of June, but infinitely more so—more—he laughed to himself, suddenly self-conscious.

"What a fool I am!" he reflected. "Just because the sun shone as she went by, I must needs think she caused the brightness;" and he returned to his Byron.

Only for a second. Then, as though impelled, he looked across again to where the fair unknown was sitting.

"I don't believe it was *all* the sunshine," he mused. "It couldn't have been. No, I'm positive it wasn't. I'm——" He jumped up, as one who makes a bold and desperate resolve. "I'm going to walk over there and see." And with courage most wonderful, he rose and went over the Square towards her. The girl was reading and her face hidden. He was seized with a sudden irresistible desire to make her look up, and to hear her speak.

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his hat. "Here—er—here is the key of the Square. I am going out and you will want it to let yourself out with, you see."

The girl had looked up at the sound of his voice, and he met her frank blue eyes. "Oh, thank you," she said. Her voice was like music.

He stared at her fair face for a second, as one bewitched. She had shining eyes, shining hair, a smile of wonderful sweetness; and the glow of youth and the gladness of an untroubled soul were about her.

Then, suddenly realising his own astonishing temerity, he bowed awkwardly and turned away; for no apparent reason, covered with confusion.

"And I called her a fat old spinster!" he said to himself. "She is a summer's day."

The girl looked after him for a vague second.

"That must be the taciturn mathematician," she reflected. "He looks it."

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Mrs. Parry, the mistress of the house, had told her of him when she came to look at the rooms.

Lewis went down to dinner that night!

Willie was rather relieved. When he found himself seated next to a slip of a girl dressed in a frivolous-looking white dress he was positively glad.

Lewis sat opposite to her—and was rather annoyed with Willie for having the courage to make use of a graceful manner.

He himself was somewhat brusque of speech, and jerky of movement, out of pure shyness.

They learnt that the unknown's name was Daphne Rivers, and that she was up in London for a six weeks' rehearsal.

An actress! Lewis opened his eyes wide. He had never met "theatrical people," and he had a notion that he wouldn't like them if he did.

Daphne had never met a mathematical scholar before. She had felt sure she couldn't live up to one, especially one so serious and middle-aged. She told him so—all except the "middle-aged" part. She remembered just in time that he might not like that.

He found himself laughing with her, listening to her, and forgetting himself. He even ventured on a very pretty speech in reply to a remark she made, and got through it so successfully that he chose that moment to tear himself away from the room, feeling sure he would only spoil it, and make an utter ass of himself, if he tempted Providence any longer.

So he and Willie went back to work upstairs, both silent, still under the spell of the newcomer's unconscious witchery. Their sitting-room looked grim and dusty—they themselves felt old-fashioned and shabby. Lewis lighted his pipe and smoked thoughtfully. Willie took up his pen and wrote, with a scratching nib.

Presently from the room beneath, a young, clear voice floated up to them in the stillness. A strange thrill vibrated through them and the scratching pen stopped. Daphne was singing an Irish folk-song downstairs. They had never heard it before—nor heard, indeed, any music for long enough—and they only knew Beethoven and Mozart, and had always despised the modern stuff; at least, Lewis had.

At the end of the first verse he took his pipe out of his mouth and got up and stared out of the open window, his morbid face alight. The pen fell from Willie's fingers, blotting the white sheet before him, and his mind travelled back to old, old dreams. They listened spell-bound to the second verse.

Then the singing ceased, but the silence upstairs remained unbroken.

They had both begun to realise now what they had missed in life.

Daphne soon became very friendly with Lewis and Willie. To cheer her quite imaginary loneliness they offered her books to read, and philanthropically devised what amusements they could which would give them an opportunity of being with her.

Right royally they waited upon her, and the summer days went by merrily.

Their work suffered, naturally. For, even when she was at the theatre, and they knew they could settle to work without running any risk of missing a chance of seeing her, they found themselves talking of her or thinking of her.

If she walked in the Square, they suddenly found their room too oppressive for work—that is, if Daphne walked alone in the Square. But she was very popular. Even the "fat old spinsters" liked her. And there were no young ones there!

She seemed to have wakened up the dull old boarding-house and filled it with the spirit of youth, and daily the delight of her presence and companionship deepened to two at least of the inmates. Mrs. Parry marvelled! Where was Mr. Milward's taciturnity? For Lewis, growing bolder, asked Daphne to allow him to be her guide in exploring London, and they spent various glorious afternoons and evenings—at least, to Lewis they were glorious.

Those summer hours with her, talking to her of his work or waxing eloquent over his favourite authors, or favourite themes; or listening to her sagely tolerant views, or submitting to her audacious teasing! All these were to him like bright stars in a dark, dark sky—oases in the dreary desert—a raft to a drowning man.

He knew soon, too soon, that he loved her, and craved for her, with all his long-repressed soul and strength, and they were great; although he cheated himself for a while and swore he regarded her as a friend.

And because she had always seemed to be glad to be with him, had always been kind, had allowed him to escort her home from late rehearsals, and take her out on holiday afternoons, he could not resist the hope that she cared a little too, that perhaps she would allow him the privi-

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his hat. "Here is the key of the Square."

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lege of loving her—would be happy with him—would love him.

As for Daphne, she thought them all—and particularly these two serious middle-aged men—most wonderfully kind; and she was very grateful. But so far she had met with kindness everywhere, and she never dreamt that anything more prompted these two, to her, elderly men. Love did not as yet enter into her dreams at all.

Willie was often left alone now in the grim sitting-room, while his friend was out with Daphne. If there was no work to do he made beautiful little sketches, whose subject was a fair maiden with bright hair and smiling lips, and the radiance of youth.

"Daphne!" he murmured, writing the name at the foot of one of them. "She should have been called 'Psyche.'"

He started guiltily and blushed; but presently fell to musing again, and conjured up in dreams a very different life from this, in a different groove; a life in which there figured a sweet little country house, and peaceful happiness, and no more dulness, because his lifelong companion would be a—wife, who was—his eyes fell on the sonnets and the sketch called—"Daphne."

Daphne! Daphne for his wife! Oh, merciful God, might it be? For he loved her—loved her! He started up, calling himself a fool. Had he forgotten his age, his poverty, his dependence on Lewis? And yet—and yet!

He tried to crush the thought, but it would return—the thought that Lewis, who had always been his salvation, might help once again. He would tell him, anyhow. He felt that he ought to have Lewis' sanction. Perhaps he guessed something even now—perhaps Daphne did!

His heart throbbed painfully—but when Lewis came in he had not the courage to tell him; and Lewis was not helpful, but wandered about restlessly, his hands in his pockets, humming occasional snatches of songs—not Beethoven's nor yet Mozart's! It struck him that Willie was getting intolerably dull lately.

Willie marvelled that even Lewis' voice could sound unmusical, singing those particular songs. It seemed to him a pity that Lewis should spoil them so.

The next evening Daphne was walking in the Square with them. It was sultry—and they had seen from their window the flutter of a white dress among the trees. That was what made the evening sultry to them!

"Why don't you smoke, you poor martyrs?" demanded she, for she knew they were inveterate smokers. "You must be miserable. Do!"

They declined gracefully.

"But I don't mind, you know," she protested. "I smoke myself, so why should I?"

Lewis stared.

"You—you smoke!" he ejaculated.

"Of course!"

"What—er——"

"Oh, only cigarettes yet," she said laughing. "Why, I do believe you are shocked."

He was, but he was thinking, too, how charming she must look.

"A—a little, perhaps," he said bashfully. Then hastened to add: "But—I am old-fashioned, I know."

She was amused.

"Well, I shall not interfere with your pleasures, or let you waste your time on me much longer," she said.

"You have never done either," he muttered awkwardly. "But what do you mean, Miss Rivers?"

"That we go on tour next Sunday," she said, and sighed regretfully.

He caught his breath.

"That means—out of London?" he asked.

"Of course. The north country towns."

"And you go on Sunday?"

"Yes, alas."

It was a thunderbolt.

She wondered a little at their silence. But the night was still and beautiful, and her thoughts were very pleasant, so she did not break it. Willie stole away with never a word, so desperately miserable he was; and Lewis stared at her aghast.

They had forgotten that she was only there for a season, that soon she would go away, and be swallowed up in the rushing world, and come back to them never more. She had become the sunny part of their days, and they could scarcely realise that they must lose her, and go back to their old monotonous routine. It was too horrible.

But all that Lewis said as he twisted his new straw hat between his fingers was:

"I—I am beastly sorry, Miss Rivers. I can't tell you how sorry."

"So am I," she returned frankly. "It has been awfully jolly here in London. And you've all been so kind."

"Oh, please don't say that," he said quickly. "It has been such a pleasure to know you. The kindness has been yours. I—I want to—tell you——"

"Supper's ready," called Mrs. Parry's cheerful voice, coming to them. "Didn't you hear the bell?"

Lewis reviled the bell under his breath with much sincerity and conviction.

"Let me see you to-morrow evening, will you?" he pleaded. hastily.

"Of course, if you like," she answered; and Mrs. Parry was upon them, so they went into the house together.

Willie did not appear at all.

Lewis paced his room that night, maddened by love, hope, fear.

Should he speak, putting aside all thought of his age and disadvantages? Or should he see her go out of his ken, and resume the old life, that was only a living death?

The thought was unendurable. It was like shutting oneself deliberately outside the gates of Eden, and throwing away the key. And surely she guessed.

Surely she knew what he felt for her, what he wanted to say to her! And knowing, would she have been so kind unless—unless—he picked up his hat, and stole out into the Square to think it all out again, and there he came upon Willie, who had spent the hours in arguing out the same problem from a different point of view.

"Hullo, Willie!"

"Hullo, Lewis!"

Strangely enough they were rather pleased to see each other at that moment. Lewis took Willie's arm, and they walked to and fro silently. Then Willie made a desperate effort to confide in Lewis and ask his help.

Just then Lewis burst forth:

"Willie—I want your advice."

This was rather a novel statement coming from Lewis, and Willie was pleased as well as surprised.

"Say on," quoth he.

"You—you'll think me an awful ass," went on Lewis. "But—but the fact is, I—I've fallen head over ears in love. Do you think—I've got the ghost of a chance?"

He was too full of his subject to notice Willie's sudden start, or the sympathetic shake in his voice as he asked:

"Who's the lady?"

Lewis stared at him.

"You mean to say you've never guessed? Why, Miss Rivers, of course."

Miss Rivers, of course! Willie was dazed for a second. Then he could have laughed aloud at the mockery of it. Here, poor fool, he had been fancying that he was the only man in the field! As if a girl would look at him, in any case! And with Lewis to compete—Lewis, whom he would not, could not compete with. Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, in what a fool's dream he had been living!

"What do you think, Willie?" Lewis recalled his thoughts. "Will she—have I—do you think she'll have me? You know she talks of going away—but it's too horrible—I—I can't go back to the old way——"

Willie swallowed a great lump in his throat. Never again would he be sufficient to his friend, in spite of these years of devoted friendship. It seemed unfair. He had always had a share in Lewis' thoughts as in his life—now even that would be

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his no longer. He would be unnecessary, useless. That is terrible.

"I think you stand a good chance," he said quite steadily. "I can't imagine any woman — refusing you, Lewis."

"She's so young, so beautiful. I'm old—ugly——"

"You're only middle-aged, Lewis. Many young girls marry men your age—and at any rate, you're a gentleman."

He ignored the personal reference. Not even Willie could call Lewis an Adonis.

"I shall speak to-morrow," said Lewis. "She goes on Sunday. I may see her to-morrow evening."

"That looks promising. And—and I wish you all luck. Lewis. You deserve it, Heaven knows!"

He held out his hand, and Lewis grasped it.

"Thank you, Willie."

And he spared a second to wonder vaguely how he could ever have thought Willie a bit—well, a bit dull! He was splendid, just splendid.

He did not dream of what Willie suffered, or that when he left him and went to his room he took out a little revolver and handled it lovingly, longingly passionately to slip out of life; and was only arrested from so doing by the thought that it was caddish to spoil their happiness, even ever so little; and also vaguely, that some day, perhaps—who knows, Lewis might have some small need of him again.

But the next morning he went out very early, with his paints and easel. It was more than could be asked of human nature, to stand by, watching passively, the sacrifice of one's dearest hopes.

To Lewis that day was an ordeal. Sometimes it seemed that a hundred years were dragging their weary length before the hour that he lived for; and then Time would seem to be rushing him on madly to his undoing. He wandered about restlessly, hot and cold by turns, though the day was brilliant summer.

At last the hour drew near when she would be in, and presently he heard her singing softly downstairs. He looked at himself in the glass, and for the first time in his life wished himself twenty years younger, and a less awkward height.

He went downstairs and opened the door quietly. She stopped singing, and turned to him with a smile which gladdened his heart, and raised his hopes.

"Don't stop, please," he pleaded. "I want to listen."

She declined, apologising.

"I was only strumming to amuse myself. I'm not in the humour to perform."

"What are you in the humour for?" he asked.

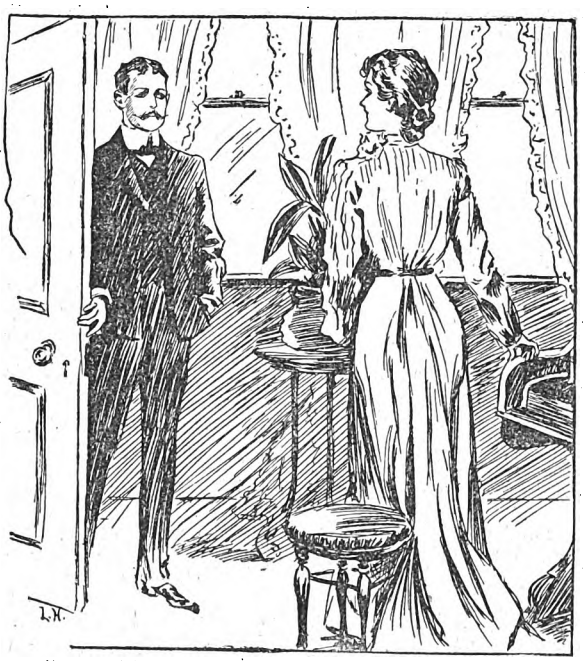
"I don't quite know. Something exciting—something terribly nice, don't you know! My language shocks you, I'm afraid."

"Allow me to take you somewhere 'terribly nice,'" he said.

"No, thanks. You would spoil me if I allowed you. But isn't it a beautiful evening?"

She left the piano and moved to the open window. He noticed her long green dress, the pink roses in her belt, and the grace of her movements.

"Then let me take you out," he pleaded. "It's your last evening, you know."



"Don't stop, please," he pleaded. "I want to listen."

She shook her head. She had never allowed them to spend money on her. Lewis had noticed that, often.

"You are very proud," he said slowly.

"Oh, it isn't pride. Don't think that," she said.

"What then?"

She raised her shoulders slightly.

"I don't know—but——" she reflected, "I suppose I like my independence. I delight in earning my own living, and I like to—to pay my own way. Men have a stupid notion that they must pay for women. To me, that spoils friendship."

He looked at her with a great light in his honest eyes. Had she been noticing him, she might have guessed what was at hand. But she stared through the window absently.

"Underneath your irresponsible manner," he said thoughtfully, "there is a depth of soul that I don't believe you dream of."

She was taken aback, and blamed her own serious speech, as having brought this on herself.

"That is a pretty speech, with a kink in it," she said.

"It is not a pretty speech," he returned. "But where is the kink?"

"You accuse me of an irresponsible manner——"

"That is one of your thousand attractions."

She plucked at some ribbon on her sleeve.

"Forgive me," she said. "But I don't like compliments."

"You are annoyed," he apologised humbly. "I am so sorry—I——"

"No, no." She raised her eyes to his face. "No. But I really do get so many at the theatre. And they seem meaningless, and—I am bored with them."

So they made her pretty speeches at the theatre! That side of her life had never occurred to him. They wooed her, too, no doubt! It was a wonder she was still free to be courted! His jealousy flamed.

"It is a horrible life for you," he exclaimed. "Their unwelcome attentions, and the late hours, and——"

"Oh, every life has its disadvantages," she said. "You must not think I am complaining. I like the life immensely—that is," she laughed, "all except the packing. That's terrible, and now I'm afraid I must go and do it, alack!"

She moved to go, but he took her hand quickly.

"No; don't pack," he said. "Don't—don't go."

She looked at him.

"I must, I'm afraid. We leave by an early train to-morrow——"

"Don't go to-morrow—don't go at all——"

She glanced at him puzzledly, and freed her hand.

"I don't quite understand you," she said.

"I want you," he went on passionately, his earnest face alight and eager. "I love you—I have loved you from the first moment. The thought of your leaving me is—is—terrible—intolerable. You have made these weeks like a perfect dream. Daphne, will you go on making my life a dream? Will you stay with me—will you marry me? It is asking so much, I know, I am such a clumsy ass, and so—so old to you. But I will devote my life to making you happy."

Daphne did not speak. She was aghast, amazed. She had not dreamed of this. The whole thing seemed impossible,

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impossible—ludicrous indeed, but for his passionate earnestness.

"You knew a little, you guessed a little, didn't you?" he went on. "Is it wrong to ask you? I love you so."

"I—I am sorry," she said, her head bent. "Really, really, I didn't know."

"But you know now," he cried, grasping her hands in his. "Daphne, tell me, I may hope. I'll wait, if you like. Don't answer me till you wish. I—I have surprised you. Only tell me I may hope—look at me, Daphne, speak to me."

She looked up at him, and was stricken with remorse and shame that so strong and noble a soul should be abased by a refusal.

"I cannot," she whispered, "I cannot."

"Ah, you don't mean that quite," he pleaded. "Don't send me away without a chance. I won't bother you. I'll wait so patiently."

Alack for him! She knew that neither patience nor time would give him what he asked for.

"I am to blame," she said brokenly. "I have been so blind, so stupid. I might have spared you all this, and now you will think me cruel. But it is impossible—utterly impossible. I looked on you only as a friend. But, oh, I am so sorry, so bitterly sorry."

He looked into her face and read pity there. It spoke more than her words. It was like a knife at his heart.

"Daphne," he said, with white lips, "Daphne, is it hopeless?"

Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at him. Then she covered her face with her hands.

Lewis went out quietly and closed the door.

* * * * *

Willie, returning very late, entered their common sitting-room to put down his paint-box. He struck a match, and found Lewis sitting motionless by the table, his face buried in his arms. Beside him lay a small study of a girl's face. He felt as one who breaks in upon a secret prayer; but, as he turned quietly to go, Lewis looked up, as one in a dream.

The moonlight showed a rigid, haggard face.

"Don't go, Willie," he said. "If you're not tired let's go out on the balcony and smoke. I want you."

So they picked up the threads of their old life and Willie was still a necessity.

Gertrude Bibby.

VIOLA: "I've just finished a unique sofa-pillow. It's stuffed with old love-letters." Mabel: "Indeed! How very nice and soft it must be."

FAIR CUSTOMER: "Are you quite sure this is a genuine four-leaf clover?" Dealer: "I could swear to it, lady. I put the extra leaf on myself."

"WILL you lend me your lawn-mower for an hour or so?" "I can't do it, but if you like, you may keep that snow shovel you borrowed last January a little longer."

TEACHER: "Johnny, surely you know what 'osculate' means? What do people do when they are in love?" Johnny (the jeweller's hopeful): "They come to pa for an engagement-ring!"

"GOING to the same place for the summer this year?" "Yes. Last year all my girls brought husbands home from there, and I'm in hopes that they'll take 'em back and leave me there again this year."

"My dear," said Mrs. Hunwell, as she poured out coffee at breakfast the other morning, "do you believe in the eternal fitness of things?" "I used to," replied Hunwell, "but that was before you began to make my shirts."

"FATHER ill and can't work! Tut, tut! That's a very serious matter for all of you, my little man." "Yessir, but it might have been wuss." "Worse! Why, he's the breadwinner, isn't he?" "Yessir, but it might have been mother, and she buys the tea an' clothes an' sugar an' milk an' meat."

Your Editor Chats.

I AM wondering how my readers liked the innovation in covers which took place last week. Of course I am pleased with it myself, otherwise I should not have made the change, and I shall be glad to have opinions from readers whether they like it or not.

IT is some weeks since the last tartan cover was published but another one is coming along in two weeks' time—the Clan Macquarrie. Any of you who have Scottish friends who are not readers of *Short Stories* should tell them what is coming. A list of the reproductions of tartans which have already appeared, together with the date of their appearance, will be published in *Short Stories* for September 19, the number with the Clan Macquarrie cover.

AGAIN I must make my apologies for not yet being able to publish the result of the Buried Stations Competition. Some readers have written asking whether it is going to be published at all. This will most certainly be done. The delay is occasioned owing to the great amount of time entailed in the checking of the attempts, and as this is holiday time the number of checkers is necessarily curtailed. However, readers may rest assured that they shall know the result at the earliest possible moment.

ON another page you will notice an announcement concerning the publication of a new paper called *The Boys' Leader*. This, as the name implies, will appeal more especially to the youths of the land. Mr. Henry T. Johnson, the author of our serial, is contributing a continued stirring historical story to this new paper, which will be published on September 8. Any parent who has sons whom they wish to provide with bright healthy reading will do well to become a subscriber to *The Boys' Leader*—it costs one penny each week.

I SHALL not be able to make many more appeals this summer for the FRESH AIR FUND as the time for holding the excursions will be over with the advent of shorter days and long, chilly evenings. However, among the children of our large cities there are still many faces which need to be made happy.

Though this summer has not, on the whole, been a hot one, those in fairly good circumstances who have not yet had the opportunity of leaving the town in which they live, will be glad when they are able to do so. They have found their surroundings uncongenial enough. What must it be then for the slum dwellers?

Go then to the nearest post-office and procure a postal order or some stamps and send them along to the Hon. Sec., FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Ninepence pays the entire cost of a day's outing for one child.

Your Editor.

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St. Clement's Wells.

The Story of a Visit and the Happiness it Brought.

"I don't *want* to go, and I *won't* go," declared Nan rebelliously.

"You will go on Monday, as Lady Thornleigh has arranged," said her step-mother in tones of authority.

Nan made no answer in words, but she pouted, tossed her head, and looked anything but submissive.

She made a lovely picture as she stood by the open window of the homely, old-fashioned sitting-room. Nan Hayslope was perfectly charming with her golden curls, her big eyes, and her dimpled little face, that looked as though it were made out of blush-roses.

Mrs. Hayslope took some fresh work out of her overflowing basket, and went on quietly sewing.

"You have spent six weeks with your god-mother every summer since you were four years old," she began presently, "and this is the first time you have made any objection to the visit. You must go, my dear, for your father will not allow you to offend Lady Thornleigh."

"It's so deadly dull at St. Clement's Wells," burst out Nan, half crying. "There's no one there but Lady Thornleigh. It was all very well when I was little, but it is quite different now I'm seventeen."

"You'll have to stand it," replied Mrs. Hayslope, and Nan knew she would. She had never known any other mother than this firm, capable woman, who ruled the household, including her wayward step-daughter, with a strong hand.

Nan's own mother had been a poor relation of Lady Thornleigh's family, and had been considered to have done very well for herself when she married the prosperous country doctor. But she died when Nan was four years old, and Lady Thornleigh who had been fond of her poor young cousin, took an interest in the child, invited her every summer to St. Clement's Wells, and made her lavish presents. The childless widow liked the presence of the pretty baby, who brightened up the old house with her frolics, and sweet babbling laughter.

But as Nan outgrew goodies and toys, and was treated with less indulgence than had been shown to the engaging child, she began to find St. Clement's Wells an exceedingly dull place to spend six weeks in, and at last she mutinied outright and declared she would not go.

"I am sure some evil will follow if you make me go, father," she pleaded, hanging coaxingly round his neck. "I have a presentiment it will. I have such a dull, heavy feeling *here*," laying her hand on a spot where she supposed her heart to be.

All Nan's pleading was in vain, and the appointed day and hour saw her arrival at St. Clement's Wells.

"I wanted you for this week particularly," observed Lady Thornleigh, as Nan having changed her dusty travelling gown for a little white frock in which she looked more like a bunch of pink-and-white roses than ever, appeared in her god-mother's drawing-room, and accepted the refreshment of a cup of tea. "My niece Felicitas Dunbar—you've heard me speak of Felicitas?—arrives to-morrow to pay me a long visit, and as I can't go about much myself, I shall want you to be with her, and to try to make her visit as pleasant as possible."

"I'll try," promised Nan dutifully, much pleased at the prospect of a girl companion.

But Miss Dunbar arrived in a very bad temper, having lost every connection she possibly could, and having spent hours at several little country stations.

"Late? *Of course* I'm late," she said, in answer to her aunt's half-reproachful greeting. "This is the most out-of-the-way place in the world, and has the worst train service. I missed the connection at the junction through that *imbecile's* fault," pointing a tragic and grimy finger at her maid, who had obviously been weeping.

When Miss Dunbar had been cleansed, soothed, and supplied with tea, she recovered her temper and smiled blandly on her aunt, and rather less blandly on Nan. She looked, now that she was freed from dust, and no longer frowning, very beautiful.

She was on a large scale, and perfectly proportioned. Her silky black hair was waved and rippled in the latest fashion.

Her clear-cut features were absolutely regular, her face was creamy white, without the faintest tinge of colour except in the lips and in the large dark eyes.

"I hear that Sir Erroll Tremaine has come back to England at last," observed Lady Thornleigh, leisurely sipping her tea. "They say he is expected at Tremaine Towers before long."

"I met him in town," said Felicitas briefly.

"He used to run about St. Clement's Wells like a son of the house, when he was a boy," observed Lady Thornleigh musingly. "But that is fourteen or fifteen years ago. I dare say he has forgotten all that now."

"No, he has not. He asked for you, and said he would call as soon as he got down to his own place. Quite near, is it not?"

"Oh, yes. You see that little gate on the right"—they were taking tea on the terrace—"it leads into a wood, through which a brook runs. On the other side of the stream begin Erroll's grounds."

"He's rich, isn't he?"

"Very; had a long minority too. Oh, he's very wealthy."

They talked on about Sir Erroll, giving Nan the feeling of being present at a drama in a foreign language. There was meaning in every word, but she could not understand it.

However, her eyes were opened when Sir Erroll came down to Tremaine Towers, and called on Lady Thornleigh. Nan kept in the background during his visit, and used her eyes diligently.

"Oh!" she said to the four walls of her own room. "*Now* I understand why Felicitas offered her aunt a visit."

Sir Erroll soon became a tame dog about St. Clement's Wells, and seldom let a day pass without a visit. Lady Thornleigh was well pleased to see his attention to her niece, but, had she been a keener observer, she might have noticed that though he talked most to Felicitas, his eyes dwelt oftenest on the wild-rose face of her little god-child.

"What is the legend of St. Clement's Wells?" asked Nan, perching herself on the broad window ledge, and sitting half in and half out of the library, where Felicitas was writing a letter for her aunt, and Erroll lounging aimlessly about.

"Is there any legend?" he asked, watching the lithe figure swaying backwards and forwards.

"Oh, yes, there is. I've heard it often when I was a child. There are two wells you know, one is in the woods——"

"I pass it every day when I come here," interrupted Erroll. "Is that the one with the legend attached to it?"

Nan nodded her golden head.

"Yes, that's the one. There's something about a girl tumbling into it, and a curse on it. And it's a wishing well, and——"

"I am surprised, Miss Hayslope, that you can repeat such nonsense," said Felicitas severely, as she rose and swept forward with the letter in her hand, but before she had reached the door she had stumbled over a foot-stool, and sank gracefully into Sir Erroll's hastily extended arms.

"Are you hurt?" asked Erroll and Nan almost in the same breath.

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"I've wrenched my ankle," replied Felicitas, "but not seriously, I think."

It was not a very bad sprain, but still it necessitated complete rest, and Miss Dunbar spent the next two days on a couch, Nan reading to her or playing cards with her, and Erroll in constant attendance.

The third day Erroll did not appear at the usual time. It was the hottest day of a very hot summer, and Miss Dunbar's temper, never her strongest point, gave way altogether under the strain of heat, the pain of her foot, and the uncertainty of her laggard knight's intentions. She was so extremely disagreeable to Nan, that at last the girl suddenly jumped up, and ran sobbing from the room.

"What's the matter?" asked Lady Thornleigh, waking up. "Why is Nan crying?"

"Oh, how can I tell?" snapped Felicitas, forgetting her usual calm repose of manner. "Temper, I suppose. Aunt Etta, why in the world do you have that *creature* here?"

"Why, Nan always comes. But I asked her earlier than usual this summer, because I thought she would be useful to go about with you. It would look less—less *pointed*. You've never paid me a visit in the country before, and anyone could see your motive for this one."

"He admired me very much in town," said Felicitas, very angrily, and without explaining her personal pronoun, "and I knew he was coming here, so of course I offered a visit. But that little wretch with her doll's face and red cheeks has come in the way, and if it falls through it will be your fault."

"Oh, nonsense! she's a child—just the kind of pretty, baby thing most men notice. There's nothing more in it."

"She'll be very coarse when she gets older," observed Felicitas vindictively. "She's got no real beauty—just the pink-and-white prettiness of rustic seventeen." Felicitas, by the way, was just twenty-seven.

"Well, well, I think you're wrong. Besides, you had to have some other girl with you."

Felicitas muttered something about "old-fashioned notions," and relapsed into ill-tempered silence.

Meantime Nan had found refuge in the woods, and had flung herself down beside the wishing-well, crying passionately. She was crying too violently to hear approaching footsteps, and her heart gave a great jump as she felt two arms draw her upwards, and heard a tender, eager voice say:

"What is it, sweetheart? What is the matter with my darling?"

Nan opened her amazed blue eyes upon Erroll Tremaine, stared at him a moment, then pushed him from her with all her small might.

"Sir Erroll, what do you mean?" she demanded, with majesty.

"I lost my head when I heard you crying," he confessed. "I couldn't help it, for I love you, dear."

"But I thought—Felicitas," faltered Nan, bewildered, and dabbing her eyes with a sopping wet handkerchief.

"Felicitas! Why, darling, who could love a cold, haughty woman of the world like her, beautiful as she is? Nan, sweetest, dearest Nan, tell me if you love me?"

Nan made no particular reply, but hid her dimples on Sir Erroll's shoulder and seemed very comfortable.

Time passes swiftly under such circumstances, and when Nan thought it necessary to look at her watch, she discovered that it was very much later than she had thought.

"Oh, it's tea-time!" she exclaimed. "We must be off at once!"

"I sha'n't come to tea," said Erroll. "I couldn't be civil to Miss Dunbar after the way she's been bullying my darling. I'll come in early to-morrow instead."

They walked together to the gate, and there paused to say good-bye.

"Kiss me, darling!" whispered Erroll. "Just one kiss, my pet."

But Nan was shy and hung her head, so he had to be content with pressing a brief kiss on her rosy cheek, and then he turned back into the wood, while Nan went slowly towards the house.

She had not gone more than a few yards when, glancing towards the terrace, she was horrified to see her godmother and Miss Dunbar glaring at her with an expression that plainly showed they had been witnesses of that tender parting.

As Nan drew near, Miss Dunbar sat bolt upright on her lounge chair, and stared harder than ever.

"You—you cat!" she hissed furiously.

"Come here, Annabel," commanded Lady Thornleigh; and as the small culprit approached, she continued: "I am ashamed of you! I am disgusted. How dare you permit Sir Erroll to kiss you?"

"He—he loves me!" faltered Annabel.

"*Loves* you!" exclaimed Felicitas scornfully. "Ridiculous vanity!"

"Let me tell you, child," went on Lady Thornleigh, "a man does not treat the girl he loves and *respects* as Sir Erroll has treated you. If you have mistaken an idle flirtation for anything serious, I am sorry for you, but I none the less blame you for your forwardness and lack of maidenly modesty.

"I am disappointed in you, Annabel, and must ask you to leave my house to-morrow morning. I will send you to the station in time to catch the ten-twenty train. I do not wish to see you again before you go. Good-bye! No, not a word, I will hear no excuses. Good-bye!"

It was a very humble and dejected Nan who faced the surprise of her family at her unexpected return.

"It was too dull for you, I suppose," said her stepmother, with some asperity.

"No, it was not at all dull," replied Nan very meekly.

"I hope you have not offended Lady Thornleigh by coming off like this?"

"No, I think not. She was quite willing I should go."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied now you have got your own way, and escaped three or four weeks of your visit. You always were the most wilful, disobedient girl in the world, and never can bear to do just as you are told."

Hope was not dead in Nan's heart, and she calculated that Erroll would find out her absence when he called early that day at St. Clement's Wells, and if he wrote at once, she might have a letter from him by the evening post. So she stationed herself by the gate to watch for the postman directly after dinner.

It was a lovely summer evening, and Nan looked like the Spirit of Summer in her white frock, with roses tucked into her white waist-ribbon, roses pinned at her throat, and fastened into her clustering fair curls.

The postman passed.

"Nothing for us? Nothing for me?" cried Nan lamentably.

"Nothing, miss," he answered, with a sympathising glance at the lovely, wistful little face; and Nan's heart gave a sickening thud. Then Lady Thornleigh was right.

It had been nothing but an idle flirtation, and she had been a credulous little fool to take the love-nonsense of a man of the world in earnest.

Very likely they were all laughing at the country-bred, vain simpleton at St. Clement's Wells. She could picture it all, and Nan stamped her foot little passionately, as she turned back to the house.

"Nan!" cried a voice behind her, and somebody pushed the gate open and rushed up to her. "Nan, my own sweetheart!" went on Erroll, smothering her with kisses. "I found out you had been packed off home in disgrace. They didn't tell me at first, but kept on humbugging me, else I'd have been here long ago. Now, my own, before I go in and ask your father's consent to our marriage, put your arms round my neck, and say: 'Erroll, I love you!'"

And Nan did exactly as she was told.

Vera Serkoff.

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The Course Was Smooth.

"DOES the course of their true love run smooth?" "Yes, indeed. There are banks on both sides."

So Absentminded.

THE BRIDE (on the honeymoon): "Why, you only bought one ticket, dear!" The Groom: "By Jove, I never thought of myself."

Rather Angular.

MR. RICHFELLO: "Miss De Slimm is evidently a woman of many fine points." Rival Belle: "I should say so. Did you see her elbows?"

Beautiful Thought.

SHE: "Oh, Charley, that gnat has come from your hand to mine." He: "Aw—beautiful thought, that your blood and mine—aw—mingle in the same gnat."

Just the Reverse.

MRS. NAGLEIGH: "I suppose you are satisfied now that you made a mistake when you married me." Mr. Nagleigh: "I made the mistake all right, but I'm not satisfied."

An Ingenious Hint.

FRANK: "Blanche pinned a tiny flat-iron on my coat last night." Dick: "Do you know what that means?" Frank: "No." Dick: "Why, she wants to press your suit."

The First Step.

EMMA: "And, Charlie, dear, would you have really shot yourself if I had refused you?" Charlie: "Indeed I would. I had already sent to four gunsmiths for price lists of revolvers."

Then He Proposed.

FRED: "Suppose I should ask you to be my wife, what would you say?" Anna: "Guess." Fred: "Oh, I haven't the least idea. What would it—er—rhyme with?" Anna: "Guess."

An Awkward Question.

HE: "I believe that a man should let his acts speak for themselves." She: "Am I to understand, then, that when you took my hand in yours last night you intended it as a proposal of marriage?"

The Next Best Thing.

"AH!" sighed she. "I wish you owned a yacht. It would be just lovely to go for a cruise." "Sorry I can't oblige you," replied the young man, "but the best I can offer is a little smack." And the silence was punctured by a sound resembling the explosion of a pop-gun.

Won-derfully Winning.

BRIDEGROOM (after the ceremony): "Maud, you and I are now one. It only remains to be decided which is the one. I tried to win you, didn't I?" Bride: "Yes, Harold." "And I won. That seems to settle it." "Not quite, Harold. You tried to win me. You succeeded. Then you are the winner, are you not?" "Yes, dear." "And I am the won."

Not Constant Love.

"I LOVED you then, and now——" "It is as I thought. You only love me now and then."

Tommy Knew.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER: "Now, Tommy, can you tell me what it is that makes men hunt for pearls and diamonds." Tommy: "Girls."

Showed His Sense.

OLD BULLION: "What? You wish to marry my daughter? She is a mere schoolgirl yet." Suitor: "Yes, sir. I came early to avoid the rush."

Dyeing Would Spoil Him.

"I WOULD die for you!" exclaimed her elderly lover passionately. "Oh, don't!" she answered in alarm. "I like your hair and moustache so much better as they are!"

Bobby Had Heard.

MRS. FLASHOUT: "Yes, Bobby; all these beautiful silk dresses of mine come from a poor, little, insignificant worm!" Bobby: "Yes, mamma; and papa is the worm, isn't he?"

She Spoke With Authority.

MADGE: "Pa, that nice young fellow, Mr. Downing, is awful fond of kissing." Pater: "How did you find that out, you good-for-nothing girl?" Madge: "I had it from his own lips, pa."

A Serious Malady.

SINGLETON: "Do you agree with the doctors who consider kissing dangerous?" Benedict: "Oh, yes." Singleton: "What dread effect do you think is likely to arise from it?" Benedict: "Marriage!"

Not Necessary to Throw.

"You are not angry with me because I threw a kiss to you, are you?" he asked. "Yes, I am," she replied. "Why?" he inquired. "Because there was no impenetrable barrier between us that made it necessary."

Marriage as a Life Saver.

SHE: "A doctor in Berlin, after a great deal of study has discovered that married men live longer than bachelors." He (imploringly): "Save my life!" She (joyously): "Oh, Clarence, how did you guess that I loved you?"

He Knew the Cause.

"WHEN does the wedding take place?" inquired the old stationer jestingly. "Why, you don't think——" She blushed and hesitated. "Ah, miss, when young ladies buy a hundred sheets of paper and only twenty-five envelopes, I know there is always something behind it."

Insult to Injury.

SMITH (angrily): "I understand you said my face would stop a motor-car." Jones: "I certainly never said anything of the kind." Smith: "Then I must have been misinformed." Jones: "That's what you have. Instead of stopping at the sight of your face, any reputable motor-car would increase its speed."

He Narrowly Escaped.

YOUNG LADY: "I suppose you have had some narrow escapes, Lieutenant Dashaway?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Y-a-a-s. Awfully narrow escape once, bah Jove!" Young Lady (breathlessly): "In what way?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Vewy near ordahed on active service, don'tcherknow, but the war came to an end before we embarked."

Then He Collapsed.

HE had called on her several times, and finally mustered up courage and assurance to be somewhat more affectionate than the circumstances warranted, perhaps. "You must not do that," she said, somewhat nervously. "Take your arm away at once." "Why?" "My brother might come in suddenly and see you." "Well, what of that? He couldn't kill me!" "No, I suppose not; but he would try to borrow some money from you, and I have lost two chances already by his doing that."

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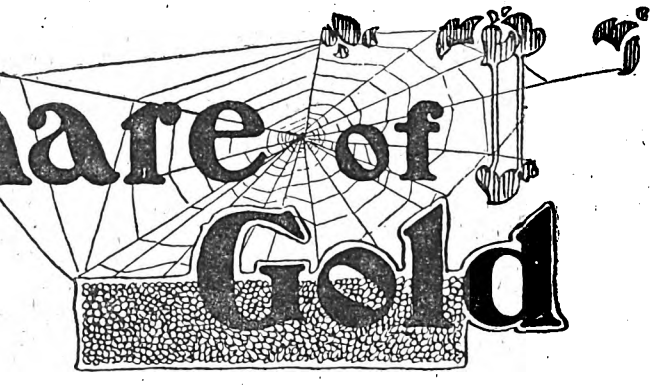
NEW SERIAL STORY. **START TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, a rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con: (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and while wandering aimlessly along the streets, manages to stop a pair of runaway horses attached to a brougham.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

Here Geldart meets with Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter, who has offices in the same building.

Recovering from his accident, Ronald is able to come to the assistance of another girl, Phyllis Daventry, who has been attacked by two pickpockets. His efforts to find a situation have, so far, been in vain, and he is contemplating the necessity of leaving Mrs. Skimper's boarding-house where he had taken up his residence.

Eric Geldart, on the very night in which the fate of the Government hangs in the balance, makes a brilliant maiden speech in the House, and mainly on account of his efforts the momentous division goes against the Ministry. Eric is the recipient of hearty congratulations, not the least warm being those of Madeleine Lorraine, the girl he has set himself to win in love. He strolls on to the terrace of the House, however, and there meets his half-sister—Clare Armitage. He is greatly tempted to murder her by pushing her into the Thames, but at the fateful moment his courage fails him.

Meanwhile Sampson Scrimshaw and Geldart, whom the former calls "Old Mystery," have become close acquaintances. Scrimshaw tells him that it is his intention to stand for Parliament, and his rival candidate will be Boanerges Blagdon—the traitorous partner of George Geldart, City merchant.

The latter receives a cable from Stanyer saying, "Hear you have been dead four months. Explain." The previous instalment ends by leaving him meditating over this last turn in his curious history, and wondering what will be the next development.

On the next page begins another absorbing instalment.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

TENTH CHAPTER.
"We'll Spoil their Little Game."

GELDART was aroused from his reverie by a shadow on the threshold. No, not a shadow, surely rather a burst of sunshine, for, looking up, roused, by a silver "May I come in?" he beheld a girl in the very early summertime of her maidenhood, whose shapely little head gleamed with a far brighter gold than that of which he had been thinking, that blood red gold the devil uses wherewith to bait his snares!

"Aha, come in, my dear!" he said cheerfully, "come in and sit down!" recognising in this winsome presence of the liquid grey and shining though thoughtful eyes, the sweet, grave, rosebud mouth, and the cheeks with the pink bloom of apple blossom, the one intermediary between the dreary apology for an office on the second floor, and the spacious premises upon the first. Then in a tone of keen concern he went on:

"Why, why, Miss Daventry, what's the matter with your arm?" for he noticed that one plump, black-sleeved, snowy-cuffed little arm rested in a sling. "Been vaccinated again?"

"Oh, no, I had an adventure last night!" the girl answered, laying a sheaf of papers on his desk, "a dreadful adventure, daddy. I was set upon by a couple of those dreadful people they call Hooligans."

"What!" The eyes beneath the bushy grey eyebrows blazed.

"I was, really! I noticed them shadowing me along the Euston Road, I turned down a side street to avoid them, the worst thing I could have done, and in a quiet, deserted, narrow street they set upon me, one twisted my poor little wrist, and the other tugged at my chain."

"The wretches! But I see they didn't get your chain. You were rescued from them?"

"Yes, just in the nick of time, by, oh, such a dear, nice fellow, quite young, but, oh! so powerful, and as handsome as——" She paused for a comparison.

"Well, say Apollo," said Old Mystery, "or Mars."

"Well, he seemed more like a fighting god than an artist on the—lyre, wasn't it? And such a gentleman, so different from Mr. Springle and the imitation sort."

"Springle! That's the young idiot with his neck in a bandbox that Scrimshaw bullies for blundering."

"Oh, yes!" laughed Phyllis merrily. "It's no end of fun to watch him lording it over the office-boy and shivering before the governor. But bother Mr. Scrimshaw! You don't seem deeply interested in my narrow escape."

And then she went on to detail her unpleasant experiences with the unknown ruffians, and her pleasanter experience of the unknown hero.

"And you have not seen him or heard from him since?" the old man asked.

Phyllis shook her head negatively, adding, with a sigh, "And never shall, I suppose. It was like a beautiful dream, he came on the scene just in the nick of time, then, just like a dream, he was gone; I suppose for evermore."

"Dear, dear!" said the old man, with a smile playing about the corners of his mouth, "and it rather seems, my pretty Phyllis, that although you saved your golden chain you lost your golden heart. Phyllis, Phyllis, have a care!"

"Daddy, don't talk nonsense!" said Mr. Scrimshaw's lady clerk, with mock severity. "To business, sir, if you please."

"I am all attention," answered Old Mystery. "Speak, thy servant heareth."

"Mr. Scrimshaw wants you to file these papers and lock them in your safe after registering them under 'Miscellaneous Memoranda,' in the Private Accounts Book."

Old Mystery carelessly turned over the bundle of papers.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "What's this? 'Proposal for a loan to Viscount Lynton to be secured primarily on his lordship's estates and collaterally by policies of assurance on his lordship's life.' What a little world it is," the old man muttered.

"Mr. Scrimshaw will speak to you about that presently."

"I should think so," said Old Mystery sententiously. "The estates are mortgaged up to the hilt, and, if the offices would take old Lynton, he couldn't find the premiums. And—hullo!—What's this? 'Correspondence with Executive of Progressive Conservative Association.' Why, the world gets smaller and smaller!"

"Mr. Scrimshaw is going to talk to you about that also," said Phyllis. "In fact, he's discussing the matter now with Mr. Eric Geldart."

"What," said Old Mystery, looking up, "is Eric Geldart beneath this roof?"

"He is, indeed, and he's beneath the ceiling which is just beneath this floor. Do you know him, daddy?"

"I've heard of him."

"Of course, so has everybody," replied Phyllis. "He's a rising man, they say, but I don't know what's happened between him and Mr. Scrimshaw, they used to be quite friendly, but Mr. Geldart is as stand-offish with the governor as if he were not merely a member of Parliament, but Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer as well."

"Ah, that's the way of the world, my dear Phyllis! Circumstances alter not only cases but people, and very often the improvement of the circumstances tends to the deterioration of the people."

"That's very horrid," said Phyllis, "and I don't think it's altogether true. For instance, whatever your circumstances might be, I think you'd always be a dear, good, kind old gentleman. And, after all, Mr. Geldart is very good style."

"And you girls think a lot of style."

"Oh, yes, style is everything! Do you know, he quite put me in mind of that splendid fellow who rescued me last night from those ruffians, only he was not only better-looking, but brighter altogether, and not quite, I should think, so hard as Mr. Geldart."

"Oh, Eric Geldart is hard, is he?"

"I should imagine so, because when Mr. Scrimshaw and he were getting to high words, the governor said to him, "You weren't quite so off-handed before your father died and left you all his money," and Mr. Geldart answered, "Perhaps not. When that obstinate old blunderer held the reins I hadn't a free hand, but now I'm on the box seat, and I drive in my own way, at my own pace."

"He said that, did he?" asked Old Mystery.

"Yes, and Mr. Scrimshaw gave him a piece of his mind. He said, 'Look here, Geldart, I never knew your governor, though I've often heard of him, he was in a different swim to mine, but if you want to slang your own father do it in somebody else's hearing, not in mine.'"

"And what did Eric Geldart say?"

"I didn't catch it. I think he was a bit ashamed of himself. But I mustn't stop chattering here all day, I shall get a scolding, only, daddy, I like to tell you things, you are so kind and wise. Had you ever a little daughter of your own, daddy?"

The old man shook his head.

"I think you'd have been a kind father to her, that's why I talk so to you, and perhaps it's not having a dear, real daddy of my own."

"Is that so, Phyllis?"

"Yes," said the girl gently.

"When did he die?"

"He didn't die, daddy. Years ago he went away." The troubled look which he had noted when once before he had spoken to Phyllis of her father came into her eyes again.

"Your pardon," he said. "I—I did not mean to be inquisitive."

"I know—I know," she answered quickly, her face looking all the more like a rose leaf because of the tears that glistened like April dews upon it, "you are all kindness and sympathy, that's why I'll tell you.

"Years before my mother died, my father went away, he was unfortunate, deplorably and persistently, and, as he

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couldn't be a help to mother, he cut himself adrift from her; that was his meaning, I know, when he left her to look for fortune in far lands, but mother couldn't see it in that light, she only felt she was deserted, abandoned. After he went she wouldn't even bear his name, and went back to her own."

"And you've never seen or heard of him since?"

"Never," said Phyllis, "but I think of him always, though, except just now and in my prayers, I never speak of him."

"And so there's only mother?"

"No mother either, daddy, only just my own little self."

"Your own dear little self? Well, it's a good little self, and it must take care of its dear little self. God bless it!"

"And God bless you, daddy, and now good-bye."

As she flitted out of the room it seemed all grey and bare again.

"Charming little soul!" said the old man, just as one might speak of a blithe singing bird, and Old Mystery turned over the papers she had left listlessly, almost wearily.

All of a sudden he sat erect, absorbed in the perusal of one of them. It related to negotiations between the executive of the Progressive Conservative Association relative to Mr. Scrimshaw's proposed candidature, and they wound up with an intimation that, while the executive recognised Mr. Scrimshaw's contributions to the cause, and relied upon his support, they were unable to offer him a seat at present, inasmuch as Mr. Blagdon, long the prospective candidate, had definitely decided to stand for Brixwell.

"So," said Old Mystery, "he is nearing the goal of his ambition at last. He has been vestryman, churchwarden, district councillor and all the rest—the whited sepulchre—and now at last he is making a bid for M.P. The unctuous humbug! The thief! The arch traitor. I've got a long score to settle with him; it was he that made my Eric a thief and rogue, to hide his own iniquities."

He went on docketing and scribbling for hours, never pausing in his work until another footstep sounded on the stair, and Scrimshaw burst into the room, flushed and furious.

"The ungrateful hound!" he shouted, banging his fist upon the desk.

"Well, what have I done now?" asked Old Mystery.

"Not you—not you, that villain Geldart!"

Geldart, despite himself, started at the mention of his own name, and involuntarily exclaimed:

"What on earth do you mean? What have I done?"

"I tell you I'm not talking about you," almost screamed Scrimshaw. "That chap Geldart's thrown me over, he and Blagdon have done it between them, the young 'un's a bit flush just now, but I'll get level with them—if it snows."

"What's happened?" asked the old man, scanning the other with a keen, grave look.

"Geldart's thrown me over. It was a solemn bond, and on the faith of it I let accounts stand between us, that at the next election his party were to nominate and support me for Brixwell; since then the tide's turned, the dissolution has taken place, they're going to run his partner Blagdon for the borough that I've been nursing for the last year, there's no time for me to cut in anywhere else, and they snap their fingers at me."

"But I thought you had young Geldart under your thumb," Old Mystery observed. The other answered:

"So I had, until his father died."

Again the icy chill struck at the old man's heart. Until his father died! Why, then, his death was waited for, welcomed as an emancipation.

"How about his thousand overdue?" he asked.

"He could raise that. Don't you see, the man's a power now. Lytton was wrong, it's the easiest world that ever was to borrow in, if you've got security, besides, no doubt Blagdon's paying his price. But I'd give anything, I'd do anything to spoil their little game."

"Suppose I spoil it for you," said Old Mystery.

"You! How?"

And Mystery repeated his question.

"Well, then, I'll be your pal to the death. I'll stand by you through thick and thin. Look here, Old Mystery, we're both a bit out of the common run, if another man had said what you've said, I should have put him down for an idiot, or a boaster, but if you think you can stop Blagdon's little game, why, then I'm sure you can. I know you know the man, and I know that you can be a staunch good pal and partner, and I can understand that you could be a dangerous foe."

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Reminder of the Past.

You all know Brixwell, that demi-semi-select London suburb hovering on the South-Western border line, ever striving, in spite of the Post Office authorities, to wrench itself within it; that suburb of cheap trams, cheap villas, cheap side, where the jerry builder flourishes exceedingly and where cheap villadom is at home upon its Thursdays.

Only a little while ago it was almost a sylvan district, where pleasant meadows stretched, where market gardens sweetened the air, where quaint old latticed windows blinked from pleasant gables in the shade of waving boughs.

Where once the market waggons lumbered through may-thorn hedges, electric trams hum and buzz and clang between jaundiced rows of houses of new and bilious yellow brick; the quaint old hostelries have given place to flaunting gin palaces, and the gardens are represented by sixteen feet forecourts in front of edifices where The Oaks, The Elms, The Beeches, The Cedars, and The Poplars exist only in name and imagination.

Brixwell is not your suburb? Certainly not, dear sir, or madam, but you know where Brixwell is, and you know the Smiths, or Browns, and perhaps the Joneses and Robinsons who live there in so pretentious a style on so paltry a scale.

But once, in the days when London's citizens were content to dwell where they worked and thrived, and only the wealthy ones had country houses, and when Brixwell, or your own select suburb, was far more distant than Brighton is now, Brixwell was a favourite sojourning place of the very well-to-do, the substantial set who flourished and waxed sleek and bounteous before that trumpery thing of shreds and patches, the "smart set," just, happily, dying, had been born or thought of.

The people who live in Brixwell now are, though they would be aghast to hear one say it, of comparatively little importance, but the dead who sleep there are of some standing. For there you shall find old family vaults, green and grey with the mosses of centuries.

Now it happened that on the afternoon following Scrimshaw's outburst detailed in the preceding chapter, Old Mystery was coming along the one still rural road in Brixwell leading to this quaint God's Acre, when he was startled by a familiar and gentle voice exclaiming:

"Why, daddy, and this is where you spend your Saturday half holiday!"

"Phyllis, my dear, why, where are you going?

"Ah!" He needed no answer, having glanced at the basket of flowers she carried, and he asked another question, "For whom are they?"

"For mother," she answered.

"Good little girl," he said. "May I come with you there?"

"Yes," she said simply. And side by side the strange old man and the bright, winsome girl passed through the gateway leading to within the walls of the city of the sleeping, wound their way amid the mounds and the stones and monuments, and cenotaphs, the highways and byways of the metropolis where mortal men and women dwell side by side, with never a note of discord, in a beautiful town that needs no policing, where none beg, or borrow, or steal from one another, where animosity is unknown, where all are lowly, though none are ashamed, where all that there is of pride is the work of those who had not when that work was done taken up the freedom of that city.

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And soon little Phyllis' Mecca was reached.

Old Mystery, with bared head, stood aside while the little girl laid on a simple mound her wreath of simple flowers, and, taking from her basket her little trowel, planted here and there a fern, uprooted here and there a weed, a thorn.

Her pious task fulfilled, they withdrew. The girl's eyes softened, yet scarce with tears. She had bedewed that verdant mound most bountifully almost from her childhood from the crystal fount of her pure heart, but the time had come when she had only the sunshine of a smile, as pure as her tears, for that spot as green in her heart as it was to the light of Heaven.

And as they walked side by side along between the tombs and in the shadow of the cypresses, the old man wondered whether the spirits of any whose mortal ashes laid beneath the tons of granite and the sculptured marble looked down upon more tender tributes to their memory than those simple flowers the simple little working girl had placed upon her mother's grave.

For instance—— Suddenly he checked his steps.

"Isn't that handsome?" said Phyllis, pointing to a ponderous cenotaph of black marble inlaid with Aberdonian granite, with many tablets on its sides cut deep in granite and in marble, and here and there filled in with lead, where the work of human hands had striven just a little longer to baffle "Time's effacing fingers."

"Geldart!" she exclaimed. "Why, yes! This is the family vault of the Mr. Geldart that we know. Well, Mr. Scrimshaw can say what he likes, he must have been a good son, look!"

And Old Mystery read—

Also to the memory of
GEORGE GELDART
relict of the above,
Who departed this life on the 15th day of December, 1901.
In the 65th year of his age.
Greatly respected and lamented
By all who knew him.
An exemplary husband, an indulgent father, a pattern citizen.
This tablet is here placed to his memory by
His sorrowing son
Eric Cosmo Geldart, Esq., M.P., for Little Claverton.
In the First Parliament of His Majesty King Edward VII.
In token of filial gratitude and undying affection.
"By their works ye shall know them."

"Why, daddy!" exclaimed the girl. "What's the matter, aren't you feeling well? Your face is quite white. Perhaps it is rather cold and clammy here, let's come away."

"Yes, yes," he said, and together they wandered along the sidewalk, lingering here and there to read some quaint or tender epitaph, to note the long journey ended at this or that tomb, or here and there with a sigh, to read of some tender baby flower cut off in bud, saved from life's sorrows, but at the cost of more sorrow for those death's hand had spared.

While Phyllis, with tender eyes, stooped to read the record of one such little life, Old Mystery, wandering to and fro, peering through the gloom of cypresses and sycamores, caught sight of an approaching form, and, catching sight of it, swiftly withdrew into the shadow of a drooping willow.

It was Ronald—Yes, in that willow shade he watched his son—it seemed his *only* son, since that other had proved so undutiful—his face all pale and grave with lines of sorrow

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

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written deep on it, watched him draw near that marble mass, and lay there at the foot of his lying brother's lying inscription, a wreath of summer flowers, saw him linger there bareheaded, then turn away along the path straight to the willow in whose shade Old Mystery stood. And the old man stealthily stole away, threading his way to the gates.

Almost he was impelled to retrace his steps, and there, amid the tombs, reveal himself, and tell the strange, weird story to the son he had disinherited, the only son who in truth had mourned for him. But then—but then—a thousand thoughts surged through his brain.

In that place, at that hour, a shock would be cruel, it might be fatal, and then—there was Blagdon to be reckoned with, and his Scheme—yes, he was testing his System and himself, as well as others.

Anyway, he must have time to think, and so, in place of turning back, he went on his way towards the obscure and lowly lodging where he lived. Yes, where he lived, he whom the world believed dead, lying still and mute beneath that mass of granite and black marble, engraven with a lie from beginning to end.

And on Monday morning, Phyllis Daventry, tripping upstairs with a sheaf of letters, cried:

"Daddy, where did you vanish to on Saturday? I looked round for you and you were gone, I waited, oh, ever so long!"

"I missed my way," Old Mystery stammered. "Yes, yes, I missed my way, and it was so late I thought you had gone home."

"That's what I thought of you," said Phyllis. "But, oh! I say, daddy, whom do you think I met, just by the cemetery gate?"

"I can't tell; that idiot Springle, I suppose—he's always shadowing you, isn't he?"

"Oh, dear, no! not Mr. Springle, someone altogether different; guess, guess!"

"I can't, you silly girl; I'm not good at riddles; besides, I'm busy—it's Monday, I have a lot to do, there's a heavy mail to-night."

"But you must guess, daddy, I've told you so much about him. I met him, daddy—the gentleman who saved me from those ruffians who were trying to rob me."

"Ha! ha! who saved your chain, your chain with its heart charm. Ha! ha! yes, Phyllis, I remember, and who charmed away your heart. And then of course the Garden of Sleep was transformed into Arcadia, with Strephon in a silk hat, with a silk umbrella for a crook; Chloe in a sailor hat and blouse surrounded by a flock—of tombstones. Is Strephon captive yet?"

"Daddy, don't be silly; he never spoke a word, I don't think he even saw me. Poor fellow, he was walking along with his head down, looking quite sad and careworn."

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Ronald Falls on his Feet.

LITTLE wonder that Ronald Geldart's face when the little lady clerk beheld it, bore signs of care, for in truth since their first meeting he had been experiencing a trying time.

He had set himself to work and turned out matter which he without vanity felt would be printable, and with this under his arm in the form of short stories, he assailed the editorial offices.

Next he awaited results, awaited them with the earnest longing of a shipwrecked man, who, clinging to the rigging, awaits the saving sail. They came—in the form of his own manuscripts—declined with thanks.

Then he set forth to beard the lions in their dens. The lions, however, either didn't happen to be in their dens at the time, or being there, declined to be bearded, their time as a rule being as minutely apportioned as that of an eminent K.C. or fashionable physician in extensive practice.

Ronald was not easily disheartened, but he had gone through a considerable spell of stress and storm, his resources had run out and Mrs. Skimper's bill was overdue, and that lady had impressed on him, with some asperity, that her house was established for the reception of *paying* guests. And Mrs. Skimper's demand, if acidulated, was a just one, the sting of her sarcasm was as nothing to Ronald compared with the shame of indebtedness to a woman. His watch had already gone, his chain had followed, so also all his overcoats.

There was still Eric. In the morning and evening papers there was his name looming large; at the dinner-table and in omnibus and trains he heard people discoursing on his rocket-like upward flight. No! no! no! not while there was a heap of stones to be broken, a truck to be run along a dock or river quay, a crossing to be swept, never would he approach the man whose brotherhood, whose very name he had renounced.

One night he sat alone in his room while his fellow-guests were dining. He had pleaded indisposition, but the truth was he could not sit there eating the bread and quivering beneath the scorn of the woman who was his creditor.

If land had been in sight it would not so much have mattered, but things seemed drifting from bad to worse; he never could have believed in his better days that it was so difficult for the man who wore a black coat, finding himself suddenly bereft of means, to earn his bread.

A tap at the door. He opened it; it was Arethusa the maid-of-all-work.

"Your boots, Mr. Bligh," she said, "which I have done my best with them."

"Thanks very much, Arethusa," said Ronald, scanning them ruefully; then he laughed, "I'm afraid they're so bad that even your best won't make much of them."

"Oh, bless you, sir, they're all right," said Arethusa; "only I took the liberty of putting in a cardboard sole in case you might get cold. And, Mr. Bligh, sir, if you've got any socks as wants mending I can take 'em down with me, and I noticed that button on your coat was a trifle loose."

"Arethusa, you're a good little soul," said Ronald, feeling for the moment heart and throat as full as his pockets were empty, "and one of these days I hope I shall be able to make it right with you."

"Lor', don't mention that, sir; tips is tips, but there's some people it's more pleasure to work for free gratis, while others, with the wealth of Injies, as the saying is, is gall and wormwood to work for."

Again he could only ejaculate rather huskily: "You are a good little soul!"

"No, I ain't, sir—I'm only a hard working little skivvy in a boardin'-house, but I knows what's what. Lor' bless you, sir, I knows things ain't very bright with you just at the moment, but they will be later on; a smart young gentleman like you, and, as for what Mrs. Skimper said to you to-day, sir, which I heard it, that's nothin' to what she says to Mr. Springle; your bill ain't nothin' to what his is sometimes."

Great Heavens! Ronald bit his lip. What had he come to? To be commiserated by a lodging-house servant whose mistress had dunned him!

Arethusa, going on with her dusting, continued, confidentially:

"And, Mr. Bligh, sir, you won't be offended at what I'm going to say, will yer?"

"No, Arethusa, you're too genuine and good a little girl to offend me, I'm sure."

"Well, sir, if as how you should be in a very desp'rit hole, if you wouldn't mind of my sayin' of it, I've got a bit of money in the Post Office, and if a couple of soverings, sir——"

"What!" almost screamed out Ronald.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Arethusa, trembling, "only you know it seemed to me perhaps the Post Office wasn't quite so safe as having the money in my box, and I thought if you'd do me the honour of taking care of it for me—— You ain't angry, sir?" for Ronald, his hand in his pockets, was

(*Continued on page 318.*)

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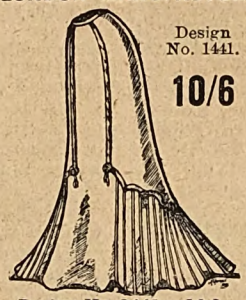

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standing in front of her, scanning her up and down, struggling for a time for words, which were slow in coming.

"You black-visaged, golden-haired little girl, I'll candidly admit you're one of the best-meaning creatures who ever put blacking on tanned boots or left a thumbmark on a plate, but if ever you dare make such a suggestion as that again, I'll—I'll run away, Arethusa—run away!"

Bundling her out he shut the door behind her, then sat down clutching his forehead with his hands. Something would have to be done. Yes! on the morrow he'd sell the few remnants of his wardrobe, buy a set of slops, square up Mrs. Skimper and ship before the mast, if nothing else turned up.

And that next morning there was a confidence in his manner which inspired Mrs. Skimper with a belief that she was not going to add another to her list of bad debts, after all. She was not an ill-natured woman, but the catering for and supplying the wants, reasonable and unreasonable, and coping with the bickerings and idiosyncrasies of indifferently-paying guests had told upon her.

"Better this morning, Mr. Bligh?"

"Yes, thanks; as right as rain!" said Ronald cheerfully.

"Breakfast will be ready in five minutes, and I should think you have an appetite."

"No, thanks," said Ronald; "the fact is I've an early appointment, and I shall no doubt breakfast out."

Mrs. Skimper touched a bell, then Mrs. Skimper put her back to the hall door.

"Mr. Bligh," she said, "you're not going out of this house without bacon and eggs or kippers or cold mutton, whichever you prefer, with marmalade, bread-and-butter, tea or coffee, according to choice, *ad lib.* Arethusa, Mr. Bligh's breakfast at once.

"Now you come and sit down like a good young gentleman. I was in a bad temper yesterday, and with Mr. Grimmage on one side of the table, Mr. Springle on the other, and Miss Amaranth from half-past ten till one and half-past two till five playing Wagner on that poor piano of mine, which is already showing signs of nervous exhaustion, it's a wonder I wasn't in screaming hysterics. Now, here's your serviette and here's Arethusa coming upstairs with the eggs and bacon; I can smell them. Now, don't waste time, drink your coffee while it's hot."

To have resisted would have been ungracious. Ronald left the house that morning with hope in his heart, hope born of gratitude and faith in human nature.

And not even half a dozen fruitless calls quite crushed that newborn hope, though his handbag was the heavier for some three or four manuscripts returned.

He felt that if he had the chance he could do well, well for himself and for those enlisting him, who took him in their ranks.

The day was wearing on, one by one the covers he had picked on had been drawn blank. What was the next move? Ah, yes! the *Meteor*, the organ of the cultured world, the newly-prospected weekly, about which there was so many rumours; that it was the venture of a certain leading lady in high society, that it was the bantling of an inner Parliamentary circle, that the Rothschilds were going to run it, that Sir Thomas Lipton was finding the money, that a certain Duke was controlling it to air his own opinions on fiscal and political matters; a hundred rumours were afloat about it.

Ronald, bracing himself to face another disappointment, entered offices spick and span and a trifle odoriferous from the hands of fitters, carpenters, joiners and painters, and inquired of a smart young man across a smart new counter if the editor were in.

"No, sir," was the prompt reply.

"The assistant editor?"

"No, sir!" equally prompt and decisive.

"Have you any idea when I can find him in?"

The smart youth knew his work too well to have any idea. Would Ronald leave his card.

"I merely called to ascertain if the editor had any views about some manuscripts I sent some weeks ago."

"Don't know, sir. Mr. Carnforth is very, very busy with a truck-load of them now; perhaps you'd better write. Good afternoon, sir."

Ronald turned wearily away. Behind him there was the sound of opening doors, a bustling familiar voice said:

"Just going to get a chop, Charles; sha'n't be long, don't let the governor be disturbed. Why—bless my soul! it's Ronnie. Eh, my lad, where have you been? By Jove! I'm glad to see you!" For it was cousin Jack whose left hand was smacked upon his shoulder, whose right was frantically shaking his own; cousin Jack who was asking a dozen questions without waiting for an answer; cousin Jack who took him over the road to the Cecil and, ordering a comfortable lunch, said:

"Now, Ronnie, come on, I am going to sit quite still while you tell me where you've been hiding, why you've been hiding, and what you've been doing."

Lunch was well nigh through ere Ronald had told his story; then he asked:

"Now, cousin Jack, what of you?"

"Oh, my lad," said Jack, rubbing his hands. "I'm going strong. I've struck blue clay."

"You deserve it; you've tried as hard as anybody."

"Yes, but I've kept pegging away though it seemed as if I should never get a bulls-eye, but so long as you keep pegging away at the target it'll come in time, though scarcely ever at the time and in the way you've looked for.

"You know the many things I've tried, the speculations I've dabbled in, mostly burning my fingers; club secretary, insurance broker, theatre manager; as dear Eric in his amiable fashion used to say: 'Jack of all trades and master of none.'"

"You were always ready and willing to do good to others," said Ronald; "perhaps that accounted for your not doing better for yourself."

"No! no! don't believe that, Ronnie, that's very sour philosophy. As a matter of fact, it was just the fact of having been able to lend a helping hand in a small sort of way, years ago that led to my getting into clover when I was on the hardest of hard pan. I'll tell you how it was."

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

"You say he died from a single blow administered by himself?" "Yes, he blew out the gas!"

She: "I want to get a pint of your best enamel." Assistant: "Yes, madam. Face or bicycle?"

"Did you hear Kusser has dyspepsia?" "No; how did he get it?" "Slugem made him eat his own words."

"Will you love me when I'm old?" she asked. "Certainly," he replied promptly, "if you will love me when I am bald."

The Young Sweet Thing: "I wonder how it is there is no good English equivalent for *fiancé?*" The Savage Bachelor: "How about 'idiot'?"

"I hear you've given up your proposed trip to Norway this summer." "Yes. The girl who is taking singing lessons next door has been invited to spend the summer with her aunt in Devonshire, so there is really no reason why we should go away."

"I can't understand it," said Mr. Gewgaw at the gas office. "Last quarter my bill was twenty-five shillings, and this quarter it is £2 10s. I haven't burnt a bit more gas this quarter than I did last. Now, how in the name of honesty do you account for that?" "You didn't pay last quarter's bill," said the clerk.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Cool Young Lady.

"EVELYN" has a young gentleman friend who has asked her to become engaged to him. He is a very good fellow and much in earnest. "EVELYN" cannot decide whether to accept him or not. At times she feels she could care for him, but at others is distinctly cool. He tells her that if she does not say "Yes," life will not be worth living. Should "EVELYN" believe him, and answer him "Yes"? She adds. "You may think it rather strange of me not to know my own mind, but I am neither romantic nor sentimental."

* * * * *

You have known the young man five or six years, "EVELYN," and evidently admire him. You have had every opportunity of knowing whether or not you feel tenderly towards him. Apparently you do not, but you are "neither romantic nor sentimental." Well, you may be one of those luke-warm young ladies who never experience any deep passions. There are many of that kind. My advice usually is that they should marry the man they feel they are most fond of and whom they most admire, and trust to the future to bring the needed love. It often follows after marriage, if on the part of one there is the feeling of love.

Love versus Mammon.

I HAVE had a manly letter from "TROUBLED WATERS," who certainly deserves all the sympathy one can give him. He has a business of his own, and a well-to-do father, who has financed him, and with whom he lives. He has also a sweetheart, who is "the best girl in the world," and the envy of all the fellows in the neighbourhood. However, she is only a cotton weaver, though one of very noble character, and his parents will not hear of an engagement. So strong is his father on the point that he says that if "TROUBLED WATERS" insists on keeping to the girl he must leave home, and get on in his business without another penny from him.

* * * * *

"TROUBLED WATERS" does not want to leave his old home, and cannot yet afford to get married, but his father has given him three months to make up his mind. If he leaves her for one month, he says, all the young men of the neighbourhood will pay their attentions to the girl, as she is much admired. If "TROUBLED WATERS" decides to stick to her, he thinks that by hard work he could make enough money to marry upon in three years, when he will be twenty-four.

* * * * *

The position is a very difficult one. It seems very cruel of your father to take up his present attitude. But if you are absolutely in love with the girl, and feel that she is necessary to your happiness in life and not a mere passing fancy, you should be prepared to make sacrifices for her. It seems unjust that your business should be in danger owing to your love affairs, but as you say you are in possession of it, could you not make a big effort to keep it going without your father's aid? Besides, as you say, there would be the encouragement of love to help you. It is for you to decide. Do you really love the girl sufficiently to sacrifice your father's money and your home on her behalf? Would your future life be unhappy if severed from her? Think it well over, for if your feeling for her is only a passing fancy, you would be doing yourself a great injury to sacrifice your prospects on her behalf.

Taking Girls to Boarding Houses.

"MATER" writes: "I have two young daughters, aged seventeen and eighteen. We shall have two months holiday this year. Should I take them to a seaside boarding house, or would that be unwise?"

* * * * *

Boarding houses drive many a young girl off her head, "MATER." You are sure to encounter there the seaside lover, who is, according to his own painting, a wondrous personage. But if you keep a close chaperonage of the girls, I think a month or so at a boarding house would do them no harm. Girls gain a necessary apprenticeship in the study of human nature that way, and it makes them cautious in future.

Should He Confess His Love?

"I HAVE been going out with a girl for four months," writes "SWEET WILLIAM." "I asked her if she loves me, and she replied 'Yes.' I love her very much myself. Should I wait till she asks me the question, or make a confession of my own love at once? I have kissed her several times, but she has not once kissed me."

* * * * *

You seem to expect the girl to do rather more than her share of the love-making. When a girl has gone so far as to tell a man she loves him, the man is very strange if he does not make some sort of reply. As a general rule, men are only too ready to make those confessions, often without meaning them As you are sincere about the matter, certainly tell her at once. It is strange she has not kissed you. But some people, though affectionate, do not always show their love that way.

Deservable Congratulation.

"I HAVE been the close companion all my life of a girl cousin," writes "PERCY," "who has always asked my advice in everything. Last time we met she seemed very reserved, and was in correspondence with people which I knew nothing about. A month later she told me she was engaged to a man I had never heard of, very much older than herself. Now is it my duty to write and congratulate her?"

* * * * *

Perhaps her reserve was pardonable. She may be the kind of girl who does not like to talk about love affairs unless she is able to announce an engagement, and, for all you know, may be very fond of the man in question. Anyhow, it is her affair whom she marries, and if she has met the man of her heart, then certainly you could write and congratulate her in good faith. An engagement is supposed to mark the happy issue of a love affair, and, as such, one usually congratulates the young couple without considering their merits.

The Attentions of Boys.

"I AM sixteen," writes "M. L.," "and people tell me I am rather good-looking. I am not allowed out much at nights, but when I am there are a few boys who stare at me a great deal. One of them I like very much. How could I get to know him?"

* * * * *

I don't think you had better make any attempts whatever to know strange boys. You are only sixteen, and it is quite right that you should not be allowed out at nights. As to the boys who stare at you, that is usually little more than curiosity and often rudeness, and you should not encourage it. If there is any boy amongst them who is genuinely attracted by you, he will himself try to get to know you in the proper way.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 767.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending September 12th, 1903.

THE COURAGE OF DEBORAH.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"DEBORAH! DEBORAH!" Everard Stanhope glanced anxiously up the white road, winding like a ribbon among the green hill sides. The sun fell full upon his face, kindly and pleasant, though the blue eyes wore a startled look and the sensitive lips twitched in nervous apprehension.

At first sight Everard Stanhope appeared to be an old man. His figure was bent, his steps uncertain, his manner deprecating; but when he spoke, the voice, singularly clear and penetrating, surprised one. As a matter of fact the man was forty-five, though he looked well over sixty!

For a while he scanned the road to left and right, watching with eager eyes for the figure of his daughter. The clatter of horses' hoofs, the sound of the girl's laugh, the deep tones of a man's voice—Deborah Stanhope came riding down the hill with Harold Earnshaw.

Tall, well-built, with long, lithe limbs and the easy carriage that tells of perfect health, the dark beauty of her face was in marked contrast to the good-looking, fair-haired man beside her.

That Earnshaw admired her it was plain to all. The young Squire's infatuation for his agent's daughter was indeed a matter of village gossip. As to Deborah, it was not so easy to discover the nature of her feelings. She was a high-spirited girl, and up to the present had kept Harold at arm's length.

"You're late," said Stanhope, as they drew up at the garden gate. "I expected you a good hour ago."

"It's my fault, Mr. Stanhope," interposed young Earnshaw. "I persuaded your daughter to look round the orchid houses at the Hall. It took longer than we expected," he added, flushing.

"It's very good of you to take such trouble about Deborah," answered Stanhope. There was a suggestion of restraint in the tone that made young Earnshaw flush. He had hoped for an invitation to spend the remainder of the evening with his agent; he had a sincere liking for the man, and had tried more than once to break down the barrier of reserve that Stanhope set between them. To-night this reserve was very much in evidence. Earnshaw responded to its influence and rode back to the Hall.

"Deb," the man caught her by the arm, "Deb, I've something to say to you. No, not in the garden, someone will overhear us. Come inside." He hurried her into the house, locked the door of the sitting-room, barred the window, and in a low voice commenced to speak.

"We shall have to leave here," he said. "I—I've seen that man again. Don't tell me I'm mistaken, or call it the fancy of a distorted brain. I saw him, more, I've spoken to him. He says he will let the world know who and what I am, that he will tell the Squire, deprive me of my place, shatter my peace, destroy my last chance of earning a livelihood. He says——"

With a passionate gesture she interrupted him.

"Let him tell his tale," she cried, "let him do his worst. We can defy him. Be guided by me, father, put your fears of this man from you. See Mr. Earnshaw yourself, tell him your history. He will have nothing but pity and commiseration for you."

"*Pity?*" said the old man with a gasp. "You forget. What pity did the people show me the last time? Deborah, I cannot bear it. I see again in fancy the mob with angry voices, cruel faces—the mob that chased me to my very doors. I tell you it will kill me if my history is dragged to light. I have striven again and yet again to make a fresh start. And always Fate has been against me. Since we came here, three years ago, for the first time it seemed as if I could escape the past. And now, now—he has traced me—and there is no hope, we must go at once, to-night, leave the place for ever."

"Father, dear father, will you not listen to me? Stay here and face it out!"

"I cannot, it would kill me. You hear me, Deborah, it would kill me—as it killed your mother. If my story were made known, not a man, woman, or child but would turn against me. They would mock at me, revile me, threaten me. I tell you it will kill me to stay here."

His voice rose to a cry, his face twitched convulsively, his eyes, wide with terror, glanced towards the door.

"Save me, save me!" he shrieked. "Deborah, they have done for me."

"Dearest, there is no one here but Deb. Father, I beg of you take courage." Her arms about him, her fresh face raised to his, she strove with tender, loving words to soothe him.

"We will leave to-night if you wish it, dear," she added with a sigh; "but perhaps there is some other way out of the difficulty. Could Martin Heriot's silence be bought?"

"Only in one way, Deb. The way I told you of three years ago. If you marry him he will persecute me no longer. As his wife——"

With a cry the girl broke from him.

"Never," she said passionately. "I can never be his wife. The thought of him fills me with loathing. His face, his hands, his voice—I cannot do it, father, even for you."

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"Then we must leave," he answered wearily, glancing round the room with a look of pathos in his eyes that filled the girl with self-reproach.

"What can I do?" she cried. "If it were any other way but that!"

Her father sighed, and turned to leave the room, but as he reached the door a sudden faintness seemed to seize him.

"I am choking," he stammered. "I cannot breathe. I I——" With a cry of pain he threw up his arms and, staggering, fell to the ground.

That night, on which he had planned to leave the village, found him stretched on a bed of pain, raving in delirium.

The good people of the village of Helstone, though curious concerning them, were kindly disposed towards the agent and his daughter. Offers of assistance in the task of nursing the invalid came from all quarters, everyone seemed desirous of helping the young girl on whom so great a strain had fallen.

Deborah, however, refused all aid. She, and she alone, was with her father in his hours of delirium, listening to his fears, the outcome of a terrible passage in his past life. Harold Earnshaw called daily at the cottage with fruit and flowers, and his kindly solicitude for her father, his tender care for herself, were the only bright things in the girl's life.

If only she could tell him the whole sad history of her father's past! She could trust him, no one could look in his clear blue eyes and not feel convinced as to that. And yet—— She glanced towards the bed where her father lay unconscious.

"No one must know," he muttered over and over again, "no one must ever know!"

With a sigh Deb put away the thought of taking Harold into her confidence. She must bear her burden alone; no one could help her. Of the man, Martin Heriot, she had seen nothing. Village gossip told her that he was stopping at the inn, and seemed concerned at the agent's illness. Deb understood his silence. He was waiting on events. If her father rallied, he would again bring pressure to bear upon her. He would threaten to expose the old man unless she became his wife.

If poor Stanhope died—Deb's thoughts stopped short at this point. She could not imagine a future without her father.

For six weeks Deborah fought unceasingly for her father's life. At the end of that time there came a change for the better. His strength increased rapidly, but though his bodily health improved his intellect remained impaired. He seemed to have lost all consciousness of past events and lived only in the present. He was to all intents and purposes a child, and like a child had to be cared for and looked after.

One evening, worn out with anxiety and fatigue, the girl snatched a respite from the sick room. Her father was sleeping peacefully, the scent of the roses from the cottage garden stole through the open window, the moon, touching the trees to silver, shed a soft light on the woods and meadows.

Deborah felt a sudden longing for the roses and the summer night. She hurried down the garden path and, leaning upon the gate, glanced swiftly up the white road. The next minute a tall figure stepped from the shadow of the trees, the gate was pushed back by an eager hand, and Deborah found herself clasped by two strong arms.

"Sweetheart, I've been watching the house for hours, hoping and praying that you might come into the garden. These past six weeks seem an eternity. It is years and years since I saw you, Deborah——" He clasped her closer, and raising her face to his, took toll from the fresh, sweet lips.

"You shouldn't, Harold, you have no right, you——" He interrupted her objections with a laugh.

"It's not my fault, Deb. Over and over again I've tried to tell you how dear you are to me, and always you've put me off. How many times it has been upon my lips to ask you to be my wife! As I commenced to speak you froze me into silence. To-night I felt the time had come when I must assert myself. It was no use to parley, the citadel had to be carried by force of arms. And now"—he drew her tenderly towards him—"now you can't refuse to hear me. Deb, my sweet Deb, will you take me for better or for worse?"

His eyes, brave and true, looked into hers. She loved him with all the force of a strong nature. Why should she put this happiness from her? Why should her father's sad fate spoil hers?

"Dearest, you must not refuse me. Your father is likely to be ailing for some time. He will want great care, care such as you alone cannot give him. I must help you, Deb—as your husband it will be my right to help you."

For a moment the girl hesitated. If she accepted Earnshaw's proposal she would gain happiness for herself, comfort for her father. If she refused, there was nothing but a future of hard work, a long and painful effort to earn a pittance sufficient to keep herself and the old man who could work no longer. Why should she put happiness from her, why should she refuse the gift of love? And yet ought she to marry any man while the shadow of her father's secret overcast her life? Dare she join her future to another's, her future that must inevitably be darkened by the past?

If she could tell her lover the truth he might find a way out of the difficulty. For a moment the temptation was almost too strong. Harold would not turn against her or her father. He would help and encourage them. But the recollection of the old man's cry "No one must know!" stayed the words upon her lips.

"I cannot marry you," she cried. "I can never marry you."

"You care for me; you love me? Deborah, you shall not say you do not love me."

With a sob she turned towards him, clasping her arms about his neck she drew his face close to her own, and kissed him passionately upon the lips.

"For the last time," she whispered; "darling, for the last time!" and left him in the stillness of the summer night—alone.

* * * * * * *

Martin Heriot, pacing with restless strides a clearing in a thick plantation of young firs, was obviously ill at ease. A tall, broad-shouldered man with a heavy brown moustache and strongly marked features, he impressed most people with a belief in his honesty of purpose; that he was a good-hearted fellow was the general opinion concerning him, an opinion he did his best to foster.

He had come to Helstone with the fixed determination of making Deborah his wife. It had needed time and considerable ingenuity to find Stanhope and his daughter, and now that he had found them he did not mean they should escape him.

Chance had revealed to him certain incidents in Stanhope's life, curiosity had led him to follow up the clues until he learnt the secret of the man's life. Armed with this knowledge he had pressed his suit on Deborah. On her refusal to entertain his proposals he had sworn to ruin both her and her father.

Their flight some three years back had upset his plans for the time being, but the game had seemed to be in his hands at Helstone. Stanhope was older, weaker, less able to withstand him. A turn of the screw and the girl would yield. His victim's illness had thrown out his calculations. Stanhope was not in a condition to understand the significance of threats. There still remained Deborah, however; Deborah whom gossip declared to be in love with the young Squire.

To and fro, to and fro, Martin Heriot paced. In his own fashion he loved the girl, not a fibre of his body but thrilled at the thought of her. The recollection of her proud face with its flashing eyes sent the blood to his head.

"I'll win her if I die for it," he muttered.

The sound of a horse's gallop in the distance made him prick up his ears. Deborah on her bright bay mare—a gift from Earnshaw—was coming down the road. Between the coppice and the highway lay a stretch of meadow land through which a stream meandered, fringed with rushes. Crossing the foot-bridge, Heriot hurried to the highway. Deborah, recognising him, urged the horse to a quicker pace.

"Not so fast, Miss Stanhope," said the man grimly, seizing the bridle of the mare, "I've waited here an hour or more on the chance of seeing you. You've got to listen to me."

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There was that in Heriot's face that showed the girl he meant to enforce his will. She dismounted and followed him to the meadow, leading her mare by the rein.

"Three years ago I asked you to be my wife," he said slowly. "To-day I ask you the same question."

"And I unhesitatingly refuse. I will never marry you!" His face whitened, his thin lips grew compressed.

"Think what it will mean," he answered slowly. "Your father disgraced, your home broken up, your livelihood gone."

"My father is beyond your power to hurt him any more. Your persecution has done its work. His mind is dead; he has no recollection of that terrible time when he suffered so cruelly, so unjustly."

"Unjustly!" the man sneered. "Your father was tried for murder."

"And found innocent," she interrupted. "Even you cannot deny that."

"One among twelve jurymen denied his guilt, and persuaded the other eleven to give in to his opinion. The public thought very differently indeed."

"There is no one left for you to persecute," she said; "a thing like you cannot hurt *me!*"

"I do not wish to hurt you. I love you—love you as only a strong man can. I want you for my own, to shield you from all care, all harm. Deborah," he stretched out his arms, "believe me—I love you."

"I cannot be your wife," she answered steadily. "If you truly love me, you will leave me and my father in peace."

"Never. I will not rest until I have you. I will follow you from place to place, drive you from every spot, turn you adrift upon the world. Not a man, not a woman but shall shrink from you—a murderer's daughter! Do you think your lover will hunger for your kisses when he learns the truth? Do you think Harold Earnshaw will marry the child of——"

"You shall not say it!" she cried fiercely. "Father is innocent—innocent!"

"And the blood upon his hands, the old man's screams for help. Are they proofs of innocence?"

"My father found the old man dying—stabbed to the heart. He tried to raise him from the floor, and when he fell back dead, called for assistance. You know the story well."

"Aye, and Harold Earnshaw shall know it also. You have refused to marry him, but in your heart you mean one day to give in. His love you shall lose. To-night he shall learn who you are. There's not a man in all the world would marry you but me—would marry a murderer's daughter."

His eyes burnt into hers, his hands, shaking with passion, clasped her own.

She knew it was the truth! If Harold learnt the story of the past, if this man told him her father was a murderer, he would put her from his heart. A cry broke from her lips.

"There is no happiness for you except with me. You have no future save what I offer. I have you at my mercy. Deborah—my love."

As he spoke he flung his arm round her waist. At his touch the girl's hot blood flamed into fury. With a sudden strength she threw him off, and raising her riding whip struck him across the face.

The suddenness of the attack, the strength of the blow, sent him staggering back. His foot slipped on the wet grass and he fell reeling to the ground on the water's brink.

The stream was behind him. With lifted arm Deborah stood in front, her face blazing with wrath, her figure drawn up to its full height.

"At your mercy am I?" she said in a clear, ringing voice. "Tell me that again!" And the whip trembled in the air.

"To-night I shall tell Earnshaw," he cried foaming.

But Earnshaw, a grim look of satisfaction in his eyes, was standing beside Deborah!

Heriot's power was broken, his career of persecution at an end.

* * * * *

Before night fell the village was agog with the intelligence that Mr. Earnshaw's agent had been tried for murder! The information, strangely enough, appeared to arouse sympathy instead of condemnation in the hearts of the rustics. Their feelings took a different colour towards their informer, however, and Mr. Heriot was glad to quit the neighbourhood with no very serious injury.

"Save me, save me!" he shrieked. "Deborah, they have done for me!"

Deborah, however, felt the kindly wishes of the neighbours almost as keenly as their suspicions, and deliberated the possibility of flying from Helstone and Harold. The latter, however, nipped any such project in the bud.

"There's no argument about it, Deb," he said. "I'm going to marry you whether you like it or not." And Deborah, glad to have the question settled for her, submitted.

"If only father's innocence were proved," she sighed, "How happy I should be."

Fate, however, who had treated Stanhope so badly, did him a kindness at the last. On his daughter's wedding eve there came the news that a certain convict had confessed to the murder for which the innocent man had been tried.

"If it had come too late, my darling," murmured Harold. "If you had let Heriot frighten you into marriage, and put me from your life. Deb, my brave-hearted Deb, I can never love you enough for your courage."

She nestled closer, clasping her arms about his neck.

"It wasn't really brave," she whispered. "I should have been terribly frightened—but for my love of you!"

John K. Prothero.

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A Terrible Doubt

And the Result of It.

"It is a first night at St. James' Theatre," observed Mrs. Gregory Farquhar.

She was sitting at the dinner-table opposite her husband, Captain Farquhar, of the Guards.

"Aw!" replied that gentleman, being evidently unable to think of any more trenchant remark.

Mrs. Farquhar went on, with a slight nervousness of manner:

"Lord Ferdie has sent me a box—you'll come, won't you, Gregory?"

"Awfully sorry," answered Gregory, indulging in all the accepted abbreviations with which our gilded youth disfigures his native tongue, "but really couldn't. Got an engagement to-night, Bessie—must keep it, 'pon my honour. Be delighted to go with you otherwise."

"Oh, I daresay!" said Mrs. Farquhar, with an angry colour rising in her cheeks—"delighted, of course! I've observed that you always would be delighted to go out with me on Saturday evening, only you're engaged."

Captain Farquhar applied himself to the claret, and made no answer. He was not blind to that angry colour rising in his pretty wife's face; and being a young man of a peaceful disposition, notwithstanding that his profession was that of war, he took refuge in a wise silence.

It is not to be denied that silence was a very easy thing to him, for as a rule he had nothing whatever to say. His claims to the admiration of Society consisted in the superb proportions of his form, the magnificence of his moustache, and the perfect fit of his clothes.

Mrs. Farquhar, on the contrary, had a tongue of her own; and just now she seemed inclined to use it.

"Am I to go alone with Lord Ferdie?" she asked presently.

"'Pon my soul, Bess, I don't know. He's a harmless chap enough; but I suppose it wouldn't look well."

"A harmless chap!" echoed Mrs. Farquhar, in such a tone that the captain opened his eyes wider than usual.

"You want some sort of a sheep-dog, I s'pose, Bess?" he added thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Mrs. Farquhar with intense scorn; "*quite* in the watch-dog style that would be. But it might be a little difficult to engage one for Saturday nights only—that little difficulty didn't occur to you, perhaps? Gregory," she said, with a sudden change of voice and manners, "I *will* know where you go on Saturday nights!"

"Oh, come, I say!" was Captain Farquhar's response.

He was a good deal taken aback by this pretty little creature's sudden transformation into a virago.

"You must tell me!" she cried.

"Very sorry," answered the Captain; "can't!"

Mrs. Farquhar looked at him from under her long, dark eyelashes; and then, by a great effort controlled herself, and did a little acting.

"Gregory dear," she said, very gently, "do tell me. It's disgraceful to be such a jealous little wretch, I know; but I can't help it."

"Forgotten the compact, eh, Bess?—each to do as we pleased, don't you know, and no unreasonable jealousy allowed."

"Oh, but we weren't to have secrets, and mine isn't unreasonable jealousy. No woman could endure such a thing—flesh and blood couldn't stand it. Dear Gregory, do tell me, and then I'll be—oh, so good!"

"Very sorry," repeated the captain—"can't!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Farquhar, transformed again, as by magic, into the virago; "then I know what to think. I'm not the ignorant little thing I was when you married me. It comes to 'You go your way and I go mine'—does it? Very well! You used to think me pretty; now, I suppose, you have found a different style of beauty that you like better. Never mind! I can still manage to be the fashion for a season or two, if I choose. You think Lord Ferdie a harmless sort of chap, do you? He's very kind; he seems to admire me very much. I'll send over for Mrs. Vane; no doubt she will go with me and play sheep-dog to-night."

"No, no!" exclaimed the captain; "don't go out with that dreadful woman, Bess."

"Who else am I to get at a moment's notice? Am I to sit at home by myself all the evening, just because it happens to be the night you are engaged? That would scarcely be keeping our compact. Ta-ta! I'm going to dress. I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

"I say, Bess," said the Captain, rising from his chair as his wife turned to the door.

"Well?"

"Don't go with Mrs. Vane and Ferdie."

"Tell me where you are going, Gregory, and I—well, I'll try and get somebody else."

The captain opened his mouth as if to speak, then shut it again.

He looked at his wife in a hesitating sort of way, grew a trifle redder than usual, and at last relapsed into the old formula: "Very sorry—can't!"

Mrs. Farquhar made him a profound courtesy, and then left the room.

She went upstairs to her dressing-room and rang the bell. When her maid came, the door was locked and she was told to go away again. For Mrs. Farquhar, to her own surprise, had burst into a passion of weeping.

After a few minutes this stopped as suddenly as it began. She rose hurriedly, opened her door, and set it ajar. Then she quietly and quickly got a long dark travelling-cloak and wrapped it round her, put a little black hat on her head, and tied a thick veil over her face. She snatched up her purse and gloves, and then went outside her door and stood listening.

In a little while she heard the captain come out into the hall, take his hat, and open the front door.

Swiftly and softly she crept down the stairs. As he closed the front door she reached it, and, after waiting a moment, opened it very gently, went out, and as gently closed it behind her.

She had made up her mind to follow him.

The Farquhars lived in Hyde Park Terrace; there was a cab-stand within a stone's throw of their house.

Lingering within the shelter of the railings, Mrs. Farquhar watched her husband take a hansom and drive off in it. Then she rushed across to the stand, sprang into another, and said to the man:

"Keep that hansom that has just driven away in sight. Stop when it stops, but not too close." The man whipped up his horse, and in another minute they were in full chase.

It was a desperate move, this of pretty Mrs. Farquhar's; and though her spirit was still all ablaze, and her face white with resolution, her heart quailed within her. How would it end? What would she learn to-night?

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Strange as it may seem, Bess Farquhar cared not one farthing for any man in the world but her own handsome guardsman; and though she pretended to have the fashionable failing of a love of admiration, she was perfectly indifferent to the worship of all the gay chappies of the day, if the especial one of her heart had indeed grown tired of her.

She felt sure he had. She only wanted to have facts, instead of feelings, to go upon; and then, she resolved, she would throw aside her lingering scruples, and drown her regrets for the past in the excitements of the present. She was making a good beginning certainly in her programme of dissipation.

Her mind was a perfect blank to the fact that Lord Ferdie would expect her to be in that box at the St. James' Theatre to-night.

Very certainly she would not be there; for it was now nearly the time of the performance, and she was speeding away Citywards along the Bayswater Road, along Oxford Street—on—on.

"How much further?" she thought to herself, with a rather frightened feeling.

To tell the truth, she had expected to be taken north, to the charming precincts of St. John's Wood.

It was a clear, fine night, and she kept her eyes steadily fixed upon the hansom in front of her, which she could see very plainly. It went on, on, at a steady pace, much as though the driver had made up his mind to drive all night, and meant to keep his horse cool for the work.

And as they went on, it really seemed to Bess Farquhar as if this were the fact.

They got into Holborn, on a straight line, over the Viaduct, down Newgate Street into Cheapside. Then came Cornhill and Leadenhall Street; and then Mrs. Farquhar began to find she was more frightened than anything else.

How deserted it looked! this place that she had seen on her former visits swarming with men of business, who one and all recognised her as an outsider, and stared at her as she was never stared at in Piccadilly or the Park.

Now, the only people about were the actual dwellers in the City, intent on their Saturday night's marketings; the only vehicles, great drays and carts that were still at work.

Now they were in Aldgate; with wide eyes of wonder Mrs. Farquhar looked at the street so full of a life so strange to her. Soon afterwards she saw written on the wall Whitechapel Road. Her heart sank within her. Where could Gregory be going? Was he a Fenian coming to some secret meeting to discuss the interesting subject of dynamite?

Like an arrow they had come straight and direct—along, as it seemed, one broad, smooth road—from Hyde Park to Whitechapel, right through the heart of the City.

Yet on went that hansom in front, straight down Whitechapel Road, that great thoroughfare which might, if fashion, instead of famine, were at home there, be one of the handsomest streets in London. But it looked a very dreary, hopeless, sordid place now.

Oh, what could Gregory want here? Or, on went that hansom straight away up the Mile End Road.

Mrs. Farquhar had heard of Whitechapel as a place the mere mention of which must make one shudder; but she had not even heard of Mile End.

The cab stopped at last—at Canal Road. Mrs. Farquhar felt quite worn out, the drive had been so long and so strange.

Her cabman, wise in his generation, drew up on the other side of the street. He accepted five shillings with an attempt at a growl; but Mrs. Farquhar did not stay to listen, for she saw that the captain was walking very swiftly down Canal Road, and she was afraid of missing him.

He turned twice, down dark and dreary streets, that filled Mrs. Farquhar with a nervous dread; then at last he stopped at a dismal little house, in a dismal little street, rang a bell, and was immediately admitted.

Mrs. Farquhar stood trembling against the railings; she knew not what to do. Presently a crowd of roughs came down the street, rang the same bell, and were admitted. Then came a number of dirty, miserable women. They too went to the door.

Despair gave Mrs. Farquhar courage. She was as much afraid to stay out in this dreadful street as to go into this mysterious place. She went in among the women, and when the door was opened, entered with them.

To her amazement she found herself in a very large room. Four houses had been thrown into one, and this room ran all the length. It was crowded with people—such people as Mrs. Farquhar had never dreamt of; the sight of their poverty, their rags, their strange faces—some fierce, some foolish, some utterly sad—made her feel sick.

Presently there rang out a clear, fine tenor voice; it was her husband's. He was singing an old Scottish ballad, with which of old he had been wont to please his college chums over gay suppers. How these poor wretches listened!

Mrs. Farquhar wondered as she looked furtively about her. And she felt a strange sensation of pride when she saw at the end of the song, that her handsome guardian was a popular favourite—a darling—among these unhappy and unwashed ones.

He was intreated for another song; the audience was familiar with his whole répertoire, and would gladly have had it all. Again and again Captain Farquhar sang; and then, with a good-humoured laugh, he refused to sing any more, and gave up the piano to a quiet-looking lady, dressed like a Sister of Mercy, who began to play some pretty dance-music.

Captain Farquhar went into another part of the hall, where there was a billiard-table. Here he was welcomed with great delight by a crowd of horrible-looking roughs, who were knocking the balls about.

A game began in good earnest. Captain Farquhar was a splendid player, and the men watched him with fascinated eyes when he was at work.

Presently Mrs. Farquhar noticed that a stalwart and very pleasant-looking young clergyman had joined this group, and saw that the men seemed to be as fond of him as they were of Captain Farquhar. By-and-by the clergyman broke up the meeting with a little speech, and when everyone rose to go out, Mrs. Farquhar slipped away unseen.

Cabs are not plentiful on the Mile End Road; a hansom is as strange a sight there as in the depth of the country. So when Captain Farquhar reached the top of Canal Road he stopped an omnibus which was going Citywards. But just as he was going to get into it his arm was touched. He looked and saw a young woman; without further ceremony he put his foot on the omnibus step, when the young woman said:

"Gregory!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Captain Farquhar.

Then he signed to the omnibus conductor to go on.

Captain and Mrs. Farquhar then took a walk down Mile End Road, and this is some of what they said:

"Will you ever forgive me, Gregory? How could I be such a jealous little wretch, and so mean as to spy?"

"All right," said the good-natured Captain; "women can't help it, I suppose."

"And why wouldn't you tell me?"

"Didn't want to be laughed at."

"Oh, I wouldn't laugh at you—I'd like to tell all London!"

"Exactly—and then all London would laugh at me. Couldn't stand that. Don't tell, Bess; should cut altogether if any of the chaps found me out."

"I won't tell, then. But how did you find such a place?"

"The parson there's an old school chum of mine. I read the papers, and wondered if the writing fellows told lies; so wrote and asked Dolly, as we always used to call him. Dolly said: 'Come and see'; he was in the midst of it, trying to humanise the wretches. Dolly got hold of me when I did come down, and made me promise to do some humanising. Don't know that it's much use, but they seem to like it. Wish they didn't look so hungry. I'm going to give 'em a supper next week."

"You are! Oh, Gregory! I must come and help."

And she did. More than that, she kept her husband's secret. For he declared positively that he would go immediately to Timbuctoo if any of "the fellows" heard of it.

Maisie Meadows.

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

Dramatis Personæ.

OLIVE BERESFORD, the writer of these confessions. She is a young lady who is lured into gambling by her friend, Annabel Vernon, whom she detects cheating. Miss Beresford arranges a secret code of signals with a Mr. Tasker, in order to beat Annabel Vernon at her own game.

HARRY VERNON, of Vernon Towers, who with his wife plans to catch Olive in a trap. He manages to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures passed between Mr. Taskot and the relater of these episodes.

ANNABEL VERNON, wife of the last-named. An old school friend of Miss Beresford's. Her husband having obtained the proofs of Olive's alleged cheating, she holds the photos over her victim as a threat, declaring that, unless Miss Beresford does as she is ordered, she will be denounced as a card-sharper. She makes the unfortunate girl a tool to win money from her guests.

MR. TASKOT, who poses as a gentleman of means, but who is really a despicable bounder. He endeavours to force Miss Beresford to marry him.

MR. MAURICE RAY, a gentleman who rescues the narrator from a mad dog, and who since takes a kindly interest in the welfare of the young girl, treating her with great respect, and showing her much consideration.

MR. DEAN FISHER, a "Bridge" expert, and one of the guests of the Vernons at Vernon Towers when Olive Beresford was fleeced.

MRS. GRAINGER, a rich widow and an ardent gambler, another of the guests at the Towers.

MR. HAROLD BAINBRIG, a wealthy bachelor, who with his sister,

MISS EDITH BAINBRIG, loses heavily at "Bridge" whilst playing with the Vernons and the unwilling Olive Beresford.

EPISODE XIII.
Accused of Theft.

"A THIEF! I am no thief! This is an infamous plot!"

Such was my passionate exclamation, and I looked eagerly round to see how far my words were likely to be believed, but not a single face held out the slightest hope for me. The Vernons looked indignant at my presumable ingratitude. The Bainbrigs averted their gaze. And the policeman was stolidly important.

"An infamous plot!" repeated Harry Vernon. "Pray who is likely to have plotted against you? Have we not done our best to provide pleasure and entertainment for you? And is it at all credible that we would bring a serious accusation against a person whom we invited to our house as a guest?"

"And it's no use your pretending to be innocent," was Annabel's coarse remark. "We've missed things ever since you came, but we should never have dreamt of suspecting you if we had not watched you come out of Harry's den in the middle of the night, hours after you were supposed to have gone to bed. When we discovered that a silver paper weight I showed you in the den only yesterday had been taken out of that room, we guessed at once what you had been doing there when we saw you. And that is why we sent for a policeman."

There was such a dreadful mixture of truth with the lies which Annabel poured out so glibly, that I turned crimson with fright, and my treacherous hostess instantly took advantage of the fact.

"See," she exclaimed, "her own looks betray her! Tell me, Miss Beresford, dare you deny that you went secretly to my husband's private room in the middle of the night?"

"I was there," was my desperate admission. "But you know very well that I stole none of your jewellery, and I am sure you never showed me a paper weight yesterday. Our conversation while I was in that room was about something very different, and I know very well why you are forswearing yourselves now."

"After that," was Mr. Vernon's stern interruption, "I am under the painful necessity of explaining to Mr. and Miss Bainbrig that I was taking you to task for cheating at cards. I did not like to mention this, but you compel me to do so in self-defence."

The wickedness and audacity of these people were so colossal that I was struck almost dumb and sank, trembling and weeping, upon the nearest chair, sobbing vain protestations of innocence the while several more articles which did not belong to me were being taken out of the folds of various garments which I had packed in readiness before I went out.

My heart became as cold as lead, and I saw nothing but ruin before me. For who would believe me if I said that this accusation was brought against me in revenge for rescuing myself from the necessity of cheating at cards for the Vernons? The whole plot was so horribly feasible, and every detail had been thought out so carefully that there was not a loophole of escape left to me. Even my careless refusal of Annabel's hypocritical offer of help over my packing was ingeniously construed into fear of allowing her to see what was contained in my dress basket, and I thought things could not look blacker for me than they did.

But I was mistaken. And even if the Bainbrigs had been faintly inclined to believe my protestations, they soon received addition l proof that my accusers were justified in dealing harshly with me.

"Here's just one more thing," said the constable, who had resumed his search. "It's a brooch this time, I think."

"Why, that belongs to me!" cried Miss Bainbrig. "I lost it last night."

It was true. The brooch just produced was one that I had seen Miss Bainbrig wearing. It must have been stolen by Annabel herself, either for the purpose of being eventually turned into money, or to be ready for use in effecting my final ruin.

"Oh, Miss Bainbrig!" I almost shrieked. "I swear to you that I did not put any of the things there! It is a frightful conspiracy intended to prevent anybody from believing me when I say that the Vernons are swindling card sharpers, who invited us here to rob us."

At this apparently wild statement, there was a horrified exclamation from Miss Bainbrig, and her brother bit his lip,

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so strong was the restraint he had to put upon himself. He looked very stern and white, but he said not a word which could be interpreted either for me or against me.

The Vernons showed no such moderation.

Annabel lifted her hands in an affectation of horrified surprise.

"Could anybody believe in such awful wickedness!" she exclaimed. "I declare, it makes me ill to think what would have happened next if we had not found this viper out before she had time to do much more mischief! Fancy her having the impudence to talk about cheating! She came here pretending to know nothing about cards. Yet she won everybody's money, and then she has the nerve to accuse other people of sharp practice!"

"Mr. Bainbrig," I implored. "For Heaven's sake, do not condemn me unheard! Things look black against me, I know, because of the frightful completeness of the plot of which I am the victim. But I swear to you that I am innocent."

"I should like to think so, Miss Beresford," was the grave answer. "And I find it difficult to believe all that is said about you. But, if you knew that the money being lost here by guests was not fairly won from us, why did you take a share of it?"

"I could not help myself last night. But I have been to your house this morning, to try and see you. You had gone out, in answer to a telegram, when I arrived, so I left a letter for you, together with all the money that fell to my share last night. I asked you to retain what ought to belong to you, and to give their proportion to the two gentlemen you brought with you last night. I said in my letter that I could not keep the money because I knew it had not been won fairly from you, and you will find when you go home that what I have just said is absolutely true."

"It is a lie!" screamed Annabel, losing all control of herself on realising that she and her husband had been forestalled to some extent. "This girl knew that she would be found out, and concocted a lame tale to lead you off the scent. I expect she was scheming to be asked to your house, so that she could rob you just as she has robbed us. Policeman, do your duty! Take this girl away."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Vernon," was Mr. Bainbrig's firm protest. "A while ago I was reluctantly inclined to believe the mass of evidence adduced against Miss Beresford. But both Mr. Vernon and you have shown so much hatred and spite over this business that I fancy you have overreached yourselves, for you have convinced me that there is something behind all this, which it will be to Miss Beresford's interest to have explained."

"Harold, I agree with you," were the words which put new hope into me, as Edith Bainbrig, with a look of heavenly compassion on her handsome face, came and folded me in her arms. "The whole thing looks too much like a planned out thing to be genuine, and if that letter and its contents are at our house, I shall believe this poor girl to be innocent, in spite of all the evidence which has been so carefully gathered."

"Thank you, Miss Bainbrig," exclaimed another voice, which brought a sudden joyful revulsion of feeling to me. "Thank you. That is just the kind of speech I should have expected you to make. Happily, your judgment is on the right scent. You *hope* this girl is innocent. I *know* her to be so. Now then, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon, what mischief have you been up to this time?"

There was a scream of rage from Annabel, and an oath from Harry Vernon, who both gazed at the newcomer as though he had been a spectre.

The Bainbrigs both looked very much relieved, and I—shall I confess it? I made no attempt to free myself when a manly figure took Miss Bainbrig's place; when a manly arm incircled my waist protectively; and when Maurice Ray's sonorous voice said feelingly:

"Don't worry any more about this business, dear. I'll see that the accusations against you are withdrawn, and that your unprincipled accusers eat every word they have said against you."

EPISODE XIV.

The Vernons are Checkmated.

So far I had noticed that several other people had entered the room, but on glancing hastily round, I saw that Mrs. Grainger was almost at my elbow, and that Mr. Dean Fisher, with an ugly gleam in his fishy eyes, was looking at Maurice Ray as if he would have liked to kill him there and then.

"I do not know who you are, sir," he said sneeringly. "But I fancy you don't exactly speak by the card, and as I was a witness of Miss Beresford's clandestine expedition to a room which she knew to be Mr. Vernon's private den, I fancy it will be difficult for you to compel anybody to eat their words."

"I suppose you are Mr. Dean Fisher?" inquired my champion, who showed no signs of being intimidated by the Bridge expert's evident partisanship of the cause of my enemies.

"That is my name," was the answer, given with much more self-possession than was shown after Mr. Ray had remarked: "I fancy I have heard of you before, sir. There was a little scandal at Carliol Castle about two month's ago, and I know of one or two people who would like to meet once more a certain Bridge expert named——"

"What has that got to do with what is going on here?" interrupted Mr. Fisher, so savagely that one had no difficulty in guessing that he was afraid of further disclosures. "Be good enough to confine yourself to the subject at issue."

Mr. Ray smiled contemptuously as he rejoined: "It shall be as you please, Mr. Fisher. I believe you observed just now that you were ready to bear witness against Miss Beresford?"

"Pardon me," was the sullen reply. "I am ready to do nothing of the sort. If Mr. and Mrs. Vernon have any accusations to make against the young lady, they need not count upon me to support them."

"Wise creature! Even a bird of prey knows when he has pursued his game far enough! Ladies and gentlemen, will you all kindly observe that Mr. Fisher knows absolutely nothing to Miss Beresford's discredit? Mr. Vernon, it is a pity that your principal coadjutor is failing you. Do you think it will be advisable to persist in accusing Miss Beresford of felony?"

Harry Vernon was as pale as a sheet, his wife scarlet with baffled rage. Veritable wild beasts both of them were. But it was evident enough that their fangs had been suddenly drawn, for the woman remained silent, and the man muttered between his teeth "Of course, if my principal witness fails me, I have no case, so it is no use having Miss Beresford arrested. Constable, I will pay you something for the trouble you have been put to, and then you can go."

"What! Without making no arrest, after finding all these things in the young lady's basket?" objected the policeman, who scented more than money enough to pay him for his trouble. He would probably want paying for his silence, and he continued: "Either the lady has stolen the things, or the case has been trumped up, just as she said. and if I'm not to finish making an arrest for stealing, I'll have to make one for con-spy-ricy."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Harry Vernon. "Miss Beresford denies everything, and we must give her the benefit of the doubt."

"Pardon me," was Maurice Ray's interjection. "To give anybody the benefit of the doubt is virtually to put the stigma of guilt upon them. That will not do for me. Mr. Vernon—once for all, do you believe that Miss Beresford had the remotest intention of taking anything from this house which did not belong to her?"

"Well, perhaps——"

"No perhaps, if you please. Has Miss Beresford touched anything of yours with the intention of depriving you of it?"

"I own that I may have been mistaken, and regret that my wife and I were somewhat hasty in jumping to conclusions."

"You mean that you know she is innocent?"

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"Yes. I believe her to be quite innocent."

"But what about all those things having been found, packed ready for removal, in her dress-basket?"

"Some of the servants very probably put them there, for some reason or other."

"Not Miss Beresford?"

"No. Now I come to think of it, she could not have done so, as she went out before some of the things disappeared. I'm sorry the mistakes have been made, and apologise most fully to Miss Beresford for having misjudged her."

Everybody else had maintained a breathless silence during this conversation, but there was quite a babel of tongues for a moment or two after my enemies had been compelled to retract all their iniquitous accusations against me. The policeman protested that "he'd be blowed if he ever saw the like of that afore," though he raised no objections when Mr. Vernon sullenly asked him to go to another room with him, where they could settle with each other quietly, and I fancy he extorted a neat little sum out of the man who sent for him to arrest me, for he soon quitted the house with a broad smile on his face.

"Mrs. Vernon, I'm afraid you are not very well," was Mr. Fisher's solicitous remark. "Let me take you away from these disagreeable people."

Annabel hastily took the proffered arm of her confederate in swindling, and the pair left their intended victim in triumphant possession of the restored esteem of the persons who had been summoned to witness her downfall and disgrace!

"You have saved me again," I said to Mr. Ray, the tears of passionate thankfulness swimming in my eyes. "I owe you first my life, and then my reputation and liberty! If I lived a thousand years, I could never repay the great services you have done me."

"Then do not try," was the kindly response. "The knowledge that I arrived here in time is reward enough for me. And now, the sooner you quit Vernon Towers the better. I arranged about your luggage, as promised, but you have missed the train you should have caught, and there is not another until midnight."

"Miss Beresford," exclaimed Edith Bainbrig, coming up to me and kissing me warmly. "We owe you no end of reparation for doubting you even for a moment. Show that you forgive us by coming home with us, and staying there for a few days, till you have got over the shock these events must have caused you. Mr. Ray knows that we are not likely to treat you badly."

"No, that won't do at all," protested Mrs. Grainger. "I have the first lien on Miss Beresford's good nature. She promised to visit me, and don't you forget that you are also both due at my house to-morrow."

I would have preferred to visit the Bainbrigs, rather than Mrs. Grainger, to whom I had not taken much of a fancy. But she seemed to be very kind now, and I left my friends to arrange for my immediate disposal amongst themselves, the result being that, escorted by Mr. Ray, and fortified by the good wishes of the brother and sister, I and my belongings, the latter properly packed, went home with the portly widow.

EPISODE XV.

Out of the Frying-Pan into the Fire.

At the door Mr. Ray bade me good-bye for a couple of days or so.

"I'm very sorry to lose sight of you so soon," he said, looking so earnestly at my blushing face that I blushed all the more. "Unfortunately, my time is not exactly altogether my own. Just now, I am staying at the residence of the Lord Lieutenant of the County, who has been good enough to give me several commissions for miniatures. I finished one yesterday, and am to begin another this afternoon, so I shall be rather busy for awhile."

"I wish you would paint a miniature of me," exclaimed Mrs. Grainger. "I don't mind how much I pay for it, so long as it is pretty."

"Poor Mr. Ray," I thought compassionately. "It will be a difficult task to make a pretty picture from Mrs. Grainger."

But it is a usual failing for us all to want our likenesses to be very unlike us. If we are pretty, we want them to be lovely. If we are plain, we want them to be at least handsome. And if we are ugly, we vow the painter has not done his work well, if he does not produce something quite beautiful. This being the case, it follows that the most successful portrait painters are always those who are adepts in the art of idealising, and it would seem that Mr. Ray had studied this art very diligently, for he showed no hesitation in accepting the commission just offered him.

"Then come straight here from the castle," said Mrs. Grainger. "Miss Beresford will still be here when you come, and we will all have a good time together."

The prospect of seeing Maurice Ray again, and of living for some days in the same house with him, was very acceptable to me, and by the time my genial hostess and I were having a belated lunch together, my elasticity of spirits had almost brought back the usual colour to my cheeks.

The Bainbrigs had gone home, after announcing their determination never to enter Vernon Towers again. They also promised to drive over to Trenewth that evening, but, greatly to my disappointment, Mr. Bainbrig came without his sister.

"Edith turned very seedy," he explained, "and asked me to excuse her at present."

"What a pity!" lamented Mrs. Grainger. "I had so looked forward to a quiet rubber, and now there will only be three of us! I'm fearfully disappointed!"

"So am I," agreed Harold Bainbrig. "But there's no help for it. It was no use pressing Edith to come when her head, as she expressed it, was turning like a mill-pond."

"Is it necessary to play bridge?" I asked timidly. "Cannot we amuse ourselves in some other way?"

I felt it due to my conscience, and to the unhappiness I had already endured, to enter a feeble protest against the game. But I was as eager to have another rubber—under fair conditions—as the others were, and I saw no harm in pursuing a course of amusement which was in itself harmless.

"It is only dangerous," I told myself, "when money is played for, thus offering temptations to cheat. I don't intend to play for money any more, so it would be foolish for me to spoil other people's enjoyment."

It was easy for me to make a wise resolve when confronted by no special temptation. But, as it proved, it was not so easy to adhere to my resolve, for both Mrs. Grainger and Mr. Bainbrig objected to playing for the mere fun of the thing.

"But you shan't be mulcted, my dear," was the former's assurance. "The question is—who will make a fourth?"

At this moment a servant announced a visitor, and our hostess smiled with pleasure.

"Just fancy! Isn't it lucky?" she exclaimed. "I didn't expect him till next week, and he's turned up to-night instead."

"May we ask the name of the gentleman whose advent is so welcome?" inquired Mr. Bainbrig. And I felt my heart grow heavy with a premonition of further evil when the glib answer was given him: "It is a gentleman whom you have both met recently, and whom you will, I am sure, be pleased to meet again. It is Mr. Taskot."

I tried not to think the visit of ill-omen to me. But I could not rid myself of the fancy, and ere many hours were over, I had ample proof that I was not to be allowed to forget the unhappy arrangement which put me in the clutches of unscrupulous acquaintances.

Mr. Maurice Ray had saved me from the Vernons. But could he save me from the man who now began to trade upon the power which "our secret" gave him?

(To be continued next week.)

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IN SPITE OF IT

Telling of an Experiment which Proved Successful.

They had been discussing a certain evergreen topic that seemed to crop up at regular intervals over the tea-cups at Myrtle Villa.

"I don't care what you say," declared Hetty, the hostess, pouring out fresh tea, "I don't care what you say—a man may be good-looking and clever, he may possess all the virtues under the sun—I wouldn't give *that* for him if he hadn't *perfect* manners!"

"Then you'll never get married," returned Kate, the matter-of-fact, with great decision. "Men with perfect manners don't exist."

"The species has died out," put in Miranda sadly.

"They never existed," retorted Kate.

"Our grandmothers tell us——" began Miranda dreamily.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," interrupted Kate. "Of course, our grandmothers' lovers were paragons of perfection. Fifty years hence we shall talk about our lovers in the same way."

"Because our memories have grown dim along with our eyes, I suppose you mean," said Hetty. "Well, I daresay there's some truth in that."

"But then——" began Molly, who up to this point had been a silent listener.

"Well?" queried the others expectantly.

It was not often that Molly could be roused to argument.

"I was only going to say," Molly went on, "that it isn't only a dim memory that makes one forget people's faults. If you really love anybody, you know——"

"Who's that talking about love?" demanded a masculine voice, the owner of which had just that moment entered the room.

"If you're good, Jack," said Hetty, as her brother shook hands with her guests, "you shall have some tea and listen to what Molly was going to say when you had the bad manners to interrupt her. Go on, Molly."

"Oh, never mind."

"But this won't do, Miss Molly," protested Jack. "Don't you see how badly you're treating me? You're making a wet blanket of me against my will."

"Come, Molly," said Kate. "You see," she explained to Jack, "we were talking about the kind of men we wanted to marry, and Julia said that *her* man must be handsome, clever, strong, manly, gentle, sympathetic, and unselfish, and then Hetty declared that she wouldn't look at a man unless he had perfect manners, which were more important than all the other virtues put together, and I argued there was "no sich a pusson" as a man with perfect manners—and—and——"

"And that there never had been 'sich a pusson,'" continued Miranda, "and that when our grandmothers talked of the delightful men of *their* young days, it was because their memories had become impaired."

"And at that, Molly here was up in arms in a minute," added Hetty. "Tell us what you were going to say, Molly."

"I only think," said Molly shyly, "that one can forget a man's faults without the help of a bad memory—if one really loves him, I mean."

"Bravo, Miss Molly!" cried Jack. "It's refreshing to listen to you, in this age of scoffers."

"What Molly says may be true of some people," remarked Hetty, with an air of superior knowledge, "but I'm sure love would never blind *me* to any man's faults."

"That shows how little you know about the subject," rejoined her brother. "By your own confession, Hetty, you've never been in love."

"That's because I'm hypercritical."

"Hetty expects too much," explained Kate. "She wants a man with *perfect* manners."

"And *perfect* good taste in everything," added Hetty.

"Men are only human," murmured Jack. "They're apt to make little mistakes sometimes. But you always were hard on our sex, Hetty."

"Because I decline to fall in love with a man who puts his feet on my mantelpiece and wears scarlet neckties."

"And you honestly imagine that it's because men's manners aren't nice that you've never fallen in love?"

"Yes, I do," replied Hetty firmly.

"My dear girl," said Jack, "you're labouring under a delusion. The fact of your never having been in love has nothing whatever to do with your hypercritical notions about the manners of my sex. To use a hackneyed phrase, you've never met your affinity. I'm quite convinced that when he does turn up, you'll fall in love with him, even if his manners are not absolute perfection."

"Never!" declared Hetty.

"I believe your brother is right," said Kate.

"Time will show," remarked Julia oracularly.

"You're wrong, Jack," said Hetty. "If ever I do fall in love—of which I'm extremely doubtful myself—it will be with a man with perfect taste and perfect manners."

"So you think *now*. Wait and see. I shouldn't be surprised, Hetty, if you could find it in your heart to forgive quite elementary rudeness, and even a scarlet necktie, when you *do* fall in love."

At this there was a general exclamation of dissent.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, you're going too far!" protested Julia. "No girl could fall in love with a man who wore a scarlet necktie."

"Or who forgot to raise his hat to a lady," said Miranda.

"Or lighted a pipe without her permission," added Kate.

"Of course not," said Hetty. "Jack, you're getting absurd. Have some more tea and change the subject."

"By all means," said Jack cheerfully. "All the same, I stick to my opinion."

"And I to mine," retorted Hetty.

"That's how every argument ends," remarked Kate, philosophically.

"Time will show," repeated Julia the oracle.

* * * * *

"I'm bringing a friend home to dinner to-night, Hetty," said Jack, a few days later. "You don't mind?"

"Of course not," replied Hetty, who was her brother's housekeeper. "Who is it, Jack?"

"You'll hardly remember him—Jim Fergusson. You were quite a kiddie when he was here last."

"I seem to remember his name, but I don't remember him."

"I haven't seen him for years—ran across him quite accidentally last night. He's going to settle down at home for good—been all over the world, you know. He's a decent sort of chap, Hetty. You ought to like him!"

And with that Jack departed for his day's grind at the office.

Her brother's announcement did not disturb Hetty very much. Jack was always bringing friends home to dinner in this informal fashion, and she felt no particular curiosity about Mr. Jim Fergusson.

When he appeared that evening, Hetty's lack of curiosity changed to a feeling of mild disapproval.

She had long ago encouraged her brother to dispense with the ceremonial of evening dress at these little dinners, but it was something of a shock to her to welcome a visitor attired in a light tweed suit, brown boots, and—horror of horrors!—a necktie of the brightest scarlet.

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When Hetty had partially recovered from this blow, she noticed that Mr. Fergusson was not a bad-looking man. If it hadn't been for that tie, she could almost have thought him handsome! When she had known him for half an hour, she decided that he was one of the most interesting, as well as one of the most provoking people she had ever met.

He talked well, almost brilliantly, on every topic that happened to present itself, but oh, the lamentable crudity of his manners!

"It's evident he hasn't travelled about the world with his eyes shut," reflected Hetty. "Then why, oh, why, hasn't he learnt how to eat peas!"

But, alas! It wasn't only Jim Fergusson's method of eating peas that Hetty objected to. She saw, with pained surprise, that he ate his soup by putting the point of the spoon into his mouth, and that he used his bread to sop up the gravy. Then, too, he was inattentive to a criminal degree. He helped himself to salt and mustard, but it did not occur to him to pass them to his neighbour.

He consumed an unpeeled apple for desert by the simple process of biting into it, and when coffee arrived Hetty was therefore not surprised to find that he ignored the sugar-tongs.

Hetty glanced furtively at her brother from time to time. She wondered whether Jack had noticed their guest's eccentricities. She rather thought he had—he seemed so silent and absent-minded, and sat with his eyes ostentatiously glued to his plate during the greater part of his meal.

Mr. Fergusson himself appeared beautifully unconscious of the dismay he was creating. He talked with cheerful fluency between his bites, and, though handicapped by the fact that he bore the burden of the conversation, contrived to make an excellent dinner.

When Hetty left them to their wine and cigars, it was Jack who rose to open the door for his sister. The observance of such little courtesies did not seem to interest his friend.

And yet, Hetty was obliged to admit that, apart from his dress and manners, her guest was delightful.

He fascinated her in spite of herself, though when he had gone, and Jack inquired: "Well, what do you think of him, Hetty?" She shrugged her shoulders and retorted lightly:

"What did you expect?"

Jack looked disappointed.

"I thought he would interest you," he remarked.

"So he does," replied Hetty, "but his manners set my teeth on edge."

"They are rather odd," admitted Jack, "but one ought to forgive much to a clever fellow like that."

"Just because he's clever, his manners irritate me all the more. He ought to know better."

"He's knocked about the world a lot," said Jack apologetically.

"Which usually has the opposite effect upon a man," rejoined his sister. "A man who has seen the world ought to know how to behave better than a man who's stayed at home all his life."

"But you forget, he chose to rough it."

"I don't care how he acquired those manners," said Hetty, "I only know that they're very irritating."

"I'm sorry," replied Jack. "Does that mean I mustn't bring him here again?"

"No—of course not," said Hetty hastily. "I didn't say I disliked Mr. Fergusson. On the contrary, I—I like him very much; but, oh, Jack, his tie was dreadful!"

"A red one!" said Jack. "How curious after our argument the other night."

"Very," returned Hetty, a trifle shortly. And Jack said nothing more that evening.

* * * * * *

Mr. Fergusson had taken to calling pretty frequently at Myrtle Villa, and it must be confessed that Hetty did not altogether discourage his visits.

She was not very clear in her own mind as to her precise feelings towards Jack's friend.

He interested her. Seeing how clever and well read and all that sort of thing he was, what was more natural than that? she reflected, arguing with her conscience. She had rather fallen into the habit of arguing with her conscience of late. Somehow, it seemed necessary to do so whenever her thoughts dwelt on Jim Fergusson.

Hetty possessed a very fair share of sound commonsense.

She never, like many of her sex, indulged in violent flirtations and called them platonic friendships. She was too sensible and too honest for that.

Neither did she overrate her own charms. She was far from imagining that every man who paid her the slightest attention was bound to be madly in love with her.

On the other hand, she never wilfully blinded herself to to the truth where the signs and tokens were unmistakable.

And so it happened that, not many months after Jim Fergusson's first introduction to her, Hetty acknowledged to herself, with some reluctance, it must be confessed, that it was her duty to discourage certain advances on the part of Jack's friend if she did not wish to merit the charge of heartless flirtation.

"Of course I'm not in love with him," she argued with herself. "I could never be in love with a man who dresses and behaves as he does, that goes without saying."

But, though it "went without saying," she found it necessary to say it pretty often, each time with a queer little pain at her heart.

She had begun, moreover, to invent excuses for Jim Fergusson's behaviour.

"It's absentmindedness that makes him walk into a room in front of me, and sit down when he ought to be handing me a chair, and—and all that sort of thing," she argued. "Of course he doesn't mean to be rude. Clever people are often like that. All the same," she would add, more regretfully than she cared to own, "that doesn't alter the fact that it's bad manners to do all these things, and one can't get over bad manners!"

On the very day when Hetty had finally made up her mind to put a stop to their growing intimacy, Jim Fergusson called when Jack was out.

"I'm not at home," said Hetty firmly.

The maid who announced the visitor looked embarrassed.

"I—I'm very sorry, miss," she stammered, "but I told the gentleman you were in."

"What made you do that?" asked Hetty.

"I thought," explained the girl, "as you'd always been at home to Mr. Fergusson before, miss——"

"I see," said Hetty, turning red. "Ask Mr. Fergusson to come in, Jane."

She was inconsistent enough to feel relieved at Jane's mistake.

At any rate, she had done her duty. She could not be held responsible for the maid's blunder.

When one has made up one's mind, as a matter of duty, to be discreet, it is rather pleasant to be obliged by circumstances over which one has no control, to be exactly the opposite thing.

Jim Fergusson stalked into Hetty's drawing-room in the somewhat blundering fashion peculiar to big men, and sat down gingerly upon a certain fragile structure, known by courtesy as an "easy chair," which his hostess pointed out to him.

"I'm sorry Jack is out," remarked Jim, with obvious mendacity.

"So am I," said Hetty, with equal lack of candour. "He's dining with some friends, so I'm afraid you'll have to put up with my company."

Considering Hetty's recent resolution, it was not a wise remark.

Jim seized it eagerly.

"It's you who are putting up with me, Miss Lawrence," he said. "I sometimes feel as though I were taking a mean advantage of your kindness of heart. But if you only knew the pleasure it gives me to come here in this informal fashion," he went on hurriedly before Hetty could reply. "I—I'm awfully grateful to you."

"Why should you be grateful?" asked Hetty.

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"For allowing me to bore you so persistently," he returned.

"You don't bore me in the least," protested Hetty laughingly. "I'm not so unselfish as all that, I assure you."

"I'm glad," said Jim, with more seriousness, Hetty felt, than her light tone merited.

Somehow conversation that evening did not progress very brilliantly. Hetty felt unaccountably nervous and ill at ease, and her companion seemed absolutely stupid.

The two started topic after topic with hopeless futility, and finally, as though by mutual consent, lapsed into desperate silence.

Hetty had not lighted the lamps, and only the flickering fire illuminated the room.

It was a chilly night, and they had drawn their chairs close up to the hearth. Each sat staring into the fire, as though for inspiration.

There was a long and painful pause which Hetty felt an idiotic inability to break. The fire seemed to mesmerise her into silence.

Presently she became dimly conscious that her companion was speaking again. She began to listen dreamily, and with a strange lack of interest, to his confused and halting words, until, all at once, she awoke with a start to the fact that Jim Fergusson was proposing to her.

She could see his bronzed, handsome face quite clearly in the firelight, and its expression was more eloquent than the stammering words. It sent a strange, new thrill to her heart.

"I love you," said Jim, and his honest grey eyes shone with a light that was not all reflected from the fire.

He had risen, and stood looking down upon her, waiting for her answer.

Slowly and timidly she raised her face to his, and he bent down to catch her whispered words.

What had come over Hetty?

She scarcely understood herself. She did not doubt or question. She only knew that a wonderful, undreamt of happiness had come to her.

This man had told her that he loved her, and she—well, she knew now that she loved him too.

At that moment she could have laughed aloud at her own past folly. She scorned her old self with a lofty, happy scorn. Scales that had blinded her seemed suddenly to have fallen from her eyes.

How mad, how *little*, she had been to weigh her lover's imperfections in the balance against this splendid, wonderful thing called love!

And so she laid her soft cheek against the scarlet neck-tie, and sealed her fate upon Jim's lips.

"Now I'm going to confess," said Jim, when Jack came home and had taken in the situation. "Will you promise, darling, not to be hard on me?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Hetty, feeling vaguely alarmed.

"You'll have to forgive him, Hetty, because it's all my fault," said Jack, beginning to laugh.

"What's all your fault?"

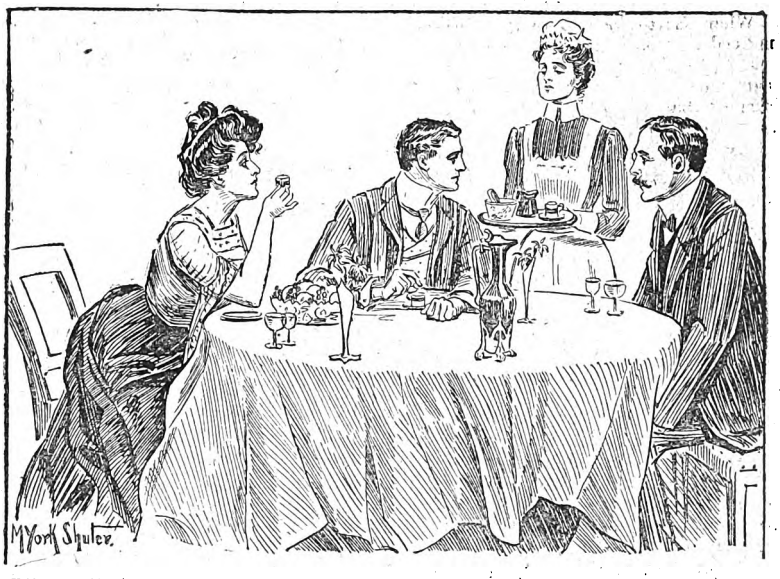
"The scarlet necktie, and—and all the rest of it," said Jack.

"Meaning my atrocious behaviour generally," said Jim.

"He'll never do it again, Hetty," said Jack.

Hetty gazed from one to the other in utter bewilderment.

"The fact is," continued Jack, "I wanted to make an experiment. Do you remember that declaration of yours, Hetty, that you couldn't fall in love with a man unless he had perfect taste and perfect manners?"



"When coffee arrived Hetty was not surprised to find that he ignored the sugar tongs.

"I remember," said Hetty, blushing self-consciously.

"Well, I wanted to put your theory to the test, and when I happened to run across Jim that day and invited him to dinner, it occurred to me that my opportunity had come. I had an idea that if ever you fell in love at all it would be with a man like Jim, and so I persuaded him to become a party to my little plot."

"I didn't know you then, you see, Hetty," put in Jim hastily, "or I would never have been fool enough to give my promise. Besides, I wasn't so vain as to suppose you could possibly care for me under any circumstances, so I didn't mind making myself out a bit worse than I am."

"Of course," continued Jack, "I, for my part, felt convinced your theory was moonshine, Hetty, or I would never have invited Jim here to risk the experiment. Once he'd seen you, though, I had jolly hard work to keep him from throwing that necktie into the fire, but as you know I succeeded in refraining him."

"I got to loathe the beastly thing," said Jim. "The more I got to know you, the more I got to loathe it, and everything it represented. But Jack was relentless. He bound me to my promise."

"I believe he'd have broken it, all the same, if I hadn't pointed out to him, that your love, Hetty, wouldn't be worth much if it didn't rise superior to his little eccentricities."

Hetty made no reply.

"You're not vexed?" asked Jim, dismayed by her persistent silence.

At this Hetty smiled a little whimsically.

"I suppose I ought to be angry with both of you for deceiving me so shamefully," she said at last.

"Well, of course," retorted Jack, quite unabashed, "it's annoying to give anybody the chance of saying 'I told you so.' But, under the circumstances, you can't blame me for saying it. You see, you fell in love with him in spite of the tie and the manners. I was right, after all."

"Yes," said Hetty, looking at Jim in a way that made his heart beat very fast. "Yes, you were right, but, all the same, I'm glad he doesn't care for scarlet neckties!"

Still, once every year, on the anniversary of their wedding-day, Jim wears a tie of the brightest scarlet hue.

Grete Hahn.

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THE CERTAINTY THAT FAILED.

A Tale of a Mean Trick at Doncaster Races.

Reginald Cashel, late of His Majesty's 10th Hussars, was in a quandary. The money market was tight, not a Jew nor a Gentile would advance another penny on his signature—they had learnt by experience that the Captain's notes were worth no more than the paper on which they were written.

Luck had been dead against him. He had laid a favourite at Goodwood on the confident assurance, of someone in the know, that the horse was not meant to stay the course.

"And he won by a head," exclaimed the Captain, furious at the recollection, "by a head!"

"My dear boy, what can you expect?" said his cousin. "Jockeys are only human after all. They win races they ought not to win, and lose those they should have left unlost."

This reflection did not comfort Cashel. To use his own words, he was absolutely broke. There was not the ghost of a good thing on his racing horizon, and his duns would wait no longer.

In despair he went to Lady Betty Fordyce, the cousin aforesaid, a young and adorable widow.

"I'm done for, Betty," he said dolefully. "I think I shall go to Africa and dig for diamonds."

"There are none left there, Reggie, they're all at the Hague. You'd better wait till after Doncaster, at any rate."

"What is there to wait for?"

"Lord Wingham and the Onyx Cup. He's running a couple in the race, you know. If you could find out which horse was meant and who's riding, you might pull through yet."

"It's a bright idea, but I don't see how I'm going to work it. I hardly know the man, not well enough at all events to ask him for a racing tip."

"Don't trouble about that, I'll ask him——"

"You, Betty." Cashel paused. "Poor Wingham!" he said slowly. "Your admirers, my dear cousin, are as many as their looks are various."

"There's nothing the matter with Lord Arthur, thank you."

"Manners and morals unimpeachable, eh? Don't trouble to expound his virtues, I know the type."

"I *am* prejudiced in favour of manners, I confess. I'm sorry you don't like Wingham."

"I don't like anyone you flirt with. I want all your gifts and graces to myself."

"Be serious, Reggie. Think of Doncaster and your debts."

"There's little chance of forgetting either. When will you work the oracle, Betty?"

"Now, in a few minutes. I expect Wingham almost directly."

Lord Arthur Wingham suffered from a burning desire to distinguish himself in Lady Betty's eyes, a desire which made him take strange and sudden resolutions.

"We were just talking about you and the races," said Lady Betty as he entered. "I was telling Reggie I felt certain you were going to bring off something good at Doncaster. He wants to learn all about it."

"My cousin is disposed to plunge, you know," interposed Cashel. "I suggested she'd better find out which of your two she was to back, before she puts her money on."

Lord Arthur coloured with pleasure.

"It's awfully good of you to care, Lady Betty," he stammered. "And I shall be delighted to let you both into my secret. Only"—he drew himself up with a delightful air of importance, "it *is* a secret. Not a word must get about."

"Of course not. You can trust me, and Reggie never gives anything away."

A remark more true than Lady Betty meant.

"I'm running 'Viking' and 'Hotspur,'" said Wingham eagerly. "We tried them both this morning. We tried them at the weights with Harris and Rogers up. 'Viking' won by a head, but it was a very near thing."

"'Viking' is a sluggard. He wants riding every yard," said Cashel. "Harris will have his work cut out."

Lord Wingham flushed a deeper red.

"Harris isn't riding 'Viking' for this race," he said slowly.

"Why, I thought you'd a retainer on him?"

"So I have—but I shan't let him ride."

"Who on earth are you going to put up?"

"Viking's" owner fluttered nervously. He clasped his chair tightly, and glanced appealingly at Betty.

"I'm going to ride myself," he said, "and—I shall ride to win."

Betty's eyebrows formed an acute angle. Cashel was heard to give a strangled sort of a cough.

In an agony of self-consciousness Wingham rose.

"I know you think I'm an idiot to dream of such a thing," he said. "But listen to me, and then you'll understand why I'm going to do it. You see, everyone regards me as a duffer. They're always chipping me at the mess, asking what's the good of horses to a man who can't handle 'em. I don't mind for myself, I know I'm not clever. But I don't like you to think that of me. I want you to be proud, to feel that I'm not quite unworthy of your—your friendship. That's why I'm going to ride, that's why I'm going to win. You'll be there, Lady Betty?"

"Of course," said Betty, pink in her cheeks, "and I'll wear your colours."

"I won't disgrace them, *really*. You don't think I've much chance, Cashel?" He turned to Reginald.

"Frankly, I don't. It's very plucky of you, and a pretty compliment to pay my cousin. But——"

The Captain shrugged his shoulders and smiled in a most superior style.

Lord Arthur winced, and Betty somehow felt annoyed. Reggie need not have crushed the poor boy so unmercifully, it was positively unfeeling.

"I hope I shall prove you in the wrong," said Wingham. "Don't lay against me too heavily, because I'm going to win," and with a laugh his lordship departed.

"What do you think of it, Reggie?" asked his cousin.

"Magnificent, my dear, for me. I shall make a scoop, and no mistake. 'Viking's' at five to two now and they think Harris is riding. Even then I wouldn't stand him, but *now* Betty, I'm going to make my fortune. I shall lay against Wingham down to my last farthing, and shall clear £20,000 if I make a penny."

"I would not be quite so sure. Wingham does not ride badly."

"Ride? My dear child, what are you thinking of? Even among amateurs he's nervous and flustered as a cat, he came an awful cropper at the regimental steeplechase. I leave you to imagine what he'll be like with Loates and Woods near him at the start and Cannon alongside at the finish—if he ever gets to the finish. It's absurd!"

"I can't see it's so ridiculous as you say. Anyhow"—Lady Betty spoke incisively—"I shall back 'Viking' and his rider."

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"I didn't know you had much money to throw away, Betty," he sneered. "Hadn't you better hedge?"

"That's not my way."

"Well, you'll get badly left. Good-bye."

From a financial point of view the morning had been a great success, and yet Cashel was conscious of a feeling of dissatisfaction. Lady Betty had shown more interest in Lord Wingham than he cared about. She usually treated men—always excepting Reggie—with a delightful indifference. Cashel was fond of his cousin, in a lazy sort of way, and had a notion that some day he would marry her and settle down. It annoyed him to think Betty might not agree.

For the next few days he was busy laying heavily but cautiously against "Viking." He felt convinced that Wingham's defeat was a dead certainty, and he made his book accordingly.

He grew less confident as the race drew near, however. Wingham was looking very fit, and Betty's continual assertions that he had a chance took an effect even on Cashel's scepticism.

Suppose he were wrong and "Viking" won after all? It was a possibility to shudder at. "Viking's" defeat was the last, the only hope of paying his debts. What if he had miscalculated? Suppose by some hideous mischance Wingham brought his horse first past the winning post. It would mean ruin. He would have to go under, to drop out of the old set, and pass a miserable existence hiding from his creditors. The night before the race he was a prey to terrible misgivings.

Pacing up and down his room, he recalled instances of men—duffers as a rule—who under the spur of excitement had done great things. Wingham might be such an one. And if it were so, if the youth plucked up sufficient nerve to ride "Viking" as he should be ridden—Cashel grew pale and caught his lip between his teeth. It was a risk, an awful risk.

If he were only sure that Wingham would fail, how different life would look! With twenty thousand he could start afresh. He'd economise, and, yes, would marry Betty. If only he were sure, if only. He stopped short and glanced half fearfully round the room. Why not make sure? The thing was easily done. On the course to-morrow, just before the race, he had only to offer Wingham a nip from his flask, whisky and water, with a dash of something else. No one would ever know. It would do no harm, a blow to Betty's vanity, a fall to his Lordship's pride. Trifles when weighed against a man's ruin.

And yet he did not easily persuade himself. His life had not been white, but it had held no spot so black as the thing he contemplated doing. It was a mean thing, a treacherous thing—but he must do it. Long he sat pondering, and when at last he rose his face was set.

Next morning he was up early. All night long he had ridden, in fancy, a mad race, straining to gain a point that as he neared, fell farther and farther away from him. He looked pale and haggard and felt so wretchedly ill that he had recourse to a strong pick-me-up. He could not do what must be done without. From his dressing-case he took a phial, measured a portion of the contents—it was powerful and had to be used with care—and drank the dose.

Gradually he felt better, and sitting down waited till his heart beat steadily and his hand ceased to tremble. Then he took up his pocket flask, ready filled—all but—with whisky and water. He was dressed and it was time to start. There was but one thing left to do. Furtively he glanced towards the table, towards a little bottle containing an opiate he had purchased in readiness the night before. He still fingered his flask and hesitated long.

The chiming of the clock roused him, he must hurry, he would be late. With a quick movement he snatched up the bottle and emptied the contents into the flask.

No chance for Lord Wingham now, Reginald Cashel had made sure at last!

* * * * *

The bell had just been rung to clear the course for the Onyx Cup at Doncaster. A hush fell over the ring, but a moment later a shout, half of surprise, half of mirth, rent the air, for opposite "Viking" stood, as rider, the significant title "owner."

Wingham, deathly pale, and generally speaking, all to pieces, shuddered at the cries of ten to one, a hundred to eight, fifteen to one "Viking," that surged round him.

Betty flashed a look from him to Cashel.

"Pull yourself together, Arthur," she said quickly. "Reggie, say something, do something, he's ready to faint."

Cashel glanced at his Lordship with a critical eye. He looked bad enough certainly, and the odds were against his getting any better. Still—it was safer to run no risks, at the last moment he might recover his nerve.

"Cheer up, Wingham," he said lightly. "Here, take my flask and drink success to Lady Betty's colours."

His Lordship took the flask, and drank off the whisky.

"It's done me good, old chap," he said, "thanks awfully," and with a creditable attempt to smile, he went to get weighed in. Cashel and Lady Betty adjourned to the top of the stand.

"Will he ever get through?" asked Lady Betty anxiously.

"I think not. In my opinion he'll collapse at the first post. It will be bad for you, Betty, eh?"

"Horrible. I've dropped a lot of money, Reggie. Besides"—she paused. "I feel so sorry for him. It's a plucky thing to do. He can't help being nervous."

Reggie agreed, and murmured a few words of consolation if not hope. He felt so lighthearted, so confident that he was ready to feel sorry for Betty or Wingham or anybody else. Who would not feel confident with twenty thousand pounds almost in one's grasp?

"Here they are," cried Betty, as the horses came trooping up ready to form in line for the start. "Oh, Reggie, look at Arthur. *Look!*"

Cashel turned quickly to face the biggest surprise in his life.

Flushed certainly and laughing, and gesticulating rather wildly, but sitting his horse well, and waving his whip triumphantly to Betty came Wingham, every trace of nervousness gone, and looking as if the race were in his pocket.

What could it mean; had he by chance made a mistake? Cashel felt wildly in his racing coat. No, it was all right, the flask was just on empty, Wingham had drunk it nearly all.

It was too soon, perhaps, for the drug to take effect. Another minute and Wingham would grow dazed, he would falter, sway——

"They're off!" cried Betty in a fever of excitement.

Cashel bent forward with eager, straining eyes. First he saw "Viking" jump away in front, then he realised that his Lordship was riding as if for dear life, making every post a winning post. His heart almost ceased to beat, the course grew blurred before him. Then he had a momentary relief as he caught the murmurs of the ring. "Wingham must be mad, it isn't a five furlong scurry, he'll ride his horse to a standstill before he's half way down the course."

But then, as they came into the straight, and he caught sight of Wingham fifty yards ahead of his field, hope died within him; and when, whipping and spurring and shouting Wingham still kept his lead while "Viking"—no sluggard now, but going great guns—with his sides covered with foam, answered his rider's every call, Reginald Cashel realised his great coup had failed. He had soiled his honour to no purpose, degraded himself to no end. Wingham had won the race!

"It was your toast that did it, old chap," his Lordship exclaimed as he returned in triumph to the stand.

Cashel turned faint with a horrible suspicion. He hurried from the course and took the first train back to town.

* * * * *

It was even as Wingham said, Cashel had won him the race. In the flurry of the morning the Captain had snatched up the wrong bottle, emptying the pick-me-up instead of the narcotic into the flask, and the powerful stimulant had so wildly exhilarated his Lordship's nerves that he had ridden "Viking" for all he was worth.

In the solitude of his room, the Captain's heart grew heavy within him, for he had planned to make his fortune, had thought to marry Betty. And by his own act he had lost both.

John K.

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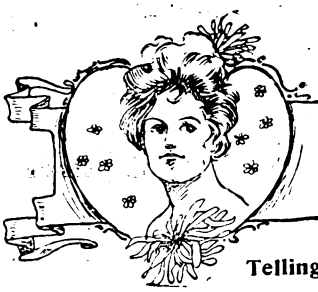

AN EXTRAORDINARY COINCIDENCE.

Telling of a Slighted Invitation and Two Engagements.

IT was only yesterday since he had seen her, and he was fully anticipating seeing her to-morrow, when a double knock of the peremptory postman order sounded, and the servant entered with an orange coloured envelope in her hand.

"A telegram for you, sir; the boy is waiting."

Dick Treherne tore open the message, and having hastily read it, tossed it, a crumpled ball, into the grate.

"No answer," he said curtly. For it ran thus, "Unavoidably prevented to-morrow. Will explain later.—"MABEL BRANCEPETH."

Treherne had half expected something of this sort. Yesterday, when he had talked softly to her of the long afternoon he hoped to spend in her company, she had said somewhat dubiously,

"After all, Dick, I don't know whether I ought to have promised to go to the circus with you. You see Mr. Goldman sent round this morning to say he had got a box at the Hippodrome and he would take us up to London, and would we all come. It would be much nicer than a country show, wouldn't it? Much safer, I mean. Of course I should like to go with you awfully, but you know what a travelling circus is and how nervous I am in a crowd."

Dick had felt distressed at her speech then, for he had taken the best seats he could afford, and even stretched a point at that, but he was madly in love with her, and tried to laugh away her fears, promising to take splendid care of her, and genuinely believing she meant them seriously. But this message of hers at the last moment put a different complexion on affairs.

The fact of the matter was that Mabel had got a better invitation, and was behaving as she had once or twice behaved before under somewhat similar circumstances.

Dick had looked forward to the morrow, meaning to plead his cause then, and hoping that Mabel would consent to be the queen of his small kingdom; but he had at last awakened from this cherished dream, and now finally realised that Mabel would choose to marry for money rather than for love, that the devotion he offered would count little with her when compared with old Mr. Goldman's banking account.

Dick began to feel how vain his hopes had been, and with his eyes opened saw now the shallowness and frivolity of the character which could throw him over so heartlessly. The awakening was less painful than he had imagined it would be.

"That little cousin of hers, Julie Perrington, is worth a dozen of her, I'll be bound," he commented to himself. "Those blue eyes of hers look true and candid enough. Strange that even while I admired Mabel so much I always liked Julie best.

"I wish I had asked her to go with me. She would not have gone back on her word, I'm quite sure, even if she had had a better offer. But there,! What a fool I am! No doubt she has a lover of her own. 'Fair, kind, and true,' as Shakespeare has it, does not go begging."

Mabel's telegram had upset and annoyed Treherne, and when he went to bed that night it was half with the intention of giving up the whole show. There was not much fun in going to a thing of that kind by oneself, he thought. But in the morning he awoke in a different frame of mind altogether.

He had dreamt all night long, and, strangely enough, Mabel had not been the subject of his sleeping thoughts. With the vividness of reality his fancy had seen Julie—fair, slight Julie, with the trusting eyes, at the mercy of a motley crowd. Hustled here and bustled there, surrounded by no lover's protecting arm, she reached her hands to Treherne, and wistfully implored his aid.

The ardour with which he sprang to the assistance of Beauty in distress effectually aroused him from his slumbers. He sprang out of bed with his mind made up. His dream had made such an impression on him that, sober-minded individual that he was, he found himself leaving the house actually possessed by the romantic notion that before the day was out he was to play the part of knight-errant to Julie Perrington. He was quite determined now to make use of his seat at the circus, even if a vacant one yawned at his side.

He started in good time, and as soon as he was fairly out upon the country road found himself in the midst of a good-humoured, hastening crowd.

Presently, when he entered the field where the circus had been set up, he was brought to a standstill. His broad shoulders stood him in good stead, and in a little while he was able to move on; but people seemed to be pressing him on every side, and a slender form was wedged up against him.

It was Julie Perrington! She recognised Treherne at once, and his hand moved to his hat.

"Miss Perrington," he cried in delight, "let me take care of you."

She seemed to be on the verge of tears.

"Oh, Mr. Treherne," she cried, "I am quite alone! I had no idea it would be like this!"

"But how is this?" he cried, in astonishment. "Surely Mr. Goldman included you in his party?"

"He didn't mention me specially," she said, flushing; "but aunt thought I was meant to be included, only Mabel said I had nothing smart enough to wear—except for a country show." Julie grew scarlet at the remembrance of the sneer, and added, "and that gave me the idea of coming in this way, for I have never seen a circus since I was a tiny child, and I did so want to."

Treherne's resentment was kindled against Mabel doubly for her unkindness towards her cousin and her selfishness.

"Miss Perrington," he said, "if you will allow me to constitute myself your escort, I think I can conduct you not only to a place of safety, but to a coign of vantage where we shall have a very good view."

Julie was all smiles now.

"Oh, how delightful!" she cried. "But, oh, how can I come! It will be robbing someone of their place, won't it?"

"I offered the seat to your cousin at first," acknowledged Treherne, "but she has thrown me over for the Goldman party."

"Perhaps she made some mistake about the day," said Julie. And Treherne thought what a generous little soul it was.

"There was no mistake," he answered smiling.

"Well, Miss Perrington, is my rejected seat worth your acceptance?"

She smiled too.

"I'm afraid I'm not proud at all," she confessed. "I am very sorry for your disappointment, for I know you must be disappointed, but I shall be so pleased to accept that seat, and I think you are very kind to offer me your escort."

They reached their places finally, and had a long wait before the performance began. But what of that? It did not seem long to Treherne, and he hoped not to Julie. He was finding out new beauties in her.

She was a fascinating little girl, and he had never had an opportunity like this before of realising her charm, nor of seeing how truly pretty she was.

Mabel was a dashing brunette, showy alike in dress and

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appearance, and had completely overshadowed her tender, refined little cousin, who occupied a dependent position in the Brancepeth household, and Treherne was convinced in his own mind she was worth her weight in gold to the establishment.

When a team of piebald ponies came into the arena and showed off their graceful accomplishments, Julie's eyes sparkled, and her cheeks flushed with childish enjoyment. She leant forward in her excitement, displaying the graceful contour of her figure.

Treherne began to contrast her looks as favourably as her manners with those of Mabel, altogether he quite lost his heart to her. He had never spent any length of time in her society before, and her sweet, retiring ways had only made a vague impression on him during the few occasions he had seen her in company with Mabel, when the latter had always taken good care to monopolise the conversation.

No doubt many a heart is caught in the rebound, but maybe none the less surely held for that.

When the circus was all over, Dick heaved a sigh of regret, echoed by Julie. There still remained the task of getting home, and Dick was determined to escort Julie to her very door.

"Do you know," she said, as they walked along slowly side by side, "I never recognised you in the crowd until you turned round, and all the time I was trying hard to get to you because I thought, "Here is a good broad pair of shoulders, if I get behind them I shall be safe."

Treherne laughed.

"You are making me compliments," he said.

"Oh," said Julie simply. "I should feel safe with you anywhere."

"I steered you safely through the crowd," said Treherne with gravity, "but if you want to prove your words you will trust me to steer you through life."

"Oh, Mr. Treherne, I don't understand!" said Julie.

"Give me hope," said Treherne, "that I may teach you to understand. I don't expect you to love me all at once, though a single day spent with you has been sufficient to give my heart into your keeping. Believe me," he added earnestly, "if I took the liberty of offering you a rejected escort I am not pleading with you to accept a rejected lover, but a very earnest one on his own account."

Her eyes met his bravely. "I have always loved you," she said, simply, "but I never hoped for such happiness."

Treherne parted with her at the house. He would not come in as she had begged him not to announce their engagement till the morrow.

The others had not yet returned, so she ran up to her own room to indulge in a delightful reverie.

Presently there came a knock at the door, and, without waiting for an answer, Mabel entered.

"I'm tired out," she said abruptly. "Julie, I wish you'd come and help me to bed."

Julie rose, too happy to be tired even after her long day.

"Yes, dear," she said gently, "you look worn out."

Mabel threw herself into a chair and raised her arms above her head. "At any rate," she said, "Mr. Goldman has proposed to me, and, needless to add, I have accepted him. I wish he were not quite so old, though, but I shall be the wife of a millionaire, and that's something. And now, let's hear about you, Julie. How did you get on? Did you see well?"

"I saw everything splendidly," said Julie. "I met Mr. Treherne, and he took care of me the whole time."

Mabel stared. "Oh," she said, "I suppose you know he asked me, but I don't care to go in that style, and I wired at the last I couldn't come. He was as cross as a bear with a sore head, I expect. You must have had a lively time!"

"He was not cross at all—to me," said Julie.

"I suppose he's fallen in love with you," sneered Mabel.

"At any rate, he asked me to marry him," said Julie, "and I have promised to be his wife."

Mabel began to laugh, but her voice sounded harsh and constrained as she affected to say carelessly, "So we are both engaged on the same day! What an extraordinary coincidence!"

Ellice Beere.

Your Editor Chats.

I have much pleasure in announcing that next week I will publish the complete list of prize winners in the recent "Buried Stations" Competition. I am very sorry that competitors have had to possess their souls in patience for so long, but the task of checking has been an unexpectedly difficult one.

This paragraph is written to remind you that next week our eleventh Tartan Cover number will appear. The cover shows the design of the cloth of the Clan Macquarrie. Although this Scottish family is not a very large one, their ancestors were gallant men, and I am sure that everyone will agree that their tartan is one of the prettiest of all. I can also promise you that next week's number will be brimful of fine reading matter, quite up to the standard of, if not surpassing, the quality of any issue that has yet appeared, which, as you know, is saying a great deal.

My girl friends, have you a brother? My lady readers, have you a son? Have any of you got a male relation of any age or temperament? Do you want to please him? There is one absolutely infallible way to do so, and that is—buy him a copy of *The Boys' Leader*. This will make him your grateful servant for ever and ever, for it is the finest, purest, in all ways *the* best journal for healthy British lads. There is not a word in it that could be deemed "vulgar" by the most scrupulous person, and it has a special mission to perform. That is, it intends to put down that vile product of modern day sensation-mongers—the penny dreadful, that makes crime a virtue, sin a necessity. *The Boys' Leader* is *the paper a boy can take home.*

You will find on page 340 another "Love Problem." It is entitled, "Should a Husband Discuss His Business Affairs with His Wife?" There are, of course, two sides to this question, and the main clue to the answer is, "Does the wife wish to hear about them?" However, in certain cases, and probably in most cases, it *is* advisable for a husband to take his loving wife into his confidence, although it is by no means unlikely that sometimes a well-meaning man would refrain from burdening his wife with the care of financial matters, even when she might be of the utmost use to him. I will leave you to read the entertaining story, and to find out for yourself the moral it contains. This is the ninth article of the series, each of which, as I understand from the many congratulatory messages I have received, have been devoured with great eagerness.

Once more, and for almost the last time this season, I must appeal to you to help us in the great work we have taken in hand to alleviate as much as possible the misery of the poor children of London and of the big provincial cities. Great numbers of hapless boys and girls, poverty-stricken through no fault of their own, brought up amongst squalid surroundings wherein the sun seldom penetrates, have been made joyful for one day through the charity of our readers. Ninepence gives a beautiful day's holiday to one child. Please send that sum, or double or treble or quadruple that sum to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Each donation will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Your Editor.

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TWO LOVERS.

A Sad Story of An Unfortunate Love.

ETHEL HARPER looked disdainfully at the card which was laid upon the table beside her. She hesitated a long time before she spoke; then, with an impatient, "Tell him I will be down in a few minutes," caught up the bit of pasteboard, and tearing it into fragments, tossed it into the open fire.

In the drawing-room below a man paced the floor more like a wild beast in a cage than a caller waiting in a magnificent apartment for the lady of the house.

He was very pale; his hands worked nervously. He drew his breath hard, like a man in pain.

Ethel Harper came in and found him so, looking at him for a moment before he saw her, with a frown on her face which was not good to see. It destroyed the harmony of the perfect features.

It was a siren face still, but it wore its fatal, not its fascinating expression.

Its natural look came back as her guest turned towards her. She extended her hand with a smile that transformed her to an angel.

"Good evening," she said, gently. "I had half a mind to excuse myself to-night, for I——"

"Is it true, then?"

"True?"

"That you are going to the regimental ball this evening?"

"Yes."

"And with Colonel Carstairs?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? And you ask me that?"

He braced himself against the mantel as he confronted her. His black eyes, brilliant with a strange light, roved restlessly over the graceful figure in its exquisite costume. He brushed his hand across them, as if the sight bewildered him.

"And I—I—it is so, then? I wouldn't believe it when they told me. I am set aside for this man; I am——"

"They told you?" she repeated, drawing back from him. "I do not understand."

"Oh, you understand well enough," he retorted with quick bitterness; "it's the talk of the club and everywhere else. I suppose Colonel Carstairs hears it to. 'Dick Hawthorne has been thrown over since he lost his fortune, and the colonel is in favour now.' That's what they say, if you do not understand. Pleasant, isn't it?" he asked, as she frowned again. "I liked it. Oh, I assure you I was highly delighted! Why shouldn't I be?"

"Dick," she said, softly, coming closer to him, and laying her hand on his arm, "it is gossip, nothing else. Colonel Carstairs is my father's friend, and——"

"Oh, no doubt!" the young man sneered in reply. "Since when, I wonder? Since your father employed him as his lawyer? Harper and Company have experienced reverses, if mere gossip can be believed. It would be an awful pity, Ethel, if your father should lose his money as I've lost mine!"

She winced at the words. Then others, besides herself, knew of her father's desperate situation!

"I didn't come here to talk of such matters," he went on. "I've been working hard to get things straight again—for you. Ethel, if you will give me what you more than half-promised long ago—yourself, Ethel, when I have——"

He stopped suddenly in his impetuous words as she put out her hand.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, almost roughly.

"I wish, Dick, I could make you understand me," she said.

"I do understand you," he replied eagerly. "I am not unreasonable—you know I am not, Ethel. I'm working like a man, trusting you, believing you will—— But to see you with other men, to hear you talked of, to feel that you are drifting away from me—I can't understand it, I tell you! I'm half mad with it all. I won't ask you for any promise now, Ethel, only to wear this ring for my sake. That is so little to ask of you, but it will mean so much to me!"

He had seized her hand. She drew it away haughtily.

"You must expect nothing from me. I never gave you reason, and now——"

"Never—never what?" he stammered. "Reason! What in Heaven's name was it then?"

"It isn't worth while to talk about it now," she resumed. "I told you I was engaged for the evening. I will see you some other time—to-morrow, if you care to come."

She tried to look him in the face as she spoke. It was impossible, and, turning towards the mirror, she busied herself with readjusting the locks of golden hair clinging about the smooth, low brow. But her face blanched as she met his eyes in the glass. "Half mad," he had said. He looked like a maniac to her terrified sight.

With one swift movement he caught her by the throat, crushing the delicate lace and rosebuds in an iron hand. She tried to scream. She threw up her arms in an agony.

"If I could kill you!" he muttered, "I'd be sure of you!"

Another instant and he released his hold. He wrung his hands together. "My God! That you could hurt a woman, Dick Hawthorne!" he exclaimed wildly to himself, and without another look at her he rushed from the room, the front door shutting heavily behind him.

Ethel Harper rallied quickly. She was thankful she had not alarmed the house. "If this is only the end of it," she thought as she walked upstairs. She locked her door as she entered her room. It was necessary to repair damages before she rang for her maid to finish her toilet.

She could not explain the torn lace and the ruined rosebuds, nor the marks on the delicate flesh under them. Yet, knowing how far she was responsible for the violence of the man whom she had driven to desperation, she felt grateful that she had made so easy an escape.

Colonel Carstairs called for her an hour later. He was at the head of the regiment whose ball that night was the most brilliant of the season. No one was so much admired and envied as the lovely Miss Harper, already looked upon as the winner of the finest matrimonial prize in Society—the elegant, cultured, wealthy Colonel Carstairs.

It was almost morning before the carriage returned to the Harper's mansion. As the Colonel stepped from it he was rudely jostled by an intoxicated man standing on the pavement.

"Look out there, fellow!" he said, imperiously, catching him by the shoulder.

Miss Harper gave a quick cry as she caught sight of his face, and Colonel Carstairs glanced at him a second time.

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"Upon my word, it's Hawthorne!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible?"

But the young man, muttering a few unintelligible words, reeled on and out of sight.

Miss Harper trembled violently as the Colonel assisted her up the steps.

"I am sorry you were so frightened," he said tenderly, bending over the sofa on which she had thrown herself. "I had no idea Hawthorne drank—he's always been such a steady fellow."

She gave a little hysterical laugh as she motioned him to a seat beside her.

"I am nervous to-night, you see. I've danced too much. I've been so worn out lately with anxiety about father, and I—I——"

Her voice broke up into short, quick sobs. She buried her face in her hands as she felt her companion's arm around her, and her head was drawn down upon his breast.

"It will be all right," he said, his deep voice tremulous with a strong man's tenderness. "It shall be all right for you, anyway, Ethel, my darling, if you will let me care for you—as my wife, Ethel."

He went away soon after, with her whispered promise and her shy kisses to transform for him the world upon which the new day was breaking.

As she rose from the sofa she touched something with her foot. It was a plain gold ring, with the one word "Fidelis," engraved upon it.

She had seen it before. It was the wedding ring of Richard Hawthorne's dead mother. She shuddered as she looked over her shoulder at her reflection in the mirror.

The roses were crushed again, but from the loving embrace of the man who had just left her, not the murderous grasp of the one whom she had sent from her to his own destruction.

She grew faint with a vague, horrible fear as she thought of him.

Three days later Colonel Carstairs determined upon a trip to South Africa, in order to give personal supervision to Mr. Harper's mining interests. The financial situation of the great house of Harper and Company was rapidly growing hopeless.

"I am the only one who has held you and worshipped you—so and so?" he had said to Ethel, with the instinctive jealousy of a lover, crushing her against his broad breast, and kissing her on lips and eyes and shining hair.

"The only one. And if you were not?" she whispered, with a slight laugh.

His arm tightened about her.

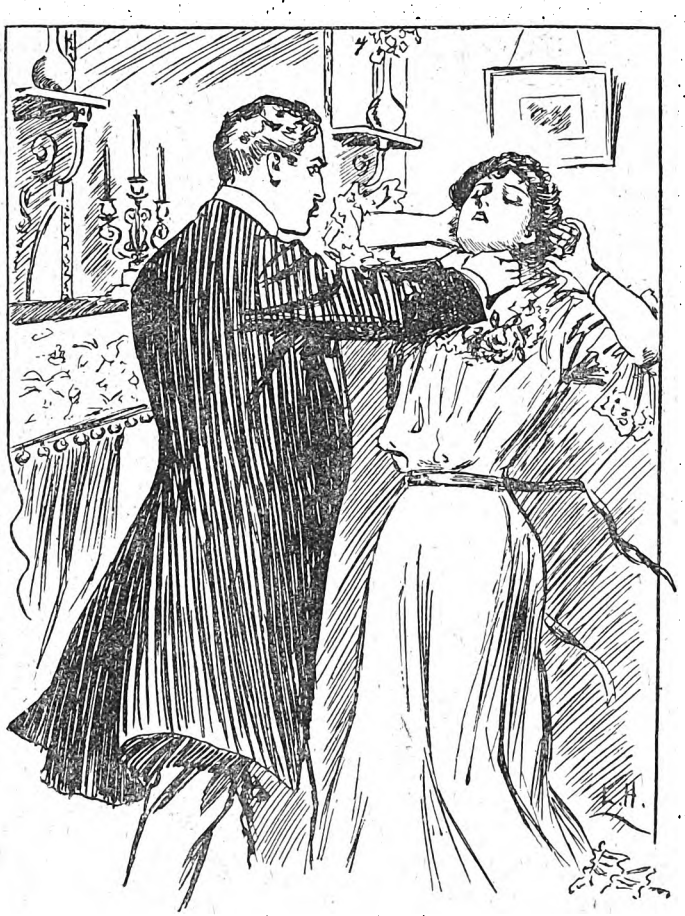
"If I were not, that would be hard to bear, but not so hard as falsehood," he answered, looking closer into the divine eyes.

"I swear it," she said, solemnly. "Now you will never doubt me?"

"Never, never! I never have. I should as soon think of doubting my love for you!"

And so he left her, trusting her.

The house seemed stifling after he had gone. She walked up and down her room trying to reconcile herself to the separation. She had had many "affairs" in the last five years. She had cared a great deal for a good many, or thought she did, which satisfied them quite as well, until—well, that frightful experience with Richard Hawthorne was only a much intensified form of similar ones.



He caught her by the throat. She threw up her arms in agony.

Her affection for Colonel Carstairs was something of which she had never believed the human heart capable.

"Was it in this way they cared for me?" she thought, with the strangest pang that had ever moved her. "Was it so that Dick cared?"

Her eyes filled with slow, miserable tears, the expression of a cowardly fear that she might some time suffer as she had made others. Her sleep that night was broken by a sudden start and shriek, as she roused from a dream in which a deadly hand was again clutching at her throat, but it was her lover's this time, and beside him stood more than one whose names even she had forgotten.

* * * *

The midnight express was "making time," a grim satire on the eternity into which men are sometimes plunged as the result of such an undertaking. Colonel Carstairs was the only wide-awake passenger on board. His body was flying through space, but his spirit was at rest with the only woman he had ever loved with his great, strong heart—his ideal of all loveliness and purity.

There was a long, shrill whistle, a quiver through the train, a horrible, deafening crash, and Colonel Carstairs was one of the many flung headlong among the *débris* of a railway wreck.

Fortunately, though terribly shaken, he was unhurt, and worked hard for the relief of those around him. He dragged from under the shattered timbers a young man whose face was covered with blood, surely dead, he thought, as he looked at him. Some of the clothing was torn from the upper part of the body. He felt for the man's heart, and his hand struck against a locket which the force of a blow had driven a little way into the flesh.

There was a faint moan from the wounded man's lips as he removed it, and taking him in his arms, he carried him to one of the beds improvised from the scattered cushions of the train.

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It was two hours before other cars came, bringing help for the victims. Colonel Carstairs worked through the time bravely.

"I will take care of you," he said, pausing at last by the side of the man whom he had first helped. Even then he did not recognise him.

"I know you," the man replied weakly, "you are the man—Ethel Harper is going to marry!"

"Richard Hawthorne!" the Colonel exclaimed in astonishment. Lifting him in his arms again, he carried him into the train, and, when they reached the city, to a hotel, where he secured for him the best attention possible.'

"I must push on further," he said in leaving him. "I shall be back in two weeks at least, and see how they have taken care of you."

He was twenty miles away before he thought of the locket. He drew it out tenderly. The hinge was broken and the lid fell off. The exquisite, smiling face of Ethel Harper confronted him, but it was stained with blood.

He uttered a quick exclamation as he turned it over and over. He tormented himself with conjectures. Heavens! What did it mean?"

At the time specified he returned to the city and the hotel.

"You see I'm all right again," were the first words Hawthorne said to him. "I'm going away to-morrow. Where's Ethel?"

"Ethel?"

Colonel Carstairs looked more closely at him, understanding for the first time what had so puzzled him—the strange look in the splendid black eyes. In such a temperament there is but a step from reason to insanity, and Richard Hawthorne had taken it before he left London.

"Hawthorne," the Colonel said, slowly, sitting down beside him, "you must tell me something. This locket——"

Its owner snatched it eagerly from his hand.

"It's Ethel, you know," he said, his voice trembling with delight at its recovery; "she gave it to me on my birthday." His mood changed suddenly. "She kissed me, too, when she gave it to me—my God! she kissed me! It is not so very long ago—not six months—and now she says it's not worth while to talk about it. She never loved me, she says, though she swore she did six months ago. I thought I had lost it," and with a quiet smile returning to his lips he handled the locket fondly.

The Colonel, rising, crossed the room once or twice, then reseated himself.

"Do you remember the night we met you on——"

"Intoxicated?" Hawthorne interrupted with a short laugh. "Oh, yes, I remember perfectly, though I don't remember much that's happened since. I had never touched a drop before—I'd kept my promise to my mother, indeed I had—but I was wild that night; she made me so. I went to see her before you did. She was dressed for the ball—all in white, like a ghost, you know—and I asked her—I"—he put his hand to his head confusedly—"I asked her to wear my mother's ring. I didn't make her promise anything, but I was afraid of you and others.

"I tried to kill her that night. I don't know just what I did; it was something horrible. It set me on fire here"—and he struck his head savagely—"and I have not been right since. I don't know what is the matter with me. I thought I would go to the Cape."

He put his hands over his eyes with a pathetic sort of helplessness.

Colonel Carstairs turned from him with a low groan.

"There's blood here," Hawthorne exclaimed, catching up the locket again. "That is strange. I didn't kill her—I know I didn't. Oh, I see now," he added, growing quiet again. "It was broken in the accident. You are her father's lawyer. Is he to be a poor man after all?"

"Yes; I can save nothing for him."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"As bad as that."

"Is Ethel going to marry you? She threw me off when I lost my money."

"I shall never marry any woman," his companion answered in a slow, steady tone.

"And Ethel will be alone and poor. Perhaps she will listen to me then. You may keep the locket," he added, pushing it across the table towards him. "I know how her face looks, and I shall see it again."

The Colonel picked up the trinket, then threw it down again.

He had not heard the last sentence, rousing himself from the reverie into which he had fallen to say, "I will see you to-morrow, Hawthorne," and, once in the street, he walked for hours, battling with a pain harder to conquer than any foe he had ever faced.

He went next day to the hotel as he had promised, but Hawthorne's room was vacant. The broken locket in a little box was left in care of the clerk with a note. "I can't wait to see you again. Perhaps Ethel will need me before I can get there."

There was no name, nor need of one.

* * * * * * *

Ethel Harper was growing pale with long anxiety. "If he would only write or come," was her unceasing thought as the slow days dragged on.

The Colonel had been gone two months. His daily notes had ceased suddenly. There had been an awful accident in South Africa, but the papers made no mention of his name. What could it mean? How could she live longer in such intolerable suspense?

"It is frightful to love like this!" she thought fiercely, as she realised how strong a hold he held upon her life, as she thought with a cold shudder of the possibilities of his death, or his discovery that she was less true than he believed her. And her father was breaking down under the long struggle he had been making.

Failure met him at every turn. He waited with impatience only a little less than his daughter for tidings from Colonel's Carstairs.

It had been a dark and stormy day. Ethel Harper stood at the window watching the lamps, early lit, as they flared in the gusts of wind which howled through the street.

Her heart ached with the sharpest pain she had ever known. She had hoped and prayed for a letter by the last delivery, but the postman had gone by on the other side. She thought, with a sick heart, of the long hours before he would make his rounds again. She pressed her burning cheeks against the glass. Her eyes were hot. They hurt her, but no tears came.

She caught her breath as a quick footfall came along the pavement and up the steps. There was a ring at the bell. She was downstairs herself by the time the servant opened the front door, but she started back into the room with a low cry of disappointment as Richard Hawthorne stepped into the hall—Richard Hawthorne, surely, or, at least, the wreck of him—a pale, frenzied-looking man, with blazing eyes and hollow cheeks, scarlet lips that moved but made no sound, clothes soiled and dusty with travel.

"I've come, Ethel," he said, tremulously, after a long, wild look at her. "I've seen Colonel Carstairs somewhere, I don't know just where"—he put his hand to his head again—"and he has told me that your father would be poor, that he couldn't save anything for him, and——"

"Dick Hawthorne," his terrified listener interrupted, "I believe you are insane. How dare you talk to Colonel Carstairs? How dare you come to me?"

"Insane!" the man laughed, slyly; "oh, no! There are plenty of crazy people about. I see them all the time; but I'm all right. Insane? No, indeed! I was afraid I should be once, when you turned from me, Ethel, but you needn't be afraid of me now."

She shrank from him, leaning against the wall, her hand pressed close against her heart.

"To think it was all a mistake," he went on—"that you are not going to marry him after all! He told me so. He——"

"Oh, Dick!" She fell on her knees before him, her hands

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"Take him away," she said to the servant. "Quick, take him away."

clenched. "For Heaven's sake, Dick! He never said that! Tell me that he never said it!"

He raised her gently, the fire dying out of his eyes as he drew her to him; but she broke from him fiercely.

"What does it all mean?" she gasped. "What are you talking about? Why do you come here to torment me, Dick Hawthorne? I told you I was done with you long ago. I told you——"

She shrank and quivered under the look with which he glared upon her.

"But it is different now," he said, with the same fixed stare. "Your father has lost his money. Don't you know? I will take care of you, Ethel. I came back here to take care of you."

"The folly of bandying words with this madman!" she thought, as she struggled to compose herself. "Excuse me, Dick, please, for one moment," she said to him, with the old fascination.

Slipping into the hall she called one of the servants.

"You must get this man out of the house," she whispered quickly—"by force, if need be. He is raving mad! Wait! There is the bell again!"

She watched eagerly as the door opened and Colonel Carstairs, entering the house, passed into the drawing-room.

"Hawthorne!" she heard him say. "I was afraid I should find you here."

She felt sick and faint as she followed him into the room.

"At last—at last!" she cried, springing into his arms, with a great burst of tears. "I have been frightened to death," she sobbed, convulsively; and, raising her face, she pointed to Richard Hawthorne. "Take him away!" she said to the servant—"quick! take him away!"

The man stepped towards him.

Colonel Carstairs disengaged the clinging hands and stood aloof from her like a figure cut in stone.

"Do not lay your finger on him!" he commanded.

"It is Miss Harper's order," the servant replied, though with perfect respect.

The Colonel bowed slightly.

"Miss Harper will allow me to countermand her order—if I can give a better one for mine."

The servant withdrew instantly.

"Hawthorne, my poor, poor boy!"

The tone was one of infinite compassion as the Colonel, approaching him, laid his hand upon the younger man's arm, and with the other brushed away the disordered hair which had fallen over his eyes.

He looked up with a vacant expression. Evidently he had failed to comprehend the meaning of what had just taken place.

"Ethel," the Colonel resumed, turning towards her, "we were together in that awful railway accident. Hawthorne was hurt. I helped him, and I found upon his breast—this! He had worn it night and day since you gave it to him, Ethel."

He laid the locket down before her, broken, blood-stained, and her own face smiled up at her from its ruin.

"I did not know he was coming, too," Hawthorne explained eagerly. "I left it for him. I knew he was fond of you. I was sorry for him, and I gave him that!"

She turned despairingly to the Colonel, her arms outstretched, tears raining over her face.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she cried, in agony. "Not one word?"

"Nothing."

"You believe this man?"

"Believe him, Ethel!"

"It is a lie!" she shrieked, striking her hands together—"it is an infamous, dastardly lie! How dare you face me with your falsehood?" she demanded, turning again towards Hawthorne; "to come here——"

He caught her hands in both his.

"It is true, my darling—oh, you know it is all true; everything is true, only you have forgotten! Never mind, Ethel; it will be all right by-and-bye! You are coming with me!"

She wrenched her hands away and stepped back from him.

"With you?" she repeated, with infinite contempt—"with you?"

He drew his breath hard. His eyes blazed again. He shook off the hand which the Colonel placed upon his shoulder.

"Not go with me, Ethel?" he muttered through his teeth—"not go with me? Then I'll go alone to perdition."

He drew a pistol from his pocket. There was a flash, a report, and the body of the young man rolled lifeless at the feet of the woman who had destroyed him.

"Mercy! Mercy!" she shrieked wildly, wringing her hands together. "Oh, my love! and you will not help me? You will not believe me? You will not——"

"Hush!" the Colonel said, solemnly, pointing to the prostrate figure, as she fell fainting at his feet. "Your own life has answered you, Ethel Harper! It is too late!"

S. S. Thorpe.

. . THE . .

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LOVE PROBLEM No. 9.

A Profitable Investment.

Should a Husband Discuss His Business Affairs with His Wife?

ALL YOUNG COUPLES SHOULD READ THIS STORY.

"ADA, what is your solicitor's address?"

"My solicitor?" replied Ada Russell, looking up with a surprised air. "Why, he's at Walton House, in Cornhill."

"Your money that he holds is in India Three per Cents., isn't it?"

"Yes, Dick."

"Well, I am thinking of reinvesting it in a more profitable direction; providing, of course, that I have your consent."

"Of course, dear. It is yours as much as mine, and you do what you think best. Where should you invest it?"

"I do not suppose you would be any the wiser if I told you. But still, as it is your money, you ought to be told. I shall invest it in the Blue Creek Diamond Mine."

"Oh, Dick, do you think it is safe?"

"Now, whatever does this little woman think she knows about diamond mines? Don't you worry yourself about business affairs, dear, they are out of a woman's sphere."

They had been married just two months, and you would have to travel far to find a more devoted couple. They occupied a little six-roomed house somewhere in Middlesex, to the north of London. Quite an old-world garden surrounded the house, converting it into an absolute Englishman's castle.

Mr. Russell's pet aversion was the business woman. He took particular care that there were no girls in his department in the City. Woman's sphere, he would argue, is home; man's in the wide world as well as home.

If by any chance a typine or lady clerk came to him with a message or a question he would always courteously listen, but would call up an office boy and give him the answer in front of the girl, thus intending to imply that he did not think a lady clerk was capable of taking a message properly.

I only just mention this instance to show how far his dislike to the business woman carried him. Outside, though, he was all that could be desired, and a truer gentleman never walked the earth. But let a lady friend ask him some business question and he was frozen in a moment.

"Dick," went on Mrs. Russell, "there's one thing in connection with my money that you may not know of. And that is, that Mr. Redford, my solicitor, according to the terms of father's will, must always conduct any business for me; as for instance, an investment."

"H'm!" muttered her husband. "Is that so? That is rather annoying; but, still, I have no doubt he will do as well as I can. I will go and see him this morning, and get him to arrange the investment."

Accordingly, Dick carried out his plan by lunching with Mr. Redford and arranging for the withdrawal of the two thousand pounds from the India Three per Cents.

"I cannot say I much care for this Blue Creek affair," said the solicitor. "But of course if Mrs. Russell is agreeable there is nothing more to be said."

"Mrs. Russell is as anxious as I am to do better with her money; it is only human, isn't it?" he asked, with a laugh.

"Quite so, but I do not think I should have invested in a West African diamond mine. But still, I have no doubt you know more than I do about such matters."

"Well, you see, it is like this, Mr. Redford. I know a man who is connected with the property out there, and he has wired to me of an exceedingly rich find. I can purchase the shares at par now, and they will probably double themselves in a fortnight."

"As you please, Mr. Russell; I only hope you are not too sanguine."

The money was advanced almost immediately, and that same day saw Mrs. Russell possessor of two thousand pounds' worth of shares in the Blue Creek Diamond Syndicate Limited.

It was some three days after this that Mr. and Mrs. Russell were seated by the fire after dinner.

"By the way, Dick, did you use that money as you said you would?"

"Money?" replied her husband in a mystified tone such as he always adopted when a woman spoke to him on any matter which he imagined might be connected with business. "Money, what money? Your dressmaker had a cheque last week if that is what you mean."

"No, Dick. I mean the money you were going to get from Mr. Redford to buy diamond shares with."

"Oh, yes, that is all finished with. Your solicitor is empowered to sign for you, is he not?"

"Yes, Dick. But I think you might have said something to me about it."

"Whatever for, dear? Now what would you know about any such matters?"

"But I like to be told a little about things which concern us both."

"Now, my dear girl, you know my opinion on such matters, and that I dislike you to appear business-like, and try to enter into a field which man alone is fitted to occupy."

"Dick, how bumptious that sounds. I should like to shake you, you consequential old thing."

That is how similar arguments that they had always ended—Ada in her husband's arms. But, nevertheless, she wished in her heart of hearts that Dick would confide in her a little as to how his business went on, and all that sort of thing. He was a dear, lovable boy, and that fad of his about women and business affairs, she thought, was his only great fault.

Occasionally he would come home looking worried; and then, with her heart overflowing with sympathy, she would say:

"What is the matter, Dick, dear?"

A fleeting smile would cross his face, but it would be gone in a second and his countenance grave and worried again, as he replied:

"Oh, business, dear. Nothing that you would understand."

This would always have the effect of arresting his wife's sympathetic inclinations, and, had he but known, robbing himself of a great deal of helpful comfort which would have been his had he chosen. But his prejudices were too strong for him, unfortunately.

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His prophecy concerning the Blue Creek Diamond Syndicate was verified that same week by the advancement in value of the shares from twenty shillings to twenty-eight shillings, with every prospect of them going higher.

His delight almost led him to tell his wife of the successful speculation; but then, he reflected, it would be rather weak and quite needless to talk business with women.

One can imagine this estimable gentleman (for he was estimable in practically every other direction) saying to himself:

"Poor things, they could not understand such affairs, even if they had it in black and white before their eyes."

Perhaps Mr. Russell is more to be pitied than scorned at. True it is that he appreciated the opposite sex in many ways; but where a woman occupied a post once occupied by a man, or did work that had once been the work of a man, then there were no bounds to his scoffing.

Strange to say, he was one of the most loyal subjects that our late Queen possessed; he never sneered at the head of our Empire being a woman. Like most prejudiced people, he was inconsistent. He never read Charlotte Brontë, Sarah Grand, or George Eliot, simply because they were women who, in his opinion, had usurped the position of men.

Thus it was that Mrs. Russell learnt the good fortune that had attended her husband's investment of her money from quite another source.

Her informant was Mr. Redford, who occasionally dropped in for a cup of tea. He had been her father's greatest friend, and in consequence was privileged. Yet—shame that I should have to set it down—people of the genus Grundy pointed it out to one another, and said it was hardly correct. And they call this a free country, wherein our womenfolk are bound by silken chains to most ridiculous laws laid down by conventionality. And all because of "what people will say!"

Ugh! the very phrase sets one's teeth on edge. And, after all, these esteemed "people" who "will say" are probably the first to break the said laws should the occasion arise. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

Both the Russells and Mr. Redford were aware of this, but were only amused at it, and would quote Beaconsfield's famous saying: "They say! What do they say? Let them say!"

"Your two thousand pounds will be largely increased, Mrs. Russell. It was a very fortunate speculation indeed."

"Why, what?" cried Mrs. Russell, "I have not heard anything about it."

"Do you mean to say that your husband has not told you of the shares rising so high?"

"No, he has not said anything about it. Oh, do tell me," she cried, all agog with excitement.

"Well, your husband is mighty reticent," grumbled Mr. Redford. "At any rate, your £2,000 is worth £3,000 now."

"Oh, how lovely, Mr. Redford!" And, rising from her seat, the impetuous Ada performed a light dance in her glee. She was not such a slave to the goddess as this might imply, but most people would feel glad at hearing similar news.

When the solicitor had gone, and the excitement worn off somewhat, it occurred to Ada that Dick might have told her of all this himself. It would certainly have added to the pleasure of it.

"Dick, dear," she said that evening. "You did not say anything about how well the investment had come off."

"No, I know; but how did you hear?" he said; and then in a horrified tone he asked: "You surely have not been reading the market quotations in the newspapers?"

"Oh, nothing so awful!" she laughingly cried, in a mock imitation of her husband's manner. "Mr. Redford told me."

"Oh!" He gave a sigh of relief; she was not trying to be businesslike, after all.

"No, I did not tell you, Ada," he went on. "But I will tell you this, that they will rise to about thirty-five shillings apiece to-morrow."

"Really, Dick! Isn't it wonderful? What luck, to be sure."

Then followed a repetition of their courtship days, which, unlike a number of couples, they had not dropped after marriage.

The following evening the Russells were out to dinner at the house of a well-known financier. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, a lady performed upon the piano with much vigour and the precision of an instruction book, which gave everyone a chance to converse.

Ada Russell was idly turning over some photos, when she suddenly heard the words "Blue Creek." In an instant she was on the alert trying to catch what the speakers were saying. For they were two of the biggest financiers in the City.

"Astonishing the way Blue Creeks have gone up."

"Yes, they will go up more to-morrow, I believe, but then they'll stop."

"I think so too, and am inclined to think they will go down a very heavy drop."

"How about those Can Paes of yours?"

But Ada had heard enough, and she hurried away to find her husband, but was unable to get alone with him.

"Dick dear!" she said, as they drove home. "Those Blue Creeks are——"

But he interrupted her with a gesture. The very way in which she named the shares sounded so professional that he was up in arms at once.

"My dear Ada, I do not want to discuss stocks and shares with you. I leave that for my male friends."

"But, Dick, they will——"

Again he interrupted her.

"Ada, please do not. You know my objections."

"Oh, very well, Dick!" and she relapsed into silence.

"How absurd it is of him!" she thought; "but he will learn differently some day." But neither knew how near the lesson was that was to teach him differently.

As anticipated, Blue Creeks rose to 37s. 6d., and shares were still being held tightly.

Mr. Russell studied the market carefully, and resolved to hold on. He had some inward misgivings though, and at times almost decided to sell and reap the huge profit he had already made.

But there seemed a chance of gaining still more; and, with the gambler's true instinct, he waited on fortune.

"Been busy to-day, dear?" questioned his wife, as they sat at dinner.

"Yes, very busy. Those shares of yours are keeping me well employed. They are worth nearly double what I paid for them at first," he replied, for once condescending to talk on the forbidden subject in a moment of triumph.

So elated was his wife at getting such a reply to her question, that she went on further.

"Don't you think you had better sell them now you have made so much, Dick?"

Immediately he closed up, and regretted his previous confidence. He had forgotten himself for a moment.

"My dear Ada, while I can I will look after business affairs in connection with us, and you will look after home affairs. I shall not dictate to you as regards your ruling of the domestic department, and I shall expect a similar state of affairs to appertain to my business."

"Oh, Dick, you are a silly old boy. Keep your ridiculous business affairs to yourself if you must. But it would be much more like husband and wife if you confided in me a little more."

Shortly after this there was silence for some time, and the next remark to be heard issued from Ada's lips.

"Dick, you do want a shave!"

From which the thoughtful reader will deduce much.

The following day was Saturday. This day is, in many places of business, quite a farce. Nobody works, or thinks of it, and persons in high places very often do not come up at all. More particularly so is this in Government offices and on the Stock Exchange.

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Mr. Russell had elected to remain at home on this Saturday, and, all unconscious of the fate in store for him, sat placidly smoking a pipe in the garden.

Suddenly a telegraph-boy came through from the house. Mr. Russell took the telegram in a nonchalant way, because he very often received wires whilst away from the office.

"Blue Creeks down to one and a quarter; still dropping," he read.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "What a fool I was! Why did I not sell?"

Distractedly he rushed into the house, and rapidly made himself presentable. Then, jumping on his bicycle, he rode madly to Mr. Redford's.

Now, most men would have gone to their wives and told the news. But Dick never dreamt of consulting his wife.

"A woman! Pooh, preposterous!" he would have said.

It was just five minutes after one o'clock that he arrived at the solicitor's office, only to find everyone gone. He rang the housekeeper's bell with sufficient force to almost snap the wires.

Presently the old woman appeared, curtseying as she opened the door.

"Mr. Redford, sir. He's been gone this half hour. Gone down to the sea somewhere. I don't quite know where, I'm sure, sir. I think he said Blackpool. He always says there's no such place as Blackpool, not that I think much of it myself; give me——".

Dick cut short her ruminations. His last hope was gone. He could have cried aloud in his vexation. Why had he not taken his wife's advice?

"Jupiter!" he groaned. "What will she say when she hears of it? I suppose they are below par by now; even she advised me to sell."

Slowly he rode home bitterly reviling his luck all the time. If he had sold yesterday he would have raked in £3,750—a clear profit of £1,750—now he did not care even to surmise what they were worth.

In the meantime, Ada was wondering where her husband was until her eyes alighted on the telegram.

Hastily she picked it up, and read it through. Then, instead of a blanched face or shocked expression, a strange smile played about her countenance.

"Poor boy!" she murmured softly.

The "poor boy" was at that moment wheeling his bicycle through the garden, and wondering how he should begin his story.

"Hullo, Dick! Been for a ride?" was his wife's greeting.

"Yes," replied her husband in a doleful tone, and with a suicidal expression.

"Why, Dick, dear. Whatever is the matter?"

"Matter, matter enough!" he replied. "Your two thousand pounds are lost, I am afraid."

"My two thousand pounds?" she cried. "How?"

"Well, Ada, Blue Creeks fell to one and a quarter this morning, and are still falling. I cannot find Redford anywhere; they think he has gone to Blackpool. I do not know how much your shares are worth now—precious little I am afraid," replied Dick, speaking professionally to his wife, so agitated was he.

"Redford ought not to have gone away with the market in the state it is!" he added in a miserable tone.

He sat down and leant his head on his hands, whilst he gazed dejectedly at the ground. Suddenly a pair of soft arms were round his neck, and Ada whispered:

"Dick, old boy, I have been a business woman for once. I heard that Blue Creeks were a bit rocky, and yesterday I got all the financial papers and read them. Then I told Mr. Redford to sell. He sold when they were worth thirty-six shillings each."

She was by his side now, and was looking into his eyes in such a compassionate manner.

"It's all right now, Dick, old boy, so cheer up."

He caught her very close to him, and kissed her passionately. There we will leave them, but not before I tell you that since then there has been a great change in affairs, and no longer does Mr. Russell worry out matters by himself, but has come to believe in the business capacity of woman.

E. Newton Bungey.

Winning a Bride.

A Touching Little Tale.

The girl was looking out of the window, humming softly, with a fine air of indifference. The man was leaning his back against the mantelpiece, gloomily observing the points of his boots.

They were good boots, but hardly worth the amount of serious observation he was giving them. To any person of moderate understanding the situation was obvious. To the two actors in it it was becoming embarrassing. The man moved first.

"You are sure your mind is made up, Marjorie?"

The girl stopped humming abruptly and turned round.

"What is the use of beginning again?" she said, with an impatient movement. "You know one cannot serve two masters. I am going to give my life to my art."

"But, Marjorie, you know what it means to me. I mean you know I could never change or forget."

"Why not?" she returned quickly. "That is just what I wanted to speak to you about. You see"—and her proud head was raised a trifle higher—"you only want a wife who can see that you get a good dinner every day and sew the buttons on your shirts. You have known us all for years. Why do you expect me, the unpractical one of the family, to snatch at the offer of this post? You would have shown more sense in asking Madge or Lilian, and I dare say one of them might have had you."

For a moment there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes, but it changed to a tender look of amusement as the girl flung herself viciously into a chair with the air of a sulky child.

"I suppose it would have been more sensible," he agreed, "only I don't love either Madge or Lilian. If you will only have me," he continued, a twinkle in his eye and abject humility in his voice. "I will do my best to overcome my disgraceful appetite and dine off a sentimental song if you deem it best. I will also look out for some patent shirt fastener which will save you the trouble of sewing on buttons."

Marjorie looked up quickly.

"You needn't try to be funny, Rex!" she said severely. "You know quite well I should have to become a domesticated woman if I married, and I won't. I am going to devote my life to music, and if I were to sacrifice that and marry you I should stop loving you in a fortnight and hate you in a month. There, that's all."

Rex looked up quickly

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"You would stop loving me in a fortnight?" he asked. "Then I may infer you have begun already?"

"You may infer nothing, sir!" she retorted sharply, but her face was crimson.

"By Jove, that's the nearest I've ever got!" thought Rex. "I believe she does half like me, but must make her cave in before she'll respect me."

There was a moment's pause, then he said gently:

"I beg your pardon, Marjorie, I believe you may be right, after all, though it is hard to think of giving you up." And he sighed softly, but resignedly. "If you are not too angry with me, will you tell me which you think it would be best for me to try to like, Lilian or Madge?"

"I am so glad, Rex, you are sensible at last! Really, I have thought it out carefully, and, though Lilian is awfully sweet and—and everything, I think Madge is the one best suited to you. You see, she cooks splendidly, and knows exactly how everything ought to be done in a house and would be perfectly satisfied if you kissed her once a month or so, and occasionally said the dinner was excellent. She really would, she is so easily pleased. While I—— Well, you know what I am."

"Yes, I know what you are," he replied quietly. "You are very young."

She misunderstood him, as he had intended she should, and assented eagerly.

"Yes, I am young—only nineteen—and you are nearly thirty. Madge is nearest you in age, and I believe you could make her love you if you tried."

"Shall I try? Do you want me to?"

"Yes, of course I want you to. It is for your own sake. She would make you a better wife than I because I don't want even to be loved. I am satisfied with my life as it is."

"All right, Marjorie. In a month I shall have made up my mind, and I will tell you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she murmured, vaguely afraid of what she had done.

She tried to reason out the cause of her depression, but it seemed to have no cause, and with a lagging step she made her way to the sunny den which she shared with her sisters.

Madge was sitting there alone, sewing and singing gaily. She looked up with a smile, as Marjorie entered, and an unusual merriment danced in her eyes.

"Guess who's been here?" exclaimed Madge.

"Who?"

"Rex. And he's got a box for *The Loves of Henrietta* to-morrow, and he's asked mother and me to go."

"I'm so glad," said Marjorie, but with singular want of enthusiasm.

And Madge stole a furtive look at her, and the corners of her mouth quivered.

A month had passed. Once more Marjorie stood at the same window, softly humming. She was waiting for Rex, and her face was very pale. It was the same face still, but there was a difference—the difference which marks every girl's face when she becomes a woman.

She had learnt her lesson and borne her punishment in silence.

To-day she had nerved herself for a supreme effort that she might do no wrong to the sister who had stepped into the place she had voluntarily resigned.

She had thought love not worth the sacrifice of art, and if art without love had turned to dust and ashes in her hand who was to blame but herself?

She was waiting for Rex—Rex, who had fallen such a helpless victim to Madge that he had had scarcely a look or a word to spare for her the whole month. It was this that had first taught her what she had lost and that had afterwards nerved her to play her part—for a week's experience had taught her that it was only a part—of careless indifference and entire absorption in her art.

When it seemed too hard for her she reminded herself sternly of her own words, "I am satisfied with my life as it is."

"They shall never see I am not satisfied," she said, and struggled on.

To-day there was a set, stern look on her face, for this was to be the supreme ordeal, and at present there was no one to see her. But as she leant her head listlessly against the window there came from the hall the sound of a familiar whistle, and instantly her expression changed. A smiling, expectant face greeted Rex as he entered, and she scrutinised him with playful anxiety.

"The funeral and wedding marches are side by side on the piano," she began, with an affected attempt at seriousness, "but I was waiting to choose between them till I have seen your face."

"What does my face tell you?" he asked.

She looked at him critically.

"That the momentous question is to be asked no later than this evening," she replied. "Good luck attend you."

"Wrong. Try again."

"Is it possible it is to be postponed till to-morrow morning?" And she held out her hand with a playful gesture of sympathy.

"Wrong again. I see I must tell you."

He had seized the hand she had offered, and was looking her straight in the face.

"What do you say to the question having been asked already?"

The last month had wrought many changes in Marjorie. She had, for one thing, learnt to keep her face under control, and only the slightest trembling of the eyelid showed that she was taken by surprise.

"My dear brother to be," she said, regaining possession of her hand, "I consider I have been grossly ill-treated in having this fact sprung upon me so suddenly. I had heard of a delightful little book called 'The Right Word in the Right Place'—a help to those people born devoid of tact. I was going to purchase it in the assurance that I should find a paragraph entitled, "What to say to a future brother-in-law,' or words to that effect, and now you pounce upon me like this and crush me. 'I feel unfit for conversation. You had better go." And she turned majestically away.

"I will. Only you must first allow me to make one remark. You did not ask what Madge said to me." He paused impressively. "She has refused me."

It was his trump card, and he was growing desperate. He took advantage of Marjorie's back being still turned towards him, and, creeping softly behind her, took one glance at her face before she knew he had moved. It was enough.

"Marjorie," he cried, "hasn't the play gone far enough? I am tired of acting, and I want you. Marjorie—I can't tell you how much I want you!" There was passionate intreaty in his voice.

"What did you mean," she asked slowly, "by saying you were 'tired of acting'? I don't understand."

"No; I know," he answered guiltily. "I've got to tell you. Madge and I have been playing at being lovers during the last month. I have even asked her to marry me, and she has refused. It was the natural climax to the play, she said, and she told me to do it, because nothing else would put you off your guard. I had to know whether you loved me or not," he ended desperately.

"It was very cruel," she whispered at last.

"Ah, Marjorie, don't!" he intreated. "I thought of that, but, honestly, would you ever have known you loved me if we had gone on in the same old way?"

There was a moment's silence.

"I should never have known I loved you," she answered softly.

Charles Herrow.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to the Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed

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Silence was Golden.

Mother: "I'm surprised at you! Couldn't you tell he was going to kiss you?" Daughter: "Yes, ma, but there was no one for me to tell, except him, and he knew it already."

Jealous Little Wench.

Emily: "I've got an invite to a charity ball, but I haven't the least idea what I am to go in. What would you wear, Fanny, if you had my complexion?" Fanny: "A thick veil."

Not Always.

Albert: "All the world loves a lover, you know." Mildred: "You wouldn't say that if you had heard papa's remarks when he found, yesterday morning, that you had taken his hat by mistake."

Another Sad, Sad Story.

"I must confess to you," he said, in a burst of confidence, "I'm an odd man. I'd like to be different if ——" "This is so sudden!" she cried, throwing herself upon his neck. For she, too, was odd, and she had longed to be even.

He Didn't Mean It.

Never use swell words. It may not always be agreeable. "How do you like my boots, love?" exclaimed a youthful bride. "Oh, they're immense," replied the partner of her joys, and she had the first matrimonial fainting fit as the result.

Auntie Was Sarcastic.

"I saw him kiss you just before he was leaving," said the sour-visaged aunt, and she said it in a regular dull-thud tone. "Yes, auntie." "Well, I can realise that it would be the last thing he would think of," and she sailed out as though she had scored every possible point.

He was Mystified.

"Goodness, we'll miss the opera," she said impatiently. "We've been waiting a good many minutes for that mother of mine." "Hours, I should say," he replied, somewhat acrimoniously. "Ours?" cried she, rapturously. "Oh, George, you do surprise me." Then she fell on his neck.

A Practical Youth.

"Do you appreciate poetry?" asked the serious girl. "Yes, indeed," answered Mr. Softy. "There's one piece of poetry that has done me a world of good. Old as I am, there are times when I couldn't tell how to calculate without saying 'Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November.'"

A Roar—But Not of the Ocean.

It was the morning after their arrival at a seaside resort. "I have often heard of the roar of the ocean," she said dreamily, "but I never knew it sounded like that." "That's not the roar of the ocean," answered her more experienced husband; "that's the roar of a departing visitor who has just been presented with his bill."

From Different Points of View.

He (sentimentally): "I wish I were a star." She: "I wish I were one, too!" He: "May I dare to guess why?" She: "Because it is known that every star is millions of miles away from the next one."

Was He Accepted?

He (at the club reception): "Are you a member of this club?" She: "No; only married people belong." He: "Then suppose we organise a trust for the purpose of making each other eligible."

Very Probably.

Hewitt: "Girls like to make a fellow think they have known a good many fellows, and have had a lot of attention from them." Jewett: "Right you are. I suppose that when Adam first kissed Eve, she said, 'You men are all alike.'"

A Good Result.

Mr. Milksop: "I do trust, Maud, you will forgive me, but I'm going to carry off your sister Vera. At your party last night she consented to marry me." Maud: "Forgive you, indeed! Why, of course I will. That's what the party was for."

Bad Taste.

Puffer: "My dear, I wish you would select a box of cigars for me while shopping to-day." Mrs. Puffer: "Why, I thought you gave up smoking a week ago?" Puffer: "So I did, and if you select the cigars it will help me to resist temptation."

The Banns Are Up.

"I've thought of a capital *nom de plume*," said Henry, who sometimes writes for the newspapers. "What is it?" asked Henrietta. "'Will U. Marrimee.'" "Why, of course I will, you goose!" she answered. "Is that what you have been trying to say so long?"

His Love was Dying.

Lottie: "I'm afraid Fred doesn't care for me as much as he did." Edith: "Nonsense! What makes you think so?" Lottie: "I got a letter from him to-day, and there were at least three places where he might have put in a 'dear' or a 'darling' and didn't."

Well Instructed.

Her head rested on his shoulder, and her little hand lay confidingly in his. "Tell me, Alfred," said the happy maiden, "how you ever came to pick me out as the girl you wanted to marry." "Well, Dora," replied the ecstatic young man in a gush of confidence, "it was mother that put me up to it."

His Excitement was Damped.

Mrs. de Fashion (before the full-length portrait of a girl): "Oh, if I only knew the painter of this!" Artist (stepping forward joyfully): "Permit me, madam, to introduce myself as the painter." Mrs. de Fashion: "What extraordinary good luck! Now you will tell me—won't you—the address of the dressmaker who made this girl's frock?"

Only a Little Encouragement.

"Has my daughter, sir," demanded the stern father, "ever given you reason to think she would listen to a proposal of marriage from you?" "Well," said the young man, twirling his hat in his hand in an embarrassed manner, "except that she calls me 'darling,' and always kisses me when I bid her good-night, I can't say that she has."

Good at Teaching.

"Can't I teach you to love me, Miss Genevieve?" pleadingly asked the young man. "I fear not, Mr. Spoonamore," she answered. "Then won't you please teach me how to teach you to love me?" he insisted eagerly. This appealed to the essentially masculine element more or less latent in every woman, and she promised to take it under consideration.

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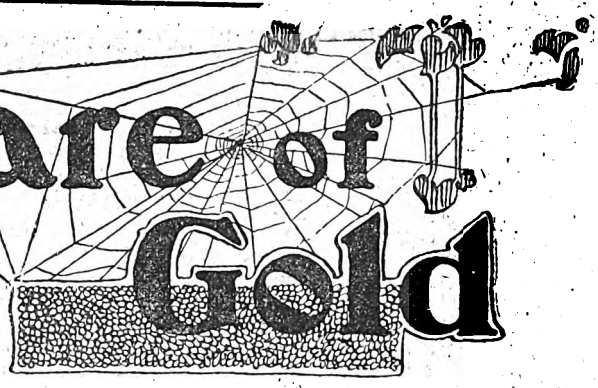
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He is elected as an M.P.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who is betrothed to Eric.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery."

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lyntoh, who loves and is beloved by Eric Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart. His story is told below:

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Ronald Falls on his Feet.

"SOME years ago, I had happened to hear of a poor little chap, who got left rather severely; no father, no mother, no home to speak of. I set the little chap going, rigged him out, got him a berth in a firm of brokers I dealt with. Well, he was as smart as paint, went on by leaps and bounds, spread his wings and soared; type of man who pops up every now and then in the city of London, astounding everybody; everything he touches turns to gold, everybody's frantic to deal with him.

"Sometimes that type of man, after going up like a rocket, comes down like the proverbial stick; but this man's still soaring. We met by chance one night at a club; he rushed at me. How was I doing, where had I been, why had he never been able to find me, where was I living?

"When he learnt that I was not absolutely on my bottom dollar, because I hadn't that bottom dollar left, and that it was extremely problematical where I was going to sleep that night or breakfast in the morning, well, the chap was perfectly delighted."

"Delighted?" exclaimed Ronald.

"Yes; don't you see it was his turn to score. He drove me home to his place, insisted on my putting up there for the night, and in the morning he produced a slip of paper with a lot of figures, all yellow, they were so old. But that slip, Ronnie, contained an account of every fiver, every sovereign, I may say every shilling I had let that chap have, when he was a youngster, to set him on his legs.

"Since then this fellow had trafficked in hundreds of thousands, yes, in millions; I've heard people say of him that he lived on figures, ate them, drank them, dreamt them, breathed them, that his whole life was one huge calculation, that he'd ceased to be human and had become an arithmetical machine, but he's kept that little account by him all this time, and he hadn't forgotten, at all events, one old friend."

"Bravo!" said Ronald; "clever men are not always necessarily bad ones!"

"No, but there was never a clever man who succeeded who hadn't hard things said about him, but this chap was as good as gold, better than gold."

"Serve you right," said Ronald.

"Of course," cousin Jack went on, "I pooh-poohed the whole idea of the thing being a matter of account; his father had been a pal of mine, and after all, what I'd done was only a mere bagatelle, but he wouldn't look at it in that light. I'd put him on his legs, he insisted on putting me on mine; and he did.

"He pitchforked me into the management of one of his concerns, then another; sent me out to the States over one matter of business; to the Cape about another. I've been to Russia; I've been dodging about to St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, Paris; nearly every capital of Europe on his business, and I've made a bit of brass, Ronnie, aye! your poor old cousin Jack, although your amiable brother Eric used to say that I should never make a shilling.

"Now I'm bossing the business arrangements of the *Meteor*, and incidentally, my dear old chap, what can I do for you?"

"You're very kind," said Ronald, "and frankly, I shall be grateful if you can help me to help myself."

"Of course I will. And so you've been sending us copy? Well, I'm not going to hold out false hopes; now don't be downhearted; something I'll do for you, that goes without saying, but in the way of contributions we've booked the best men to be got, and though we've had tons of applications from outside, we've only struck one man worth his salt; mind you, he's a flyer—an unknown man, too—named Harvey Bligh."

Ronald Geldart let fall his knife and fork and sat upright.

"What's up? Bolted something?" asked cousin Jack. "Here, have a glass of wine."

"Harvey Bligh, did you say?"

"Why, yes, Carnforth's raving about him; a man with an entirely new style—all grip and mustard; we're writing him to-day for an appointment."

"To what address?"

"Somewhere in your neighbourhood, Bloomsbury Square

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—dashed if the number doesn't sound like yours! Do you know anything about the chap?"

"Why, cousin Jack," said Ronald, taking a deep breath and stretching his hand across the table, "I am the very chap; my *nom de plume* is Harvey Bligh."

This time it was cousin Jack who sat breathless, and when he had recovered respiration he said, gripping Ronald's hand heartily:

"I knew it, I knew it all along. When your dear dead dad used to hold forth about Eric's prospects, I said to him many a time, 'Ronnie's the colt to carry my money,' and so you are. The other chap's got push and cheek and they'll carry a man a long way, but you've got better—you've got grit and talent. Come along and see the boss!"

Ronald went. Mr. Carnforth was not only in but visible, and Mr. Carnforth, too, had lunched and was well disposed towards the world in general.

Yes, Mr. Bligh's stories were just the thing they wanted; up-to-date, with characters that lived and breathed, incidents that happened every day and plots interwoven with the current questions of the hour.

And Ronald left that office with a cheque for his story appearing next day in the first number of the *Meteor*, and with a commission to write a serial on similar lines. He was in the seventh heaven of delight.

"We are going to do big things," were Carnforth's last words; "we are as taut and clipper-built a boat as ever put to sea. The smartest men and women of the day in every walk of life have signed on with us. We mean to be the voice and mentor of the world; in high finance, high politics, and high Bohemia we mean to reign; we have the best of the old, and we mean to get the best of the new; we know we have found a diamond in Mr. Harvey Bligh."

For cousin Jack had promised to respect his cousin Ronald's resolution to preserve the incognito he had chosen, and to know him henceforth only by his *nom de plume*.

So Ronald left the offices with a lighter heart than he had known for many months. It was a double-barrelled joy, for he was quite as pleased to learn of cousin Jack's good luck as of his own, and, returning to Mrs. Skimper's, he announced his arrival with so exuberant and rollicking a rat-tat-tat-TAT! that Mrs. Skimper, in the act of ladling the soup, gave a start which ruined the chances of a second appearance of that tablecloth, and caused Arethusa, ascending from the regions below, to break her second plate that day, much to her sorrow.

When Mrs. Skimper and her paying guests discovered that it was only Mr. Harvey Bligh on his return the good lady's expression changed from alarm to severity; and Mr. Springle audibly whispered to Mr. Grimmage that some folks had brass of one kind if not of another.

But this remark went wide, its object being oblivious even of the very existence of Messrs. Springle and Grimmage.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Mrs. Skimper," he said genially, "but I've been detained on business."

'You're too late for soup, Mr. Bligh," said that lady as coldly as possible. But her iciness melted before the youngster's bright, beaming expression, and she added, more good humouredly: "But you are in time for fish."

"Oh, thanks," said Ronald, "but give me very little; I lunched rather well."

"Whereabouts?" asked Springle. "At the Hotel Cecil?" with a sniggering glance at Mr. Grimmage.

"Why, how did you know?" asked Ronald. "Were you there? Anyway, you've guessed it." Then to Miss Amaranth:

"I saw that new symphony 'Réve Extatique' in a shop window and I bought it for you, if you'll accept it."

And, somehow, Mrs. Skimper in her heart of hearts felt that Mr. Harvey Bligh's account was as good as settled. And she was glad.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wrong Must Be Righted.

THE more or less select suburb of Brixwell was agitated to its core. The excitement created by the sudden dissolution, sweeping like a gale over the United Kingdom, on reaching Brixwell, swelled into a hurricane. Party spirit was running high, other spirits in certain clubs and public houses were running freely, for a bombshell had burst upon the community.

For some considerable time the borough had been assiduously "nursed" by that eminent financier, philanthropist and sportsman, Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, who had been generally regarded as the accepted candidate in the interests of that numerically small but tremendously active party the "Pro-Cons," and to that end Mr. Scrimshaw had manifested the deepest interest in Brixwell and all that therein was.

He had laid foundation stones, opened bazaars, taken the chair at lectures and smoking concerts, patronised cricket clubs, football clubs, ping-pong clubs, goose clubs, and kindred institutions, and lost no opportunity of impressing upon Brixwell that it was, in his deliberate and candid opinion, a model community, and that the furtherance of its interests formed the principal object of Mr. Scrimshaw's existence.

And now, Brixwell suddenly discovered that the man it needed sojourned within its very gates.

It had been some time finding it out, indeed it had on former occasions pooh-poohed Blagdon and his pretensions as impossible and presumptuous; but a change had come over the spirit of its dream from the very moment when that brilliant and promising young politician, Eric Geldart, M.P., came down to Brixwell and met the councillors of the Progressive Conservative Association in quiet conclave.

It was then that the fiat went forth. "Blagdon for Brixwell!" was to be the battle-cry of the "Pro-Con." party, and Scrimshaw and all his works were renounced, he himself being openly scoffed at by the powers that were in Brixwell as an interloper.

It was at the same meeting arranged that a deputation should wait upon Boanerges Blagdon, Esq., and inform him that it was the unanimous desire of that association that he should become their Parliamentary representative.

Of course all these things were undreamt of at the Laurestinas, Mr. Blagdon's residence, notwithstanding that a hasty spring clean was on that identical day instituted.

Boanerges Blagdon assured that deputation on its arrival that he had never been so utterly surprised in his life, that nothing was further from his mind than to intrude himself upon the attention of any of his fellow-citizens, more especially when they happened to be such tried and valued friends as Podger, Wriggles, Smith, and others he beheld before him.

Still he took some pains to impress upon them that if they really required him his services were at their disposal, and when that deputation had departed, Blagdon, the personification of the respectable and Brixwell's potential M.P. to be, danced a very ungraceful imitation of the sailor's hornpipe, greatly to the alarm of the wife of his bosom, who, entering at the moment, was seized with an appalling suspicion that he had all of a sudden given way to drink.

Late that night Boanerges Blagdon, to cool his heated brow, took a walk along the pleasant tree-lined road in the outskirts of Brixwell wherein his house was situate, his mind full of the triumph awaiting him in the near future.

He would win the election, that was almost certain, for the late member, a valetudinarian, had been on the verge of resigning just before the dissolution, and no one else had been put forward by his party, who had indeed made overtures towards an amalgamation with the "Pro-Cons."

Yes! ere a month was over, ere he was a month older, and while he was still in the prime of life, he would be standing at the Speaker's chair shaking hands with the first commoner in Britain, and taking his seat amid the cordial cheers of his party.

That would be only the beginning of his glory, that would be the standpoint from which he would start Life's race afresh, developing powers and resources which would astound

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those who having known him for years, yet had really never known him.

How different it all might have been if—but no, he would not think of that, would not contemplate what might have been, but what was—he heaved a sigh of thankfulness—could never be, and he wiped a cold bead of perspiration from his forehead that the chill night air had touched with a sudden icy finger.

But, strive as he might, the haunting thought would recur. What if George Geldart had discovered that false entry in the books a few days earlier? What if Geldart had lived? Why, then he, Blagdon the potential M.P., might have been toiling in chains at Portland, for Geldart was a stern man, and, though by nature trustful, once deceived a stern and unrelenting one. And Boanerges Blagdon was a coward.

But George Geldart was dead and buried, the secret buried in the grave with him, save for Eric Geldart, whom it affected equally with Blagdon, Eric who would not split for the sole sufficient reason that he dared not.

Dead men tell no tales—he turned within the gateway of his house—and, Oh, God, there in the flickering light of the lamp overhanging it, he gazed across that gate upon——

George Geldart's face and form! Yes, there was no mistaking it, it was no creature of a disordered brain, George Geldart stood before him in his habit as he lived, raised one warning, extended arm, one accusing finger.

"What do you want with me? Who are you? For God's sake leave me!" he gasped, trembling in every limb, holding to the cross-bar of his gate and sinking nearly to his knees. And in the silence of the night the thing answered him—in a whisper:

"I will leave you when the wrong is righted. As for this foolery—beware, remember the higher the pedestal the greater the shame when all the world shall know."

"I'll right—the wrong. Mercy—I'll—I'll——" His chattering teeth clenched rigidly together, his tongue was terror-tied, he could speak no more, with dilated eyes he looked up—IT was gone!

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Voice from the Dead.

BUT it must have been a dream, a hallucination, the product of over-strained nerves and over-worked brain. That was what Boanerges Blagdon kept saying to himself for the next few days. He said nothing of it to anybody else, not even to Eric Geldart, his partner, though he surprised the latter once or twice by strange, sudden speeches.

"Eric, I sometimes think I can't go through with this. My heart's queer, I know, and—I say, Eric, I suppose there's no chance of anything coming to light about—you know."

"Of course not. What on earth's the matter with you? Look here, you'd better get away to Brighton for a day or two, you want toning up, man, your liver's wrong, you'll be all right in a day or two."

"I wish I had your nerve. I—I don't think you'd turn a hair if—if——"

"If what?" the other exclaimed angrily and impatiently.

"If," Boanerges lowered his voice to a whisper—"if the old man stood before you."

"What do you mean?" snarled the younger man, showing his clenched teeth. "Look here, if you're going to play the fool, you'd better chuck it before the campaign commences."

"No, no, I don't want to play the fool, I'll go right through with it if it hails."

"Well, then, don't talk like an idiot, or act like one. As to what you will keep harping on, why can't you let it all alone? Let the dead past bury its dead. Look here, Boanerges, what's done is done and can't be undone, neither

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE FAMOUS HOUSEHOLD REMEDIES.

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have gained their wonderful reputation by sheer force of merit, because every person who uses them recommends them to others. They have positively no equal for thoroughly cleansing the system and putting the liver and kidneys in functional order, without pain or griping. They are the best known remedy for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dizziness, and the common condition of ill-health, known as "run-down" or "out of sorts." Females of every age find Holloway's Pills an invaluable remedy and aid.

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is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

AND OINTMENT

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you nor I would if we could undo it. Now, henceforth, once for all, on that matter, silence."

"Yes, yes!" said Blagdon, "we'll talk of something else. I say, Eric, I am certain I saw Ronald yesterday as I was driving down the Strand, he hasn't left the country after all."

"Let him do as he pleases," said Eric, swinging his key-chain, and then "he—he can't harm us."

But he spoke the words a trifle uneasily, and somehow he would rather have heard that his brother was at the other end of the earth or, better still, at the bottom of the sea.

"He was looking rather seedy and rather down in the mouth," said Blagdon, "and he'd taken off his moustache, but I'm certain it was he."

"Perhaps; one or two people tell me much the same. Well, Boanerges, you know the proverb, 'the way of the transgressor is hard.'"

Then they went out to lunch, for Boanerges' first meeting in the Brixwell Town Hall was fixed for that night, when he was to be proposed and seconded and confidence was to be voted in him by his supporters, all of which had been arranged by the Council of the Pro-Cons. under the guiding hand of Eric Geldart, and, as Eric said, it was above all things necessary that he should keep his pecker up.

Whether thanks were due to Eric Geldart or not, certainly Boanerges Blagdon appeared before his supporters that night in the very pink of condition for a parliamentary candidate. His rotundity of face and form were accentuated with the portentousness of one possibly destined to control the destinies of Empire.

The Brixwell Town Hall was crammed, of course political opponents insinuated rather it was "packed," but the supporters of Blagdon were palpably in an overwhelming majority though there were not wanting a few dissentients who raised calls for Scrimshaw and made pertinent inquiries as to who had "burked" him and why he had been "muzzled."

These calls the Progressive-Conservatives as a body received with indignant counter-cries of "Order! Order!" and at the back of the hall was congregated a more or less goodly leaven of the opposition candidate's supporters, predisposed to turbulence and shockingly irreverent.

Eric Geldart, M.P., self-sufficient and all important, occupied the chair, acknowledging, with just sufficient, but not too much geniality, the ovation accorded him as one of the earliest newly elect.

The most prominent men in Brixwell, or, to quote Blagdon himself, "the cream of the intellect, culture, patriotism, and substantiality," were present on the platform and in the front seats. There was also a sprinkling of politicians and professional platform speakers, men accustomed to address audiences of all kinds and denominations from a Hyde Park mass meeting to an Irish hillside gathering.

Eric Geldart introduced the candidate to the supporters, claiming for him a fair and patient hearing, and then amid an artillery of cheers and a musket fire of handclaps, Boanerges Blagdon deliberately and stolidly rose, advanced to the chairman's table, filled himself a glass of water, took out and unhitched his gold hunter, took a note of the time, laid the watch on the chairman's table, and, clasping his hands in the small of his back, his right leg erect, and his left foot a trifle advanced, he said:

"Mr. Chairman, free and independent electors of this important and enlightened borough." This was the beginning, and he said a lot more.

He said of course that it was and had been for any years the most cherished wish of his heart to devote himself, if deemed worthy, to the parliamentary representation of that particular borough above all other constituencies in the United Kingdom. They all do that, and it invariably gets a cheer.

He said he meant to fight this election with fairness and courtesy. This also is certain to have a round of applause. He then went on to hold up to the execration of his audience the personalities, the actions, and the utterances of his opponents.

He next proceeded to intimate the glorious era of prosperity and progress, in fact a miniature millennium which would for Brixwell follow his own election, and to warn his hearers against the slough of social, political, religious, and moral Despond into which the election of his opponent would most inevitably plunge them.

Attempts were made from the back of the hall to interrupt him as when one gentleman inquired, "How about the council secret syndicate?" "What did yer buy Slammer's Rents for?" "What did yer get compensation?" "What price land-grabbing on Grey Duck Green?"

These interruptions, however, were sternly discountenanced by the chairman, the originators being in many instances persuaded out of their contumacy, and also out of the building, by a bevy of short-haired, square-jawed, broad-shouldered gentlemen in the vicinity of the back doors and incidentally referred to by the promoters of the meeting as "the boys."

Mr. Blagdon, beaming profusely and complacently, having resumed his seat, amid an uproar of cheers, and with what were erroneously described by the reporters as "musical honours," the chairman stated that if any gentleman had questions to put, Mr. Blagdon would, now that he had finished his speech, be most happy to answer them fairly, squarely, and candidly.

There was, however, some hesitancy on the part of questioners in coming forward, most of the putters of inconvenient questions having been incontinently put out previously, the most awkward questioners, moreover, having been charged with disorderly behaviour.

One individual arose in the body of the hall, holding several sheets of foolscap, and announced his fell intention of putting a number of interrogatories, each of which apparently comprised a couple of sheets, but the Chairman promptly ruled him out of order, intimating that if he wanted to make his own speeches he had better hold his own meeting.

A few desultory questions were fired in a half-hearted manner from here and there, inquiries as to the candidate's views on compulsory vegetarianism, the taxing of cats, free telephones, and so on, and the Chairman, having hammered for order, was about to call upon their esteemed friend, Mr. Mugwaddle, to propose a vote of confidence in Boanerges Blagdon, Esq., as the Progressive-Conservative candidate for the borough of Brixwell, when, from a dimly-lighted corner, close to the doorway at the back of the hall, there came clear and distinct—a voice—at the sound of which Eric Geldart looked up with amazement in his eyes.

"Mr. Chairman, Sir, I desire to put one question to the candidate and yourself."

"Too late," said Eric, nervously clutching his chairman's hammer.

But from the opposing element came a clamour. "No! No! The question! The question! You've challenged questions! Stick to your guns!"

And even the candidate's supporters chorussed tolerantly: "Let him put the question."

"Very well, then," answered Eric, half-angrily, half in the tone of one seized with a strange foreboding; while Blagdon, for his part, his hand shading his eyes, peered through the distance into that dimly-lighted corner at the end of the crowded building, that mist looming over the horizon of the sea of faces.

Then in the hush following Eric Geldart's words, there came right across the hall in clear, incisive, strident tones, these words:

"I want you to tell this meeting, where would Boanerges Blagdon be and where would you be—if George Geldart—had—not—died!"

There was a silence, a murmur, for as he listened to the words the Chairman's face turned livid white, his eyes dilated, and his breath came and went in deep gasps. Half rising from his seat he cried hoarsely:

"What does it mean? Who is it dares to ask that question?

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Where is he? Let him stand forth. Where is the man? Who is the man?" And he turned, fierce of face and tone towards his partner and his colleague, Boanerges Blagdon.

The murmur of the audience rose and swelled into almost a clamour of sensation. For Boanerges, who had been sitting gazing rigidly towards the distant door, with eyes dilating wide and wider yet, and cheeks turning from red to crimson, from crimson to purple, and with the big blue-black veins standing out like knotted cords upon his shiny, big, bald forehead, groaned stertorously, extending one trembling hand:

"It was there—there—I saw—it—I saw it again—it's gone—vanished!" Then dropping his arms, falling heavily back in his chair, he rolled over and crashed down chair and all on to the platform boards amid the panic of his affrighted supporters.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Rescue on the River.

The collapse of Boanerges Blagdon and his meeting caused consternation in the Pro.-Con. camp, and corresponding jubilation in the ranks of the other party.

The newspapers on the following morning vibrated with the accounts of this "Dramatic Incident at a Political Meeting." "Sensational Scene on an Election Platform," and all kinds of reports and rumours filled the air.

Blagdon had been threatened by a mysterious stranger with prosecution; he had been accused of murder by someone in the audience, who had mysteriously disappeared. The *Brixwell Clarion*, representing the Yellow Press of that suburb, gave pages to it.

Whatever the origin or true inwardness of the incident, one thing was certain: Boanerges Blagdon, despite the indignation of his council and his supporters, and regardless even of the scorn of his partner, the member for Claverton, as resolutely as he was able to do anything in his then condition, finally and irrevocably expressed his determination of retiring from the contest.

Mrs. Blagdon, good worthy soul, to whom her Boanerges was far more than political power, fame, or anything else, supported him, but the Brixwell Pro.-Cons. asked each other blankly, what was to be done?

It was at this critical juncture that Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw returned to the scene.

His first move was to remind Eric Geldart of the little financial matter outstanding between them in respect of "differences," impressing upon him that money was very tight in the City and that he himself was being harassed by innumerable calls.

The effect of this was to bring Eric Geldart to Crosby Square in a hurry, with the result that within twenty-four hours Sampson Scrimshaw, Esq., had been nominated as candidate for the Parliamentary representation of Brixwell, and the Pro.-Con. Council were working for him with all its might and main. For Eric Geldart put it to his partner:

"As you won't, or can't, shake off your mortal funk we may as well square the bucket-shop man this way as any other. It would be rather awkward for him to cut up rough just now. Lynton's in rather a tight place for money, and I want to see if Scrimshaw can't do something for him."

"Then how do you stand in? You don't do much for nothing, Eric."

Geldart laughed.

"I play my game.'

Which was quite true, and he played to win, hampered by no scruples. But in Sampson Scrimshaw he met a man as cool and calculating as himself, and one who never showed his hand until he made the trick.

Each meant to make a catspaw of the other—who prevailed will be set down hereafter; suffice it at this stage to say that

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Born in 1798. Dancing in 1903.

At a ball the other day, so it is stated on excellent authority, a Greek Officer named Colonel Mavroyeni, who was born in 1798, and has therefore lived in three centuries, led his granddaughter in the first dance. He is still in the enjoyment of excellent health and his digestion is apparently as strong as that of a young man, which indeed goes without saying, for the agility of limb and buoyancy of spirit indicated by this remarkable feat are blessings rarely enjoyed by those past middle life and never by the man who can't digest his food. The incident is remarkable only for its rarity. But why should it be rare?

To be lithe of limb and light of heart; at seventy to possess the faculties of mind and body unimpaired, that is life indeed. Yet rarely as it is experienced, it is within the reach of all except deformed and crippled persons. Attention to the laws of health, moderation and care in the selection of diet, and a timely use of the root and herb tonic, Mother Seigel's Syrup, whenever the stomach, liver and kidneys show signs of over work or disorder—*that* is the secret of perennial youthfulness. When digestion fails, life ebbs. Mother Seigel's Syrup helps digestion, it makes food nourish and upbuild your body, that is the reason of its world-wide popularity and success in curing indigestion, biliousness, constipation, anæmia, and all the host of weakening and distressing ailments that arise from faulty action of the stomach, liver or kidneys.

A striking instance of the power of Mother Seigel's Syrup to cure, when ordinary medicines have miserably failed, is afforded by the case of Mr. Benjamin Stoker. For eight years he was ill, and for half that time unable to work. He suffered from gall-stones and acute indigestion. The Doctor said it was cancer of the stomach, but time proved he was wrong. Violent pains at the pit of the stomach made his life almost unbearable. He says: "The pain never left me and if I tried to eat anything I was sure to be sick. I suffered fearfully from headaches and dizziness. I spent pounds on medical advice, and the uselessness of it all made me feel so hopeless and low-spirited that I did not care whether I lived or died. The Doctor told my wife to be prepared for the worst. He could do no more for me.

"This was my condition when my wife determined to try Seigel's Syrup. I had not much faith in it but to please her began taking it. Well the result was little short of a miracle. Before I had finished one bottle I felt easier; and as I continued taking it the pain and sickness left me and I began to recover my lost health. Slowly I regained strength and after four bottles was able to go back to work. I am now as well as ever in my life, can eat anything, and do a hard day's work, all owing to Seigel's Syrup." If confirmation of a statement at once so explicit and convincing is needed, it may be had from Mr. Edward Tulip, a Lay Preacher in Claravale Colliery, Ryton-on-Tyne, who has known Mr. Stoker intimately for over sixteen years and vouches for the accuracy of his statements.

Attractive Girls.

Attractive girls are not all made on one pattern. Oh, no, their charms are as varied as their faces, and the particular grace or charm that captivates one man, leaves his brother untouched. But most men will admit that the languid, dejected, sallow-faced girl, whose every movement and action betokens indigestion, constipation, or anæmia, is less attractive than her more favoured and healthful sister, who having discovered the secret that bright eyes, clear skin, and a perfect complexion are attributes of sound health and thorough digestion, has preserved all her charms inviolate by a prudent and timely use of that best of all female medicines, Mother Seigel's Syrup. So it is, that the "Seigel" girl is always admired for her beauty, vivacity, and buoyant healthfulness.

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Sampson Scrimshaw, Esq., was duly returned M.P. for Brixwell in the Pro.-Con. interest, and that one of his sponsors on his introduction to the Speaker was the honourable member for Little Claverton.

It was just at this time that the *Meteor* burst upon the public and took the town by storm. Its success was instantaneous and phenomenal; there was scarcely a dull line in it from title to imprint.

The self-elected high priests and priestesses of the lighter literature, the would-be celebrities with their own puff-paragraphs and home-made snap-shots of their environment, were welcomely conspicuous by their absence from its pages.

The drama received its meed of competent recognition without the enshrining of the actor, the author, or the "amiable and genial" gentleman on the mat with an oasis of diamond in a Sahara of white shirt front.

Sport was dealt with in its columns by sportsmen, horses were written about by men who rode them, its Society small talk created plenty more small talk in boudoir-land and the clubs, and the incessant repetition of the question, "Who could have told them?" "How did they find it out?"

Indeed, so pertinent, without being impertinent, were some of its whispers from clubs, drawing-rooms, even from palace corridors, that in theatre foyers, the opera crush-room, beneath the trees of Rotten Row, at Hurlingham, Sandown, Gatwick, in the Ascot inclosure and on Goodwood's lawn, people hushed their voices and thought twice before speaking, lest a *Meteor* man—or woman, might be within hearing or addressing them.

But to the general reader who bought the *Meteor* neither for its advice to investors, nor for those racing tips so deadly sure that the *Meteor's* selected was the despair of the ring, and went to odds on at once, perhaps the most delightful features of the production were the quaint and dainty verses and the strong and extraordinary stories signed "Harvey Bligh."

Nothing quite like them had been known. Bizarre, varied this week in bantering vein, a feather of a story, the next a lurid, hot, and fierce encounter of the brain of writer and reader, such a story as one laid down wondering many things, thinking many things, perhaps for the first time, feeling that the tale was stranger than ever because, strange to say, it was so true.

Or again, a sudden white light on some dark corner of the life lived around us at our doors, at our feet, ignored by a social system with one all and only object, aim, and end; its own amusement, but some dread day to come to be ignored no longer.

People began to ask each other, who was Harvey Bligh? Had you ever met him? What manner of man was he? He could not be so very young to know so much, nor yet so very old to wield a pen so dainty and light-hearted, and editors and publishers began to ask the self-same question.

By-and-bye at the *Meteor* Office Harvey Bligh, Esq., found letters, even telegrams, awaiting him, not a few from far-off lands, from Australia herself a promising nursery of fiction weavers, and notably from Boston and New York, ever swifter and keener to recognise and raise good men and new.

So that ere long his name was a familiar one to the readers of the best of the magazines and periodicals; his work had caught the public fancy, which means in every walk of life a fortune, and commissions rained upon him thick and fast.

So also social recognition, and had he been that way inclined, the young poet-author's days, and much of his nights, might have been devoted to dinner-parties, At Homes, and clubs, and Society would once more have killed its latest lion.

But Harvey Bligh, to Society's surprise, shrank and withdrew himself from that celebrity for which others would have given their ears.

He still made Mrs. Skimper's establishment his home, but, greatly to that lady's regret and to the despair of Arethusa, although remaining a paying, he ceased to be a resident guest, save occasionally, betaking himself instead with his work now to a cottage on the Northumbrian cliffs, now to some bungalow on the Devon coast, now and then for a spell inhaling the heather-fragrant air of Hindhead, and now and then drifting by easy stages from one to the other of the hotels and inns beside the Thames, 'twixt Wallingford and Hampton Court.

It was thus that the successful new writer was enabled to not only devote himself to his work, but to conceal the identity of Harvey Bligh with Ronald Geldart, the unjustly banned. Naturally now and then he would on the river or some seaside pier happen with some associate of earlier days, not a few of whom either not having heard or utterly discrediting the stigma of suspicion resting on his name, met him with cordial greetings.

None of these suspected that they were face to face with the man whose work had so suddenly and decisively made its mark.

And Ronald had the satisfaction and amusement of at times hearing his work, its merits and demerits, discussed at the *table d'hôte* of the pleasure steamer, in the train, and sometimes being naively asked his opinion regarding himself, or, rather, regarding his other self.

It was during one of these pleasant spells that the young writer, idly sculling along a pleasant timber-shaded reach that might have been the lake of some Castle of Indolence, so languorously the drowsy bees and shimmering gay dragon-flies buzzed and hummed round the cups of fox-gloves and water-lilies, when all of a sudden he raised his eyes to watch a supple, willowy form that passed him wielding a punt-pole with the grace of a water nymph.

The graceful form of the English river girl, surely of all girls the sweetest, breeziest, and most adorable, with her dainty piqué skirt, her serviceable blouse, her natty sailor hat, its ribbon matching her sailor knot tie in the colours of her or his club, or perhaps his college.

Such a picture, charming as it is, happily along the Thames is to be met with so frequently, that Harvey Bligh would doubtless, when a few strokes past that punt, have resumed the weaving of a serial story plot then in his mind, but that, almost unconsciously, he raised his eyes to the oval, sun-tinged face beneath that dainty sailor hat.

Just at that moment a pair of grave, grey eyes met and riveted his glance. Her eyes, the eyes that for so long had haunted his nights and days, the eyes that he had first beheld fixed, terror dilated, on the frantic carriage horses, stampeding, so it had seemed, to their own and her destruction, the eyes that he had last beheld awaking from his coma of exhaustion following her rescue, fixed on his face with tender gratitude.

And as he now with indrawn breath met their glance there gleamed in them the light—yes! his heart beat to note it—the glad light of recognition, and the summer noon-day breeze carried to his ears the whisper of a little involuntary half-sigh, half-cry.

Instinctively he doffed his boating cap. The weigh was on her trim, gay-cushioned craft, the impetuous, officious tide and his own strong, sweeping strokes had borne him well away from her.

Once again they had met, just for a moment, once again were drifting apart, perhaps for ever. For the envious river bearing him so swiftly from her was winding round, and ere he had time to think or to decide should he speak to her, wait for her to drift back to him or turn his boat and scull up stream in her wake, breaking and scattering to the winds all conventionality, all the etiquette and the unwritten laws of Society, the river's bend had blotted from that summer idyll picture her nymph-like form. She was gone, it was too late—perhaps it was all for the best.

He sculled on, grinding his teeth with vexation. Then of a sudden he ceased, startled by a cry, a cry from around that bend up-stream.

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Troubles of a Cousin.

"I HAVE been staying in the country," writes "ALBERT," "where I have met a very pretty girl cousin, lately grown up. Naturally, I have rather sought her society. However, every time I have tried to get a walk or quiet chat with her about half a dozen of the younger members of the family have appeared on the scene and quite monopolised the young lady's attention. The result is that I have not even exchanged a private word with her. Is this not hard, and how can I remedy it?"

* * * * *

As you are cousins, I suppose you would not be going too far in asking the girl if she will not take a walk with you alone. It is not as though you were strangers. If she really wants to do so she will very soon dispose of her troublesome brothers and sisters. To chat privately with one's cousin is quite an accepted diversion with most girls, and I don't think there is much harm in it.

❦❦❦

The Seaside Flirt Again.

"I AM another victim of the seaside flirt," writes "F. J. I.," "and would like your opinion, even if you cannot advise me on the matter. I stayed recently at a boarding-house on the Kent coast, where I met a very charming girl. I had scarcely been there a day or two when we began to strike up something more than a mere acquaintanceship. We took walks together, sat next to each other, and in time grew very much like lovers. I really began to feel that I liked the girl very much, and when we parted we had arranged to correspond, and to see each other on our return to town.

"A week or so elapsed, and I wrote to her at her London address, asking permission to call. To my surprise, I received in reply a curt note, saying that the girl thought we had better not continue the relationship, and hoping that I would regard this note as final. I was much hurt at this treatment. Will you please advise me, or give me your opinion on her conduct, as I think it has been very wrong."

* * * * *

I think the girl has acted in a very regrettable way. No doubt, like only too many others, she has allowed herself to go beyond discretion while at the seaside, and as a result has led a young man to go further than he otherwise would. Frequently, as has often been pointed out, one's ideas do relax a little at the seaside, but that is no reason why one should deliberately play with other people's affections.

"F. J. I." had better write to her expressing his view of her conduct in polite and even friendly language. If he does it delicately, the way may be still left open for a revival of the seaside friendship. "F. J. I." should also try in future to avoid falling too deeply into the meshes of the seaside flirt. What may be a romance on the seashore by moonlight often proves a very transparent deception in the cold light of working-day.

Calling in the Country.

"WHEN paying an afternoon call in the country," writes "MAX," "should I attire myself in any particular garb? For instance, would it be bad form to go in a flannel or cycling suit?"

* * * * *

Etiquette slackens a good deal in the country. A man is not supposed to have dressed himself for the occasion on paying a call, but to be wearing just his ordinary clothes. At smart country houses it is quite often that one sees men in riding costume or flannels. The man who has carefully dressed himself for the occasion may very often find himself conspicuous, as one of the charms of the country is freedom from town manners and costumes.

❦❦❦

The Nervous Admirer.

"I AM considered a very pretty girl," writes "ADA," "and have a good many admirers. For many months I have been meeting a gentleman in the streets, and he has looked at me in a very meaning way whenever we have met. The other day I saw him with a lady friend of mine, and on meeting her afterwards she said, 'Mr. Brown is simply dying to be introduced to you. Would you mind?' I said I should be very pleased to meet Mr. Brown, and we got to know each other.

"My point is this. We have now been acquainted for over a month, and he has seen me very often. During that time however, he has not breathed one word which I might take as proving him to be in love. We have just chatted as ordinary friends, and he has not even squeezed my hand. What is your opinion? Do you think he wanted to know me because he felt he could love me, or was it mere curiosity?"

* * * * *

You must give him at least another month, "ADA," before coming to any conclusion. Perhaps the man is too shy to make a clean breast of his feelings, and perhaps you have not given him enough encouragement to make a start. He may be simply boiling over with admiration for you, and yet too nervous to reveal the fact. If he is really in love with you he will take an opportunity of showing it sooner or later. I have known affairs of the kind you mention in which the man has met the girl for over a year, yet has never dared to speak of his love.

❦❦❦

The Other Fellow's Girl.

MORE seaside troubles, this time of a more complicated order. "BERTIE" was staying at a friend's house at the seaside, where was also a young man and his *fiancé*. "BERTIE" knew the young man fairly well, and had no idea whatever of flirting with the girl. However, before he had been there long this young lady started making violent love to him. She sought him out alone, always tried to sit next to him, said sweet nothings, and generally suggested that she preferred his society to that of her *fiancée*. Meanwhile the young man seemed scarcely to notice his sweetheart's breach of faith, and treated "BERTIE" in the most friendly fashion. How should "BERTIE" act? He felt that he was himself beginning to fall in love with his friend's girl.

* * * * *

"BERTIE" had better cut the affair short at once. He is playing with fire. I know that kind of girl. No doubt she has taken a passing fancy to "BERTIE," and, with the usual seaside influence has allowed herself to show it, whereas otherwise she would have kept it to herself. I do not suppose she really cares more for "BERTIE" than for her *fiance*, but perhaps it has struck her as a good joke to play one off against the other—a favourite habit with girls.

Let "BERTIE" get out of all communication with the girl at once, before any serious result happens.

Cynthia

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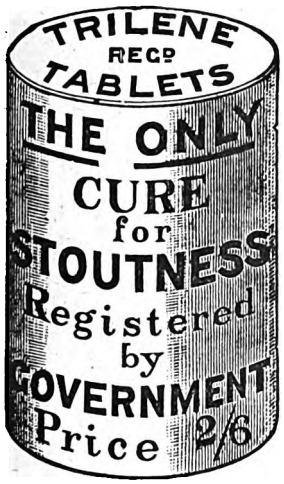

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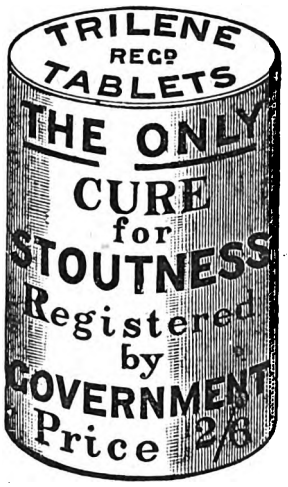

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWARD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 8lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have don world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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BILIOUSNESS

Headache and Loss of Appetite completely Cured.

"ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO I FIRST BEGAN TO SUFFER from attacks of Biliousness, which, in spite of treatment, seemed to grow worse and worse," said Mrs. Elizabeth Vowles, Chew Lane, Chew, Stoke, near Bristol, to a "Bristol Times and Mirror" Reporter. "I first had a bad headache, then pains in the chest and stomach, and felt ill all over. I could not sleep well; as to my appetite, I had none. Of course I was bound to eat, but whatever I took upset me. I at last got in such a state that I could take nothing solid without continually vomiting, and then suffering agonies of pain in the chest. I could not even take cold water, so I tried a little brandy, but it did me no good and made me sick. Of course I consulted a doctor, and he gave me a bottle of medicine, and this certainly did me some good, but the next lot I had seemed to have no effect, and I became as bad as ever. I could do no housework, and when I got up in the morning the biliousness was dreadful, my head seeming as if it would burst. For ten long years I suffered thus, but relief was yet to come. One day my son was reading a paper, when he noticed an advertisement of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness, and this seemed to strike him, for he called my attention to it and advised me to get a sample. I took these and then noticed an improvement in my condition. My appetite seemed to be returning, and, what was more, the food which I took my stomach retained. I continued the course, carefully following the directions, and after taking four boxes I was surprised to find myself well. Being able to digest my food, I gained strength, the sickness and headaches abated, and I was able to get about my work with ease and comfort. My health now compares quite favourably with that I experienced in the past, and I attribute this solely to Bile Beans, which I can and do conscientiously recommend to all who suffer as I have done."

"My son advised me to try Bile Beans."

BILE BEANS are the product of modern scientific research. They are not a mere purgative like the old-fashioned so-called remedies of 40 or 50 years ago. They act directly on the liver and digestive organs, strengthening and stimulating those organs to perform their natural duties. They produce a gentle action on the bowels, curing or preventing constipation, cleansing the stomach and ridding the system of all impurities. Do not be misled by claims of half a hundred pills in box, where probably four to six constitute a dose, and the doses cannot be discontinued. ONE BILE BEAN IS ONE DOSE. They can be discontinued after the cure is effected; they are purely vegetable; they contain no harmful drugs, and they are the SAFEST FAMILY MEDICINE.

Bile Beans FOR Biliousness

Bile Beans for Biliousness promptly and permanently cure Headache, Constipation, Piles, Liver Troubles, Bad Breath, Indigestion, Flatulence, Dizziness, Loss of Appetite, Buzzing in the Head, Pimples, Debility, Loss of Energy, Anæmia, and all Female Ailments. Of all Medicine Vendors, 1/1½ and 2/9 per box.

SAMPLE BOX FREE.

The Proprietors of Bile Beans will forward a Sample Box Free, and a Book on Liver and Digestive Ailments, if you send your name and address, along with accompanying Coupon and 1d. stamp to cover return postage, to the BILE BEAN CO., GREEK STREET, LEEDS.

FREE SAMPLE COUPON. *Short Stories.* 12/9/03.

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SHORT STORIES

THE DAINTY HOME STORY PAPER.

TARTAN COVER
No. 11.—MACQUARRIE.

No. 768.] Week ending September 19th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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A New Model No. 3a F.P.K. taking Pictures 5½ by 3¼.

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Safely, surely and without bad after effects.

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ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.**, Sole Proprietor **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Countess Furstenberg, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well." Mrs. Crossley, of Ross Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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SHORT STORIES

No. 768.] Week Ending September 19th, 1903. [One Penny.

A MODERN MARTYR.

The Story of a Jealous Man's Revenge.

One evening from out a side and almost secret entrance of a palatial mansion, situated in the aristocratic part of St. Petersburg, came a figure.

This figure, low and somewhat thick-set, hurried through deserted byways, to the business portion of the city. Here the lights disclosed in the pedestrian a man, in appearance of about seventy-five years of age.

Despite his sturdy, compact form, the hair that fell upon his collar was white, and with the black, bushy eyebrows that overhung the darkly-smoked glasses protecting the eyes, gave a somewhat extraordinary expression to the dark countenance.

His gait grew less swift and even laggard; but as he strolled along the thoroughfares those keen eyes behind the spectacles swept a constant, searching regard upon every face he met, as one fearing detection.

At length he paused upon the corner of a narrow street and swept another of those piercing glances about him; then, apparently satisfied, darted down the passageway, which was scarcely more than an alley, and eventually disappeared.

Just then another figure was seen, evidently following the white-haired man. In stature he was deformed, and of less height than a child of twelve years old, though the head, even for a figure of fine proportions, was immense.

He stood motionless, that bushy, gigantic head thrust slightly forward, about him something to suggest the ferocious, half-baffled expectancy of a bloodhound lost to its trail. Then he proceeded down the alley-way, walking slowly in the shadow of the houses, his sharp, fierce eyes piercing the gloom like fiery meteors.

Not a human object met his sight. The hour was now growing late, the way was deserted, the frowning fronts of the residences owned by tradesmen presented uncompromising darkness, not a light being visible.

A muttered oath broke from the lips of the disappointed pursuer, and, after standing irresolute for a few minutes, he started for the more populous portion of the city, where, jumping into a closed carriage waiting, bearing upon its panels the escutcheon of a noble family, he was driven to a castle in the outskirts of the capital.

Here, alighting and ringing the bell, he was admitted by an obsequious porter, and, without waiting for directions or invitation, made his way to a certain door through which, after a brief, imperative knock, he entered to the apartment within.

This chamber, of great size and elegance, was occupied by two ladies of aristocratic bearing—evidently mother and daughter.

As the hunchback entered, the elder lady rose and advanced to meet him, with suppressed eagerness in her look and manner. He made an impatient gesture towards their companion. The mother turned.

"Olga," she said, "your uncle has some business with me; leave us alone for the present."

The girl rose and withdrew, after first formally bowing to the visitor, to whom the Princess Artoff now again turned.

"Well?" she said, with suppressed excitement.

A malicious smile came across the man's lips.

"My dear sister-in-law," he said, "I regret that I have no pleasant intelligence to impart."

A smothered exclamation of disappointment escaped the lady.

In the light of the hundred tapers certain features in her companion that the darkness had concealed, now became visible; but at midnight or noonday he could be nothing but a monstrosity.

His cloak thrown aside showed his distorted but thick-set figure to be richly dressed. But inhuman and revolting as was his form, his countenance, developed to its normal condition, strange to say, was to a certain degree handsome, though it bore a bitter expression.

No one in St. Petersburg was more noted for dissipation and every kind of excess, than the dwarfed Prince d'Artoff, the last heir of his race. But though physically dwarfed, his spirit, intellect, passions, had developed to an abnormal degree, and all pandered to the evil he seemed to revel in.

Crossing the room he flung himself upon a divan—his sister-in-law seated herself in a chair before him.

"Yes," he continued, "I have again been unsuccessful. Not trusting to our lackeys, I, as usual, followed the figure, and as usual it disappeared almost before my very eyes. What became of it I am not prepared to say. But I swear I will solve the mystery!"

"But are you sure that you are not mistaken in the identity?" said the woman eagerly.

"As sure as I am that that haughty, unbending girl shall yield to my power," returned the other, through his shut teeth. "I followed the person from a back entrance of Ivan Drasky's residence to the lonely and humble locality it nightly seeks.

"I cannot be mistaken in that bull-like form, that shuffling gait. They are his—it is Ivan Drasky in disguise. And why this concealment, if there is not some mystery in his life?"

"True. But for years he has been a wealthy and respected citizen of St. Petersburg, though somewhat noted for parsimony in his dealings."

"He is a mean, sordid cur, with money for a goal, despite

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all. And there is a dark page in his life that I will turn before the season dies," muttered the prince.

A look of anxiety and impatience was in his companion's countenance. She had risen and was pacing the tiled floor of the luxurious room.

"There is little time to lose," she said, in a suppressed voice. "If there is anything in this man's history that will give you control of him, you must know it soon, or we must abandon ourselves to failure—you to losing a wife, I a fortune.

"The marriage of Ilma Drasky to my nephew, Count Karl Petroff, will undoubtedly take place in a few weeks. By the will of that madman—my brother and his father—not a kopeck of his immense fortune reverts to me unless Karl attains his fortieth birthday unmarried, in which case I can claim half. There are yet four years before I shall be safe.

"My child is comparatively poor—Karl immensely rich, aside from his inheritance. I always thought Olga safe since her cousin has lived to this age in celibacy. But, despite all his pride and coldness, he has succumbed at last. If we could place a barrier between him and this daughter of Drasky, all would be well. Men like him never love but once.

"He is a distinguished statesman, wedded, until he knew Ilma, to the good of his country. But though the girl, rich as her father is, is far beneath him in social status, he will marry her so long as she and her father bear the respectable reputation they now possess; but cast some shadow upon them, make it a disgrace to give his proud old name into her keeping, and I will have my fortune, and you will rob him of the girl you love."

A look of passion and malevolence swept the dwarf's countenance. He sprang up, stamping his foot savagely. In his fury he looked like an ogre.

"I do love her!" he cried, "despite her haughty refusal of my hand, her scorn, her loathing, that she makes no effort to conceal—through it all my love has lived! But I swear, though she may never be mine, neither shall she marry the man of her choice. There *must* be some way to thwart them.

"Old Drasky has long aroused my suspicions. For what purpose is he disguised? What business takes him to this humble, almost disreputable, neighbourhood every night?

"I dare never go near enough to him to see the exact house in which he disappears, for his eyes are so keen. But I have repeatedly sent servants to investigate the business of the inhabitants, and find that the street is composed of tradespeople, poor, ignorant, and above suspicion. Yet I swear there is a mystery connected with old Ivan."

Princess Artoff paused in her rapid walk and stood before him.

"Artoff," she said sharply, "it may be that he is a Nihilist."

"I myself have thought of that possibility," returned the other moodily. "But there is not man enough in him to take the risk—not soul enough to share sentiment—not generosity enough to sympathise with any object or principle unconnected with his self-interest. No—he is not a Nihilist. Would to Heaven he were—if we could prove it against him! Petroff at the head of the Government, and faithful statesman that I admit he is, would never dare—however much his heart might plead for her—connect himself with a daughter of a Nihilist."

"Then what *is* he?" cried the woman in despair.

"As yet I am not prepared to answer. Give me time. Such impatience will ruin all."

* * * * *

A few days later, in her father's mansion stood Ilma Drasky. Ivan, her parent, though bearing an unblemished reputation, was, nevertheless, well known to be miserly in his dealings with everyone but himself and daughter, silent and unsociable.

It was, therefore, a source of universal wonder that he could be the father of a girl whose reputation throughout the city bore indisputable evidence of her beauty, both of mind and person.

Highly educated and accomplished, amiable in disposition, and generous of soul, this daughter of the house of Drasky was the perfection of womanhood. In stature, unlike Ivan, she was tall and unexceptionally graceful

Her complexion, soft, creamy, was colourless save for the scarlet lips, around which was a peculiarly pensive curve, as though her nature were slightly predisposed to melancholy.

Her features were straight and clear-cut as a cameo's; her eyes, large, black, lustreless, but soul-filled, and the heavy silken hair growing low down upon the forehead was of the same rich hue.

She was standing at a window, looking down into the street, when a pair of arms were wound tightly around her waist, and, turning suddenly, she came face to face with her lover.

One glance into that proud, stern, countenance, now abandoned to the rapture of his passion, was sufficient to show the intensity of love that had at last swept the proud nature of the statesman.

A look of delight illumined the great, shadowy orbs of the girl as she fondly greeted him.

"I scarcely expected to be with you before evening," said the count, his arms still tight about her. "But there being a recess, I stole a few minutes from the palace to come to my beloved." Then, while a swarthy flush stained his countenance, and his embrace grew closer about her: "In a little while, Ilma, you will be always with me—morning, noon, night. Oh! how infinitely blessed will be that time!"

A faint flush had stolen into the girl's lovely face, but she reached up her arms and laid them about his throat.

"I can scarcely believe my great happiness," she murmured. "You, so great and noble, and distinguished—how is it you seek me, so lowly, when the proudest ladies of the land could be yours for the asking?"

"Flatterer!" he said gaily; but almost instantly his manner became characterised by a tender gravity, and, putting her gently from him, regarded her with fond admiration.

"Shall I tell you, love, why I sought you? It was because the first time I ever saw you my senses yielded to your matchless beauty—because after I grew to know you better I beheld in you everything high and noble to captivate the soul—because, when St. Petersburg, already ringing with the fame of your loveliness, grew wild with enthusiasm over your bravery in snatching with your own hands the shell from under the imperial carriage waiting for the Tsar, and never relinquishing the deadly burden until all danger for the Emperor was over, I said to my soul: 'That is the wife for me, and mine she shall be if only I can win her.' For, my darling, the Petroffs of St. Petersburg have always been warriors and statesmen.

"The women of their love have ever had but one rival to fear, and that is—*Russia*. Therefore, in selecting wives the utmost discrimination was necessary, so that no ill-assorted union would shackle their duty and retard their labour for their country. For this reason so many of my race have lived and died unmarried.

"But the wives that *have* been among us were brave, self-sacrificing women, without a shadow to taint the glory of their memory. And *you*—I say it honestly—are worthy of your predecessors. For I believe you are too noble and patriotic to be jealous of that which in the heart of every true statesman must be first, even beyond wife and children—his country!"

As she listened her countenance had kindled with his enthusiasm—the lofty spirit in her that was made for martyrs irradiated her eyes.

"Jealous of Russia!" she said, softly. "Never! I am her true daughter; and my husband"—another soft flush that made him draw her again into his arms—"shall be given to her service in time of peace as well as of war."

At this juncture, after some discreet difficulty in opening the door, Drasky entered, and respectfully greeted his intended son-in-law.

In complexion he was dark almost to swarthiness, though his hair was of light brown. But his eyes, keen, piercing, restless—true insight into his sharp and avaricious temperament—were black as sloes.

With all his greed, if any man ever adored his child, that man was Ivan, as his glance now resting on the queenly woman testified; and it was an adoration as completely reciprocated by its object.

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But, despite the alterations in his appearance, any person who had keenly observed that disguised figure pursued by the dwarfed Prince a few nights previously could not fail to recognise its proportions and gait in the man now standing before his daughter and her lover.

At this moment a commotion in the street attracted their attention. Looking out, a miserable spectacle met their view.

In the middle of the street, like pack-horses, came a wretched crowd, composed of men, women, and children, the pathos of human suffering and soul despair in their heavy, dark faces.

There were old men and women treading with trembling steps the rough flagstones of this city which had known their youth and rejected their age. There were sturdy fathers, leading by the hand little ones whose tired eyes roamed in sad wonder upon their surroundings. There were heart-broken mothers cradling in their arms the infants too young to know misfortune, yet none the less homeless and friendless.

There was youth, robbed of its lightness, and branded with the stigma of disgrace, while after all came the merciless mob, howling, gibing, stoning, and up to that luxurious chamber floated fierce cries of the people casting reproaches on them.

Ilma shrank away from the window with a low cry, and covered her face with her hands.

Count Petroff's countenance softened in the sternness that had seized it at sight of that wretched herd outside, as he witnessed her emotion, and he gently took down her hands.

"What is it, Ilma?" he asked slowly, looking at her searchingly.

She made a gesture towards the street, but withdrew still further from the window.

"Poor, miserable unfortunates!" she murmured, in an unsteady voice. "I cannot but pity them, erring though I know them to be."

"A dog were more deserving of your pity, sweet one," he said, tenderly, though in his voice there was a stern sincerity. He was the lover no longer, but the statesman. "The wife of a Petroff must have no sympathy with the Jews. The *people* are driving that race from the city—not the rulers; but it is right and just.

"The Jew, in the eyes of a Russian, is a rank rebel, an oppressor, a devourer of every right and liberty, an absorber of every privilege, but as ungrateful as a carrion-bird, and deserves to be driven from every Christian community. However secret his identity, his mere existence contaminates and breeds pestilence!"

She had somewhat recovered her composure, though in her heart there was a dull pain that suffering always occasioned.

That horrible procession had now passed, though the din and roar of the shouting populace, softened by space, still floated up to them like the distant thunders of surging billows.

By chance at this moment her glance fell upon her father. His face was colourless, his eyes, wild, horrified, were fixed upon her in a look that lingered with her for days.

She made as if she would spring towards him, but he made a forbidding, almost warning gesture, and glancing once at Petroff, turned and went out of the room.

Pained and mystified, Ilma stood silent, marvelling as to the cause of that agonised look in her father's eyes. Was it possible that he had recognised a friend among those Jewish refugees?

Soon, with many a tender word and fond caress, Petroff left her to return to state duties, and she was alone, with the memory of Ivan's strange expression to share her solitude.

That evening she attended a state ball, escorted by her lover. As he was assisting her from the carriage in the gleam of the thousand lamps, some power seemed to draw her attention to the carriage standing in front of her own.

Petroff and Ilma looked out of the window and saw the howling, frantic mob passing by. The girl was moved to compassion for them. "They are not worthy of your pity" said the Count.

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Looking towards it, she met the gaze of a pair of eyes, burning with fierce hate, passion, and desire, and caught the glimpse of a burly, mis-shapen form, whose hideous shape even the many priceless furs in which it was wrapped could not entirely conceal.

The girl shuddered and shrank closer to her lover's side. Ever watchful and abiding as was his love, Petroff noted the involuntary gesture of his beloved, and looked down at her in tender questioning.

"It is that horrible Prince Artoff," she explained slowly. "The expression in his eyes affects me strangely. And I meet him so often that it would seem as though he followed me."

Petroff's face flushed with displeasure.

"The coward!" he muttered, tightening his clasp on the small hand resting upon his arm. "If I thought so, I would wring the degraded life out of him. I always feel like shooting him when I think of his presumption in offering himself to you, my queen and idol!"

* * * * *

As Ivan Drasky, disguised for his nightly trip, was admitting himself with a secret key to the house to which under such circumstances he always repaired, a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder. Trembling all over, he turned and confronted the burly figure of his captor, beside whom stood a short, humped form he knew too well. It was this latter who spoke.

"Ivan Drasky," said those sneering, malicious tones, "your cause is lost—I have pierced to your well-guarded secret."

The quaking man made a miserable attempt at recovering his composure.

"What mean you, your Highness?" he queried, in accents he vainly essayed to steady.

Even in the dusk of the gloomy street the malicious gleam of the dwarf's fiery eyes was visible. He stretched up towards Ivan and uttered a few low, mysterious words.

From the miserable man broke a shriek of fear and horror, and he would have dropped to the flagstones had not his captor forcibly sustained him.

"It's false! It's a lie to ruin me!" he again shrieked, now struggling desperately with the detaining grasp.

A jeering, malicious laugh broke from the dwarf.

"Take me into the back rooms of this house, friend Ivan, and I will prove the truth of my assertions," he sneered.

"Never!" groaned the trembling, unhappy man, endeavouring to seize the key for the purpose of concealing it.

"Admit me," thundered his foe, "or I will sound the alarm, raise a mob, and when the truth of you is known, you will be seized by it and treated as a mad cur!"

Almost panic-stricken, the old man unlocked the door and led the way to a suite of rooms whose furniture and contents but corroborated the fatal secret now in the possession of his enemy.

"Now do you deny it?" sneered Artoff triumphantly.

Resistance, denial, were worthless. The detected man flung himself upon the floor at the feet of the dwarf, crying aloud for mercy.

"Spare me!" he moaned. "Take my houses, my gold, my everything I possess, but keep my secret for my child's sake."

The dwarf's face had grown more evil and more triumphant.

"You can buy my silence with but one price—give me your daughter."

Again that wild shriek broke from the wretched father.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake! My child, my beautiful Rachel. I cannot—you *know* she is betrothed to Count Petroff."

"I will hear her answer from her own lips," sneered the dwarf. "And for that purpose will go to her at once."

Ivan caught desperately at his foe, who, however, eluded him and went his way.

He immediately sought Drasky's residence. By dint of bribing the servants, Artoff succeeded in gaining admittance to Ilma.

How lovely she looked in the gleam of the burning tapers. Around her elegant figure fell the rich folds of her crimson velvet gown; her throat and arms bare, and like columns of rarest marble, were adorned with strings of rubies and amber; in her small ears were jewels of the same. Her head carried high, like one used to wearing a crown, was destitute of ornament save for the heavy braids of purple-black hair coiled low on the neck.

As the dwarf stood regarding this dazzling vision his face grew more evil, in his eyes deepened that look of vast desire and vindictive triumph.

"This is an unexpected visit, Prince," she observed, haughtily, "and, I might even add, undesired on my part. Have you business with me?"

"I have, madam," returned the guest. "Important business, if you will grant me an interview."

He wheeled up his chair before her and climbed into it.

"Probably you can surmise the business that brings me again into your presence," he began. "I once offered you my hand in marriage, which you refused. Since then circumstances have transpired that may induce you to change your mind. Therefore I have sought you to-night to repeat my offer."

She partially sprang to her feet in her angry excitement; then, controlling herself, sank back upon the divan. But her countenance, grand, proud as an outraged queen's, testified to her indignation at his persistency.

"I told you then that I had but one answer to give to your suit," she replied slowly but haughtily. "And I tell you now no time or change of circumstances can alter that answer."

"You again refuse my offer?"

His evil countenance had grown fierce and threatening.

"I do, once and for ever."

For a minute Artoff's rage was too great to allow him speech. His eyes, like a basilisk's, dwelt upon the splendid beauty he coveted as though he would wipe it out for ever.

"Listen to me, madam," he at last hissed through his clinched teeth. "You shall marry me or I will cover your name with infamy. Take your choice between being my wife or the gibe, the ridicule, the horror of the people. Your destiny is in my hands—not only yours, but your father's, and a more wretched one woman never had, if you tempt me to do my worst."

This time she sprang to her feet in uncontrollable passion—her eyes flashed fire.

At this moment Count Petroff was shown into the apartment. At one glance he took in the scene—with one spring he reached the side of the woman he adored, and his eyes, gleaming with a lion's wrath, fixed upon the miserable object before them.

"Ah, Count," said Artoff, with insufferable insolence, "you are come in time. I was about to enlighten your betrothed upon one or two little matters upon which she is either really ignorant or has wilfully deceived you. Are you aware, my lord, that she to whom you are betrothed comes of that despicable race—that long ere this, had the world but pierced to the hideous secret her hound of a father has so well concealed, she would have been driven with lash and stone to join the herd of her infamous people? Are you aware, sir count, that *you* are the betrothed of the daughter of a Hebrew?"

For a moment there was an intense hush, the girl standing dazed and bewildered. But in the next her lover leapt towards the dwarf as one wild beast springs upon another.

"Traducer!" he cried, in fierce passion, catching the hunchback by the throat, "take back those words, or I will wring the wretched, craven life out of you!"

"Truth can never traduce," returned the other doggedly. "And if you doubt the truth of my accusation, look at the face of that Hebrew—you may be convinced.

All eyes turned towards Ivan, who had just staggered into the room. One glance at the wild, ashen countenance was sufficient to establish the miserable truth.

For an instant the magnificent strength of Petroff failed under the frightful blow. He reeled back against the wall.

Then he recovered himself with an effort. With a look of murder in his maddened eyes, he turned to Artoff, pointing to the door; and, not daring to disobey the dwarf slunk out

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He sprang forward and caught the hunchback by the throat.

Not until then did Ilma, standing like a statue of despair, move or speak. Now she turned to Ivan, who, with his head buried in his hands, crouched in a chair.

"Father," she cried, "is this thing true?"

Ivan lifted his head—a look of rage had swept into his countenance.

"It is," he shrieked.

Ilma sank down upon a divan and lifted her blanched, agonised face to her lover. Between the two—but now so supremely blest in their love—had come a yawning precipice that no time or circumstance could bridge. No more in all the world could they be aught to one another.

"It was for your sake, Rachel, that I did it," continued the father, and the girl shuddered as that name of miserable significance fell upon her ear. "Your mother died at your birth, and from that hour the love I bore her has been lavished upon her child.

"Ah, Rachel"—he seemed to experience a morbid pleasure in calling her by that name—"forgive your father, when you think that it is for your sake I have sinned and deceived, turning apostate to the faith of my forefathers. I could not bear that you, equal in beauty and intellect to the proudest in the land, should grow to womanhood, banned from your birth.

"I foresaw this persecution of the chosen of Israel—I looked ahead and saw this day when the Hebrew martyrs are stoned through the streets, and driven from the land of their birth. How could I endure that you should suffer this doom? I had wealth, you growing in beauty and intelligence, and I swore to save you from the fate of your people.

"I accordingly removed from Hungary, where we were then living, and with only the disguise of a light wig which I have always worn, and the assumed name of Drasky, began a new life in St. Petersburg. You both know how successful it has been. I saw you lifted from out the shadow of your birth into the beautiful sunlight in which I had hoped ever to keep you.

"For years, disguised by wigs, spectacles, and paint, I carried on the business of a pawnshop in one of the poor localities of this city, thus adding to the wealth which I was treasuring for you. But when the hatred and rank prejudice became so strong against the Hebrews, I was compelled to close my establishment.

"Fortunately I, under the name of Isaacs, owned the house and was thus enabled to lock up the premises with the stock concealed within. This I intended by degrees to remove to our house, and for the purpose of making preparations went there every night. Through some means that fiendish dwarf pierced to my secret, and all is lost!"

He ended with a groan and again buried his face in his trembling hands.

Again old Ivan lifted his head, his eyes piteous, shrinking, sought his child.

"Do you hate me—do you treasure wrath?" he queried piteously. "Ah! Rachel, child of my dead Rebecca, my whole life has been devoted to you—turn not against me."

She rose, crossed with a steady step to her father, and put her arm around his neck, in a gentle, infinite protection.

"While life last we will cling together," she said, her head reared with the grandeur of immolation. "In all the world we have but one another; on the face of the earth we are wanderers and Pariahs. We will go together.

The Count, standing alone, bent his head upon the marble mantel, and the bitter, scalding tears of a proud man's intolerable anguish dropped one by one upon the cold stone.

And now up from the street came a sound that caused him to lift his head—that sent in his heavy, despairing eyes a look of wild fear and horror. Nearer and nearer it came, that hoarse, dull roar of an angry populace, until it resolved itself into furious shrieks and yells and curses. Petroff leapt towards the father and daughter.

"It is the mob!" he cried. "That dwarfish fiend has sounded the alarm. Oh, for God's sake! Could not even *this* have been spared us? Fly!—Conceal yourselves! You might expect more mercy from a pack of wolves. Hide somewhere while I deal with them, and as soon as I can I will seek and take care of you."

"Get up," Petroff cried fiercely to Ivan. "Will you give your daughter to the mob? My carriage is at the side entrance—try to reach it and drive straight to the castle."

Ivan sat like one paralyzed. Brave and pale, his daughter stood above him, like a prophetess of old, her eyes steady and shining with a great courage, her head held high.

"It is too late," she said to her lover. "The rabble are already in the house. To defend us will be to ruin you—only God can befriend us. Leave the house."

But he never moved. And now at last the shouts of the people, the tramp of their feet in the beautiful chambers they were ravishing and destroying, the loud shattering of marble, the heavy crash of broken furniture, roused Ivan, and he sprang to his feet with a shriek of terror.

But at this moment into the chamber came that hooting, mad throng. Even the presence of the most powerful statesman of the day could not restrain them. They swept in between Petroff and the Jews, despite the maddened, desperate resistance of the former.

A wild, maddened cry broke from the Count, and he flung himself among the throng; but he was powerless.

With all his fame, fortune, power, what could he do for her—this poor, unhappy daughter of a usurer? Absolutely nothing! Where he stood a hoarse, choking sob broke in his throat, and he fell face downward upon the floor in unconsciousness.

A week later, a shipload of refugees sailed for America; Ivan and his daughter were amongst them.

Ilma, brave girl, unflinchingly faced the new life into which she was entering.

Annie J. Duffell.

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A Romantic Marriage.

Telling of a Highland Love Affair.

ON the shores of one of Scotland's most beautiful lochs a fisher-lad and a girl stood together. It was an ideal spot for a love idyll; the rippling waters, surrounded by the grand mountain scenery, made the most perfect setting for a romance.

The lovers were as perfect in their way as the scenery. The man was as handsome as a young Apollo, browned by the sun and full of manly vigour which redeemed his beauty from effeminacy.

The girl was tall, graceful as a young sapling, with a wild-rose bloom on her lovely little face, and eyes the exact colour of the wild hyacinth, fringed with long dark lashes that matched her curling hair.

The man was talking eagerly, while the girl was listening silently, but presently he broke off abruptly, kissed his companion, and went away along the shore. The girl stood lost in a reverie from which she was aroused presently by a fresh girlish voice.

"Meg!" it called.

The girl looked round quickly and glanced from the face behind her to the figure of the fisherman still visible in the distance.

"Dolly!" she exclaimed, "Dolly—you saw——"

Dolly was a slim overgrown child of fifteen, in a short cotton frock, and with her bright hair flowing over her shoulders.

"Yes, Meg," she answered simply.

"What did you see—exactly?"

"I saw young Sinclair kiss you," said Dolly straightforwardly. Dolly was always straightforward. It was her great charm to some people, her most irritating quality to others.

Meg sat down on a rock and pulled her cousin down beside her.

"It's all right, child," she said lightly, "I'm going to marry Angus Sinclair."

"Oh, I wouldn't, Meg," she said in her awkward school-girl diction, but her tone was eloquent.

"Why not? Aunt Mary won't mind. She'd be glad to get rid of me anyhow, and so would May."

Dolly was silent. She knew that her mother and sister disliked the high-spirited, beautiful, poor relation whom circumstances had brought under their roof, and only a distinct promise to her dying husband that she would afford a home to his brother's orphan daughter prevented Mrs. Conyngham from turning the girl out.

"Mother won't like it, though," Dolly jerked out after a pause.

"Yes she will. It'll give her a good excuse to wash her hands of me. Besides, I'm of age and can do as I like."

"Sinclair isn't a gentleman."

"I know. And a man of his class would be quite impossible elsewhere. But these Highlanders, with their mingled courtesy and independence, are Nature's gentlemen. Angus speaks correctly, and the Highland accent is rather pretty, I think. Then he's fairly well-to-do. His father owns several cottages besides the one Aunt Mary has taken for the summer.

"This is a lovely spot, Dolly. I shouldn't mind living here, and one doesn't want riches in such a retired place. 'The world forgetting, by the world forgot.' Angus loves me, and he is the handsomest man I have ever seen; now, isn't he? Think of Miles Oakley beside him."

Dolly looked quickly at her cousin.

"Miles is a gentleman."

"And ugly and stupid. Angus is handsome, clever, and he adores me. I once thought Miles—but never mind that. I shall marry Angus. It will be a romantic marriage, but I believe it will be a hundred times happier than the conventional one that May is sure to make."

"I don't believe you'll be happy," said Dolly.

"I'm sure I shall. It will be a case of 'all for love and the world well lost.' Aunt Mary and May will never speak to me again, but you won't desert me, Dolly, will you? You are such a staunch little soul."

"I won't, Meg. You can always count on me." Dolly's large brown eyes shone with unshed tears, for she was devoted to her cousin with that devotion a young girl often feels for an older woman. "But I'm so afraid you won't be happy, Meg. I'm afraid you're making a big mistake."

Meg smiled and kissed the soft cheek near her own.

"You darling, you needn't be afraid. But, dear Dolly, you won't say anything to Aunt Mary, will you? There's nothing arranged yet, and I don't want the storm to break before its time."

Dolly promised secrecy, and kept her promise faithfully until Meg's disappearance on the morning on which the party were to return to London rendered silence unnecessary.

* * * * *

"Miss Dorothy, a lady wishes to see you."

Dolly turned round.

"Did she ask for me particularly, Saunders? Didn't she give any name?"

"She asked particularly for Miss Dolly, and said she wouldn't send in her name, but her business was important."

Dolly glanced impatiently at the clock. She was expecting a very special visitor, and he was almost due now.

"It isn't a bit convenient, Saunders," she said, "but you may show her up. If—if Mr. Oakley comes while she is here put him into the library and let me know."

Five years had passed since Meg's romantic marriage, and Dorothy had grown into a very sweet and dainty little woman. She was not tall, nor was she, strictly speaking, pretty, though her deep brown eyes, fair curling hair, and brilliant colouring made her very attractive, but her chief charm was her expression of candour, innocence, and sincerity.

She had tried to keep up a correspondence with Meg, in spite of her mother's displeasure, but she had only had one letter from her cousin, and in that Meg said she did not wish to hear from any of her relatives. But Dolly had never forgotten her pretty cousin, and now as the door opened to admit a tall, graceful woman in mourning, Dolly uttered a scream and flew into her arms.

"Oh, Meg, my darling, how glad I am to see you."

"Is Aunt Mary at home?" asked Meg nervously, returning Dolly's embrace with interest.

"No. She won't be back for a long time yet. Sit down, darling—I'll ring for tea and we'll have a long talk."

"And May—where is she?"

"Oh, May's married. She married a very rich man just six months ago—the conventional marriage you always said she would make. But she seems most happy. And you, dear? Are you very happy?"

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Meg had sunk down on a low chair by the fire, and was looking round the once familiar room.

"How pretty it all is!" she said, drawing a deep breath. "How lovely the flowers are! How delightful it is to see a pretty drawing-room after that odious little cottage. Ah Dolly, you were right, my marriage was a great mistake."

"Was it, dear? I'm so sorry."

There was a short silence while tea was brought in. Then Dolly brought her cousin over a cup of tea and some dainty little cakes.

"Thank you, dear. Oh, Dolly, I have suffered for my folly. Angus thought I had money. I told him my real position quite at first—that I was a poor relation and acted as your governess, but he thought it was all my romantic nonsense, for he could not believe a lady, as he knew me to be, could be penniless. When he found there was no money and realised that my relatives had cast me off, and he had a useless lady-wife on his hands, he was furious.

"I got your letter, my staunch little Dolly, but I had to tell you not to write again because Angus insisted that all my correspondence should pass through his hands.

"It was an awful life. I had to fetch water from the well, to cook, light fires, do all the work, and Angus' mother and sisters sneered at me for a useless fine lady who was just a burden and expense to the family. Then the food was so coarse. In winter we lived on salt herring and potatoes almost entirely. Then—the baby came."

Meg paused and tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, Dolly, she was such a comfort—a wee, wee thing, fair as a lily and beautiful as an angel. I called her Dolly after you. But she was delicate and wanted great care. I had no nurse for her, no servant at all. Angus was indignant when I wanted one, yet he was quite well enough off to keep at least one servant. He said what was good enough for his mother was good enough for me, and *she* had never wanted a servant."

"Was he unkind to you?" whispered Dolly.

"He didn't mean to be. It was just what you said, a big mistake. He had fancied himself in love with me as I had fancied myself in love with him, but he had hoped for money with me, and resented the disappointment.

"Then, too, we had nothing in common, and he was jealous of my superiority over his people. He didn't like my trying to keep to my own refined habits, and bring the baby up to be like myself.

"He was a good man in his own way, but small-minded and tyrannical. The child died in infancy, and just a year ago Angus was drowned while fishing. I took what little there was and came to London."

"Have you been a year in London without coming to me?" cried Dorothy.

"I wouldn't come till I was doing fairly well. I have a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, together with a friend who is also a widow, and we are getting on very well indeed. So I thought this afternoon I might come and see you."

"I'm so glad, and, Meg, I shall come and see you."

"Good, true little friend. Do you remember Miles Oakley and how you always stuck up for him?

"Ah me! I have sometimes—wished—but never mind that now. Good-bye, darling, I must go, but I'll come again, for you're just the same as ever, just as sweet and loving, just as true. You were always true."

A hurried embrace and she was gone.

"Always true," repeated Dolly as the door closed behind her cousin. "Ah, Meg, if you only knew what it costs me to be true now!"

She sank down on a low chair before the fire, so lost in thought that she did not hear the door open after a time, and started violently as she felt a kiss on her cheek.

"Miles!" she cried, jumping up.

Miles Oakley was thirty-three, decidedly plain, and with no resemblance to a Greek god or a young Apollo, but a gentleman to his finger tips.

"Well, little sweetheart," he began, trying to take Dolly in his arms, but she gently repulsed him.

"Don't, Miles. I have something to tell you. Five years ago you used to come here very much, and mother thought you wanted May and so did May herself. But I knew better. You wanted Meg."

"Wise little woman, I did." They were both standing; Dolly looking pale and resolute, Miles gazing at her thoroughly puzzled.

"The night before May was married," Dolly went on, "she asked me to help her turn out her desk and burn old letters, looking them over first. I came upon one addressed to Miss M. Conyngham, but beginning 'My darling Meg.' It was from you asking Meg to marry you. May told me it was brought to her by mistake, and out of spite she kept it."

"That's what became of that letter, then! I've often wondered."

"But don't you see what this means?" asked Dorothy. "Meg was piqued by your silence and rushed into this disastrous marriage. But she is now a widow, free, and lovelier than ever. I have just seen her, Miles, and I can give you her address. Go to her. Never mind me. Make her happy and be happy yourself."

"You noble girl, you true woman," said Miles, deeply moved. He took both her hands in his, and drew her towards him. "But you are utterly wrong, my darling. Listen! I did admire Meg very much, and I did write that letter. No answer came, but, not being a fellow in a novel, I wasn't going to take it for granted that silence meant a refusal.

"I saw Meg, found she hadn't had my letter, and repeated my proposal. She refused me. She was very candid; said she was a passionate lover of the beautiful and of the romantic, and that I was too commonplace and too ugly for her. I did think of trying again, but you went off to Scotland immediately, and then I heard of her romantic marriage. And then I fell in love with you, dear."

"But she is free now," faltered Dolly, "and more beautiful than ever."

"And if she were a thousand times more beautiful than ever, what is that to me?" cried Miles with sudden fire. "Free, is she? But I am not, and would not be for worlds. Dorothy, my own, my darling, believe me," drawing her to his breast, all unresisting, "believe me, sweet one, 'there are no birds in last year's nests,' and all the love in my heart belongs to Dorothy and to Dorothy alone."

Vera Serkoff.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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IVA'S FIRST DAY DREAM.

A Story of What Might Have Been.

ALONG the steep, tree-clad bank of a winding west country stream a young man climbed one bright, blazing June afternoon.

Entirely bewildered as to his whereabouts, now he stopped to peer up the unexplored heights, now to look back upon the silvery thread below, always starting afresh, puzzled as ever as to his right route.

Soon, by good fortune, he stumbled on a guide.

Halting by a tangled underwood, where shadows and sunshine played hide-and-seek in the summer breeze, he saw beyond the moving branches what, from a distance, he had mistaken for a bit of grey crag, but what in truth was a decaying wall of some old monastic cell, and leaning lightly against it a young, girlish form, a book neglected at her feet, hands lazily clasped, and dark eyes dreamily gazing into the distance.

The south wind, stealing round an ivied corner, ruffled the dark feathers in her hat and stirred the short, curling chestnut hair below; but whatever whispers it bore upon its wings, it carried no tales of the stranger close at hand, no suspicion of an admiring watcher intruding upon that happy solitude.

"I beg your pardon, but may I ask if I'm on the right way to Mr. Hurst's, of Perristone?" A vivid blush rose on the young face that turned towards the inquirer with the answer:

"You are right if you wish to walk round by the bridge."

"But I think I was told to take a nearer way," said the newcomer, pushing forward through a miniature forest of bracken and oak saplings, and disclosing, under the broad-brimmed hat he raised, his sunburnt features. "I was to find Mr. Hurst's boat, ferry myself over if it was on this side, or shout for it if it was opposite. I have kept watch for the boat all along, but failed to find it. Can you kindly direct me to it?"

A glance, half-shy, half-amused, came with the response to this:

"I am afraid the boat is nowhere near. Some of them from the house are fishing from it, I believe."

"By Jove! And the bridge——"

"Will take you four miles round. The river winds so."

Now the day was delicious for doing nothing, and doing that at one's leisure; but the very idea of a four-mile trudge under a three-o'clock sun was exhausting.

The young man hesitated, casting longing eyes at a mossy seat near by in a cool, shady angle.

His young guide had much ado to keep from laughing, and a pair of fascinating dimples began to hover about her cheeks.

"Is there no other way to get over?" said he, distinctly disinclined to go.

"None at all," said she, with a shake of the head.

"Then I have no choice. Thank you very much for directing me."

And, adding something to his farewell about being forced to get on to Perristone, the stranger turned to begin his long walk.

Hereat compunction overtook the young lady, and her detaining hand brought him to a standstill.

"Is it Mr. Hurst you are wanting to see?"

"Well, partly—yes."

"Then he is not at home. I saw him drive towards Ross half an hour back."

"Indeed! Thank you; but I must still go on. I shall find Mrs. Hurst within."

"Oh, no! Mrs. Hurst was to have come back from Gloucester yesterday, but instead she only returns this evening."

This seemed a stop final; but the gentleman appeared to be still undecided, or perhaps he enjoyed prolonging the conversation.

"I believe there are two Mr. Hursts, of Perristone. I am speaking of—of the squire."

"And so"—with a very pretty smile—"am I."

"And I bring a note to him from my hostess, Mrs. Furnival, of Coombside, who is his sister."

"Aunt Helen! Oh, then, give it to me, please, for I am his daughter."

At this off went the young man's hat again; the note was handed forth, and a prolonged study of the bright, young face enjoyed while its owner, taking the underlined "*Immediate*" for leave, opened and read this missive to her father:

"DEAR HUGH,—*Please entertain the bearer of this for a few hours, and keep him to dinner. He is Captain Ryland, son of my old school fellow you fell so desperately in love with thirty years ago! I am planning a little surprise for him, and want him out of the way. Will explain when I come this evening with another friend. Love to Charlotte, who came back, of course, last night.—Your affectionate sister,*

"HELEN FURNIVAL."

"*Give Iva five-and-twenty kisses for me! The child hasn't been to see me for a week.*"

Iva finished the letter, and then, with a most charming mixture of girlish dignity and childish simplicity, turned to Captain Ryland, doing the hospitable honours of the moment for her absent parents.

"They will be so glad to see you this evening," said she; "and if you don't mind coming with me, we will soon find the boys—my brothers, I mean—and the boat, and I'll ferry you across. Papa will be sorry he was out."

And then a droll smile began to lurk again about her lips and Captain Ryland came to the conclusion that the squire's daughter was the most delightful substitute for her elders, and blessed the chance that sent his steps straying up this path.

Perhaps thrown off his guard by this unceremonious intro-

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duction, he expressed his satisfaction a little too warmly, or Iva's ingenuousness took fright at compliments, but her shyness came back with a rush, and instead of loitering down the uneven way, she sprang on alone, never so much as looking to see if he were following, and gained the greensward by the river before her companion's less accustomed feet had half made the descent.

The moment he reached her—"Now," said she, with the young imperiousness that was vastly amusing, "stay here, if you please, and rest. *I* can run for Tom and Harold. I shall go much more quickly alone."

Captain Ryland begged for leave to join the search so humbly that it was graciously accorded, and therewith set in an innocent afternoon romance; for in the languid heat along the valley that search proved a most desultory affair.

"There's no particular need to hurry if Mr. Hurst won't be at home for a couple of hours," suggested the young man; and Iva agreeing, with the recollection that her brothers, coming up-stream, must pass this point, they stayed their ramble by a little hill rivulet that rippled down to its stronger sister, margined with whispering reeds and blue forget-me-nots, and on a huge lichen-tinted stone, among springing ferns and sprays of wild white rose, sat and waited most contentedly.

More than contentedly. For Wallis Ryland, at pains to undo his first blunder, put out the strength of his ten years' seniority to please; and Iva, with all the frankness of seventeen, was so ready to be propitiated that they were quickly on the best of terms, she gliding, willing as a child, into the present hour's enjoyment, he entangled every moment more, in the fresh charms of his young listener.

With the swallows circling overhead under the clear sky, no sound near save the rustling of many leaves and the rippling of gleaming waters, the most sensible of mortals would have found it hard to be prosaic.

Our couple had no extraordinary claims on sense, and soon they wandered far out of prosaic bounds.

To be sure, their words were commonplace enough—he telling of a chance encounter that brought about this visit to his mother's old friend; she talking of her home, her father, her brothers, their many pets, of which it was easy to perceive she was the chief. There was something not commonplace to him, and new to her, in the lower tone in which the young soldier declared that chance encounter a stroke of rare good fortune to him, and when she turned a pair of loving eyes towards the gables of her home, just visible on the opposite bank, asked,

"Would she never care to leave that home—*never?*"

Then into a very wonderland followed Iva, while her companion told—and told well—of far-off countries where for eight years he had seen service, and had run the gauntlet of risks that had sent scores of men about him to their graves.

Desdemona like, she hung sighing upon stories such as she had never heard before, and saw in this fair-haired guest of her aunt's the nearest embodiment of a real hero she had ever known.

"But you were safe!" she cried, with a rising colour and a long, quivering breath at the climax of some danger whereout he had come scathless, thanks to his steed's swiftness. "And oh! I am so glad that——"

"That ——?" echoed the young man, leaning a little nearer.

"That our Harold is not to be a soldier!" finished Iva, so stopping warmer words that a different answer would assuredly have betrayed Captain Ryland into uttering.

Thus quickly the minutes went by. The shadows lengthened, the golden light gathered about the tree tops; and not one thought did these young people give to time till a church bell, sounding over the hillside, startled Iva.

"Six o'clock!" she exclaimed, opening wide her eyes, as if just waking, "and the boys not back! Perhaps they went the other way, after all, and have left the boat for me. Oh, if I have kept you here for nothing, I am so sorry!"

"But I am not—I never shall be!" was the reply, in a low tone, that stirred a curious answering thrill. "And must we hurry now? Here, stay!" as a long branch of roses caught her dress. "Let me just gather some of these before we go."

A bunch of roses, a half-hour's homeward stroll side by side in silence which was more eloquent than speech; three minutes' row across the narrow stream—they would have made it hours if they could—and the brief drama drew to its final act.

The boat was moored under the willow. As the occupants stepped out one forgot to let loose the hand that lay in his.

For a few seconds they lingered so, she gazing over the peaceful meadows to the dim Welsh hills, that all to-night seemed dressed in some new beauty, he looking down on her—beauty enough for him.

Suddenly "Iva!" shouted a boyish voice, and Harold came racing down the steep lane, with a flood of questionings and explainings anent fishing and wading that lasted the whole way up to the manor.

There the home party, earlier returned, awaited them, Aunt Helen in their midst, and someone strange, whom she brought forward with many smiles, and, "Now you'll forgive me for going off to Swanley Junction alone, Captain Ryland! I wanted to make sure of her coming before I told you a word about it."

The next minute a fair young woman, with the calm air of proprietorship begotten of long engagement, was holding the gentleman's arm; and how happy he might be looking Iva never saw, for with a little cry, she had run to her mother, glad—ah, strange to say, glad almost to tears—to shelter once again by her safe side.

* * * * * * *

But that was years ago. Iva is now a gracious young wife, loving and dearly loved, the garden of her life filled with such blossoms as womanhood prizes above all others.

But now and again across her thoughts, like first notes of a melody never completed, flits a memory of warm June hours, of the first throb of an unknown pleasure, of a nameless pain—of a glimpse into a possibility never fulfilled—of the farewell she bade her childhood in a midsummer day's dream.

Mabel Villiers.

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The Cruise of the *Clan Macquarrie.*

A Tale of Scottish Fidelity.

CHARLIE, my young brother, had been fagging at his studies; I had just passed my final, and was proportionately elate. We had earned our summer holiday, we thought; and nothing loath was I when Charlie, with a map in his hand, pointed out a spot on the Caithness coast and exclaimed:

"Here we are! There we'll go! What say you, Frank?"

"Very good choice. Plenty of ozone, fishing and boating; fashion at a discount. Where is the time-table?"

A primitive fishing-village—call it Clanhead—was quickly fixed upon; and after the usual delights of railway travelling we found ourselves in a place richly endowed by nature, but without an inn.

A Highland cottage, however, proved a comfortable enough shelter; and after a night's rest and a hearty fish breakfast we strolled off towards the sea.

In the one straggling street of Clanhead were yellow-haired children, who stood in wide-eyed, innocent wonder, and stared at us. Perhaps they were overcome by the sight of our hideous brown sand-shoes; or it might have been that they were bewitched by Charlie's handsome face.

Charlie is the Adonis of our family; and I—well, I am an ugly young man, with a marvellously wide mouth, eyesight so near that I cannot pick up a sixpence without the help of my glasses, and an expression, to say the least of it, scared.

Such as we were, we stood the lads' and lasses' scrutiny unabashed, plodding on till we perceived a middle-aged man leaning on a gate in, I imagined, an attitude of repose.

He turned, however, and moved towards us.

"Will ye no' be takin' a sail the mornin', gentlemen?"

"Just what we want!" cried Charlie.

"Aweel, tak' ye the first turn to the reet an' it'll bring ye to the head o' the cliff. Some way bock ye'll see the openin' to a ravine. Gang awa' through the gap an' ye'll soon be where the sea washes the cliff-foot. Be ye canny, for the tide's high the noo, an' the shallowest water there may droun' ye. In five minutes I'll be comin' roond wi' my boat an' my mate at your service."

The boatman touched his cap and moved off; we made for the ravine, passed down it, and came suddenly upon the most magnificent expanse of rolling water that our eyes had ever feasted upon.

Shortly from, I suppose, some sheltering nook under the cliff, came along our little craft, the *Clan Macquarrie*, with her mainsail spread and her master at the helm, while Donald, his mate, kept watch at the bow.

With a "Yo ho! Steady! Yo ho!" she was "brought to" and in we scrambled, neck or nothing.

We were scarcely seated before, emerging from the ravine, toiling on with the help of a crutch over loose earth and boulders, came a girl, with a sweet but very sad face; evidently she was suffering in mind and body.

"Ech, Hinny, Hinny!" said our boatman, with a softened intonation, "ye should na act sae, my dear. When gentlemen hire the *Clan Macquarrie* they dinna expect to tak' her master's family aboord. Gang awa' hame again, Mamie."

"Oh, by all means take your girl aboard, Mr. ——"

"Ben is my name, sir, and I thank ye for your kindness. Come, then, bairn; and, look ye, dinna trust to your crutch when ye step aboord. Should the boat luff, it may slip frae under ye. Let me lay it doon at the stern, and gie me your hond. Now, steady, and in ye are!"

Ben guided the boat off, then turned to the girl again.

"Eh, my bairnie, not sae mickle as a speck o' headgear, and they bits o' fallal clothing flying aboot ye! Ye'll catch your death! Ye maun hae my jacket on. Mebbe, sir, ye'll be sae kind as to haud the tiller whiles I dress her oop? There, now, Mamie, are ye no' warmly buskit?"

Off we were before the wind, our swelling mainsail hiding the man at the bow.

The grand sea and sky threw Charlie and myself into ecstasies. Ben, used to such scenes, was quiet and, I thought, sad, while the lassie looked decidedly sleepy.

"Eh, my doo," said Ben, "ye were oop wi' the birds; I marked ye windin' your way to the cliffs by the first glint o' the sun. Ye's liken to a wraith, my dearie. Ye's aye wandering. Aweel, lay doon your head a while on my shoulder, and be ye takin' a wee bit sleep the noo."

With his disengaged arm Ben supported the frail little body, and soon his charge was dozing as restfully as any weary child.

As she slept I espied a wedding-ring on her finger; and even in repose her face told a tale of mental and bodily suffering. Some heavy calamity, I thought, must have fallen upon her.

Her childlike confidence in Ben, and his tenderness towards her, were pathetic; and, altogether, my sympathy was won.

Presently I ventured to ask if she were not an invalid; and Ben returned:

"Oo, yes, sir; and she is my only bairn. Pretty doo. She married ower early, and a week after Tam, her husband, sailed north wi' his crew for the fishin'. Three months hae passed sin' the wofu' day, but nae word can we get o' boat or men."

"Then you think the vessel——"

"Went doon, sir, is what ye mean. There is nae doot aboot it; for, miles awa' along coast, a piece of her sail was washed ashore. But my lamb knows na *that*; an' sae, instead o' puttin' on widow's weeds, she aye says we'se boun' to find him; an' she watches the sea, an' questions every fisherman she meets, till it's just pitifu' to hear her."

"She is nearly distraught," thought I. Then I gave Ben a warning note regarding the imperative need of trying to divert her mind from her trouble. Also I proffered a word of advice about her lameness, which, it appeared, arose from some recent injury done to the muscles; and which, I gathered, had been treated in anything but a scientific manner.

Ben was delighted to find that I was a doctor, and most grateful for my interest in him. Indeed, he was so earnest in pouring out his thanks when I volunteered to take Mamie's case in hand while I was at Clanhead, that the man at the bow (as he afterwards owned) became an absorbed and sympathetic listener; for Mamie and he had been playmates, and he felt rather down-hearted, Ben told me, when Tam carried her off.

Deep in our subject, and entirely free from apprehension, we scudded pleasantly along. One moment our thoughts were of healing; the next—crash! crash!! crash!!! over our heads, under our feet, everywhere!

A swift glance at the mainsail, wrench at the tiller, and a tremendous shout from Ben:

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"Bow, there, bow! are ye sleepin', mon?"

The warning was too late. A large vessel was down upon us; our mainsail was pierced by her bowsprit; our timbers were shivering under her bows. I heard shouting on the deck above us; I saw a man leap from the vessel's side; I saw Mamie wake up in an agony of terror, and throw her arms round her father's neck; I heard Ben say, "Nae, dina cumber me, but strike ye oot an' *trust*."

I knew we were all in the water, for I saw Ben supporting his child as he swam vigorously towards the man who had leapt over. I saw Charlie going down (neither he nor I was a swimmer), I clutched at him fruitlessly; then came the confused cries of "Keep your heads up!" "Here's a life-belt!" "Catch this rope!" and so on.

But soon the voices sounded far away and undistinguishable, I knew that salt water was in my nostrils and mouth; there was singing in my ears, roaring in my head; I felt a mad impulse to *rise*; I did rise; again, for a moment only, I heard eager voices near me, and caught a glimpse of the efforts that were being made to save us; in an agony I made an effort to keep up; it was futile; then, hiss! hiss! swish! through my very brain; after that, darkness, *dense* darkness! a clear consciousness that the hand of Death was on me; a cry from my inmost soul to Heaven, and—a strange deep calm.

* * * * *

The sun was going down in a flood of crimson glory. I lay upon a well-swabbed deck all alone. Where had I been? Where was I going? What had happened? I pinched myself and felt the pain; so I was still in the flesh. I tried my voice—"Hi! halloa! somebody!"

No one came. I sat up and took a speculative survey. The vessel was taut and trim, and she smelt of timber, but she was not of British build.

As I cogitated—rather weakly, I must own—a footstep sounded on the deck, and along came a good-natured looking seaman, fair and blue-eyed; he made his way to me and gazed smilingly down.

"What ship is this?" queried I.

A shake of the head.

"Are you a German?"

Two shakes of the head.

"*Speak*, man, in some tongue or other, will you?"

The word "speak" he understood, and obeyed with energy. But no word of any language could I pick out from his strange jabber.

Feeling, no doubt, that my understanding wanted arousing, he went away and shortly returned with six other men; some strong, fair and blue-eyed like himself, the rest shorter, darker, but powerfully built, and all chattering the most unintelligible jargon.

As they bent their energies to make me acquainted with something or other, I tried hard to discover their nationalities, for certainly they were not all of one nation, when—happy thought!—came flitting through my brain the words:

> "*And then the blue-eyed Norseman told*
> *A saga of the days of old.*"

"You are from Norway!" bawled I. "And you," the darker men, "you are Swedes. Am I right?"

"Ha! Norroway! Norge! Norge! Ha! Ha! Norrike! Ha! Ha!"

The words were taken up like a refrain with boisterous satisfaction. Had I only raised my eyes to the vessel's flag, I might have seen at first that she was called the *Jarl Hakon*. But just then my wits were scattered. They began, however, to disentangle themselves, and thoughts of Charlie, Ben, and the rest, crowded upon me. Where were they? Where was the lame girl? and where the *Clan Macquarrie?*

It was useless to question, so I rose up and with rather unsteady gait walked across the deck and found my way to the captain's cabin.

On one side lay Ben, with pain in every line of his face; in the captain's berth, looking absolutely dead, was Mamie; stretched out on a rug lay my brother. He, however, managed to moan out "Hooray!" when he saw me.

I went to the girl's side and felt her pulse. Then, "Where's the captain?" said I to Ben's careless mate, Donald, who was standing by, the picture of helpless distress.

"Here," came a ready answer from a mellow voice behind me.

I turned. There stood a portly, grey-headed man, with a trustworthy face. He spoke English; this was worth something just then.

"Have you a wife—a lady on board, sir, who will carry out my instructions respecting this patient?"

"Are you, then, a physician?"

"I am a member of the College of Surgeons, and am anxious to do my best in this emergency."

"I am heartily glad, sir. A lady—no; there is not one on board. But there is a man who would lay down his life for this child. He is burly, but docile; let him be her nurse."

"Oh, her father? But he is in a sorry plight himself. I fear I shall find some broken bones when I have time to look at him."

"No, not her father—her husband."

I glanced at Ben.

"I knaw," said he; "there's a reet bright siller linin' to oor cloud, thank Heaven."

"Bring him in," quoth I.

He came; a young fellow having a splendid physique and six feet two of height, the very man who had leapt from the side of the *Jarl Hakon* to our rescue.

I stretched out my arm in front of the berth as a warning or barrier. But Tam had tact and caution. He stood mutely looking down on his ghostly young wife; then, in response to a touch on his arm, he bent his head to take my orders.

While Mamie remained unconscious he was to keep his post quietly, using the prescribed remedies; the moment she showed signs of consciousness he was to vanish.

I turned to Ben, who I found had a broken arm.

"Splints!" said I to Charlie, who was on his feet by this time. "Go to the captain for thin wood, and tools to shape it, also linen for bandages—a sheet will do. Now, Ben, you are a Briton, I know; will you trust me to set that bone?"

"Trust ye? Ay, sir; I ne'er wince at sich like! I'd be poorly off if it were na set."

That business was got through; and Ben had scarcely uttered a moan from first to last, but cold perspiration stood on his forehead, and I was just dispatching Donald for a strong cup of tea to revive him when—a sudden knock on my arm.

I turned sharply. "Beg pardon, sir," whispered Tam, as his great bulk rolled and stumbled into a dark corner beyond me.

But Mamie's eyes were wide open; the whiteness had gone from her face; her breath came thick and fast; she even tried to to raise herself on her elbow.

"Father! father! Ye'se foun' my Tam!"

Quaking with fear lest the remedy should be worse than the disease, I motioned Tam out from his hiding-place.

I saw the girl's face flush violently; I saw her throw up her arms to clasp her husband's neck; I saw the young giant turn white and weak with emotion; then away darted I, never halting till I reached the stern. Tyro as I was, I would rather have set half a dozen more bones than have stood out that meeting.

The captain was there, and very soon we got into conversation. Here is the substance of what he told me.

The *Jarl Hakon* was doing a pine trade between Bergen and Aberdeen. On her last homeward voyage she had picked up Tam and another seaman who were beating hopelessly about in a small boat, half-dead with thirst and exhaustion.

Tam was now working his way back to Scotland.

* * * * *

Mamie walked without her crutch before I left Clanhead, and Ben's bone was doing well. My holiday had been a most successful one.

Stanley Hammond.

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THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

Dramatis Personæ.

OLIVE BERESFORD, the writer of these confessions. She is a young lady who is lured into gambling by her friend, Annabel Vernon, whom she detects cheating. Miss Beresford arranges a secret code of signals with a Mr. Taskot, in order to beat Annabel Vernon at her own game.

HARRY VERNON, of Vernon Towers, who with his wife plans to catch Olive in a trap. He manages to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures passed between Mr. Taskot and the relater of these episodes.

ANNABEL VERNON, wife of the last-named. An old school friend of Miss Beresford. Her husband having obtained the proofs of Olive's alleged cheating, she holds the photos over her victim as a threat, declaring that, unless Miss Beresford does as she is ordered, she will be denounced as a card-sharper. She makes the unfortunate girl a tool to win money from her guests.

MR. TASKOT, who poses as a gentleman of means, but who is really a despicable bounder. He endeavours to force Miss Beresford to marry him.

MR. MAURICE RAY, a gentleman who rescues the narrator from a mad dog, and who since takes a kindly interest in the welfare of the young girl, treating her with great respect, and showing her much consideration.

MR. DEAN FISHER, a "Bridge" expert, and one of the guests of the Vernons at Vernon Towers when Olive Beresford was fleeced.

MRS. GRAINGER, a rich widow and an ardent gambler, another of the guests at the Towers.

MR. HAROLD BAINBRIG, a wealthy bachelor, who with his sister,

MISS EDITH BAINBRIG, loses heavily at "Bridge" whilst playing with the Vernons and the unwilling Olive Beresford.

EPISODE SIXTEEN.

Phantom Stakes.

I BELIEVE there had been some idea of including the Vernons in the little house-party to be entertained by Mrs. Grainger, who appeared to spend nearly all her time in visiting or being visited.

If her friends lived some distance off, she made her stay a prolonged one, and even if they only lived a few miles from her residence, she preferred to stay the night, if possible, so that she might not have to forego one tittle of whatever enjoyment was to the fore.

She had been some days at Vernon Towers before my arrival, but, in consequence of what had happened, she did not consider herself bound to return the hospitality she had received, and neither Harry nor Annabel Vernon was ever likely to overcome the disgust which their behaviour to me had inspired in her.

Neither would she countenance Mr. Dean Fisher any more, and it was thus doubly vexing for me to have an otherwise promisingly pleasant little evening spoiled by the advent of Mr. Taskot, whose presence was a continual reminder of misfortune.

He evidently regarded the matter from quite another point of view, for his face positively beamed at sight of me, though I would fain have avoided the warm handshake with which he emphasised his satisfaction.

"H'm! This is going to be quite jolly, don't you know," he said, casting at me a languishing glance, which sent the hot colour rushing over my cheeks. "I never dreamt that I should have the pleasure of meeting you here."

"You knew that *I* was coming home to-day," interposed Mrs. Grainger, who did not look over pleased at Mr. Taskot's pointed attention to me. "That in itself ought to have made you feel sure of plenty of amusement."

"My dear lady," was the quick protest, given with a most graceful bow to our hostess, "there can be no two opinions about that. But I had an impression that our mutual friends, the Vernons, were rather antagonistically inclined towards Miss Beresford, and I was glad to see that she had been rescued and brought into safer quarters."

"Indeed! What made you think things would not do well with her at the Towers?"

"Well, Vernon, and afterwards Fisher, had the cheek to say Miss Beresford knew a fine sight more about cards than she pretended to know, and that her verdancy at bridge was all a sham. Of course I fired up at once. In fact, we had words about it, and I declined to stay longer in a house where the host and hostess broke all the rules of hospitality by maligning their guests."

If Mr. Taskot imagined that I would accept the situation as he put it, and acknowledge that his hasty departure from Vernon Towers was due to his chivalrous defence of me, he was mistaken. I knew exactly why he went, but of course I dared not challenge the truth of his statement.

Mr. Ray knew everything that had transpired. But Mr. Taskot was the only other person, except the Vernons and Mr. Fisher, who knew about the compromising snapshots, and I dared not risk enlightening anybody else.

So Mr. Taskot's impertinence was allowed to pass muster for the time being, and Mrs. Grainger, thoroughly good-humoured again, entered into a quick narration of the events which preceded the general exodus from Vernon Towers.

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Mr. Taskot, having listened most intently. "As if it were likely that Miss Beresford would condescend to enter Harry Vernon's den in the middle of the night!"

"Why will you talk about all this unpleasantness?" was my impatient question. "It has been dreadful enough without dwelling upon it now."

Mrs. Grainger did not look very pleased at this check to her volubility, especially as it emanated from the very person whose cause she was championing. But Mr. Bainbrig quietly indorsed my protest, and suggested that as soon as Mr. Taskot was ready, we would begin our game.

The latter immediately sat down, opposite to me, with the evident intention of constituting himself my partner. But this was an arrangement I wanted to avoid, and I suggested that we should cut for partners, which was accordingly

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done. Unfortunately, the cuts were against my inclination, and I had no choice but to play with Mr. Taskot.

I was nervous and ill-at-ease, so probably played very badly. Anyhow, we lost two rubbers, and, becoming frightened of the consequences, I protested that I would play no more.

"I have lost more already than I shall ever be able to pay," I said, "so please do not ask me to continue playing now."

"Look here, Miss Beresford," smiled Mr. Bainbrig. "I'm really enjoying myself immensely. But not because I am winning money, for I do not intend to take any of my winnings. There is plenty of fun in the game, without juggling one's income away over it."

Greatly to my relief, both Mr. Grainger and Mr. Taskot agreed to play for phantom stakes, and there was now no more earnest player than myself. We continued one rubber after another until we were all fain to own ourselves tired, and I was actually going to bed before it struck me that we had devoted ourselves with such abandon to the game that we had given ourselves time to talk of nothing else.

My luck had fluctuated considerably, and after we had decided upon phantom stakes only, I was a rapid winner, until, when we came to add up the results, it transpired that I was over three hundred pounds to the good.

"Over three hundred pounds!" I murmured to myself. "Why, it is a small fortune! How foolish I was to protest so soon. I should not have needed to hesitate at taking the money, for both the losers have heaps of it."

To tell the truth, I was by this time so smitten with the gambling mania, that I was prepared to risk anything, and I resolved that if the others were tired of phantom stakes, I would not insist upon them myself.

EPISODE SEVENTEEN.
A Dangerous Champion.

MRS. GRAINGER'S establishment was kept on a liberal scale of expenditure, and the garden was a dream of loveliness. When I rose on the first morning after my arrival, both blackbirds and thrushes were holding high revel, and I eagerly made my way to a rustic arbour wherein I could enjoy sweet scents and sounds without incurring undue fatigue.

Late hours seemed to be inseparable from the enjoyment of the game by which I was now thoroughly fascinated. But late hours were rather new to me, and, coupled with the anxiety of mind I had suffered, they were making great inroads upon the freshness of my looks. They were also making inroads upon the freshness of my nature, for even out here the glamour of gambling had me in its grip, and it seemed quite a natural, although unwelcome sequel to my thoughts when Mr. Taskot's voice broke upon them.

"I thought I should find you here," he said, sitting down on the rustic seat beside me with much more familiarity in his manner than I approved of. "It's queer what a knack you and I have of running against each other in the open. It's a kind of telepathy, you know."

"There's no telepathy on my part, I assure you," was my sharp rejoinder. "And you are hardly justified in disturbing me whenever I try to be alone."

"Do you mind if I have a smoke?"

The question was asked with as much confidence as if Mr. Taskot had joined me at my express desire, and I was nettled into being very stiff indeed with the man who was so impervious to snubs as he was.

"If you smoke here," I said, "I shall go to another part of the garden."

"Thank you, Miss Beresford, for having the courage to speak your mind. I will debar myself from smoking at present, because it is imperative for us two to have a long talk together."

"I do not see the necessity of that."

"You will presently, when that little secret of ours has been turned over, and limited to its proper diet."

"Its proper diet is silence."

"Yes, after I know what sort of a hotch-potch was made of yesterday's ingredients. You observed my sudden departure, after an interview with Mr. Dean Fisher?"

"Yes."

"Well, thereby hangs a tale. I was told that an ingenious little system of espionage had been adopted, and I was mulcted of several hundred pounds under a threat of having certain compromising snap-shots exhibited as proofs of cheating by me—and by you."

"You paid several hundred pounds?"

"Yes, and received in exchange a complete set of films, depicting every trick you and I resorted to while playing our little game of diamond cut diamond. Would you like to see them?"

I nearly fainted at this unexpected revelation, for I never imagined such a calamity as that which was here indicated.

When I burnt the photographs which I abstracted from Harry Vernon's den, I thought I had finished that painful episode of my life for ever. Yet here it had cropped up again, and, looking at Mr. Taskot's face, with its affectedly poised monocle, and its curious mixture of cunning and vapidity, I felt sure that he meant to be as merciless towards me in his way as the Vernons had been in theirs.

"Would you like to see them?" he repeated.

"What good can it do me to see them?" I moaned. "I have suffered enough already from the sight of them!"

"Oh! Then there is a duplicate set! That beast of a Vernon deceived me and got my money on the pretence of yielding all the proofs up to me! By Jove but I'll be even with him for this. But I say what has become of the other set or sets? Do you know?"

It was on the point of my tongue to say that I had burnt them. But it suddenly struck me that if Mr. Taskot was going to hold his set over me, threateningly, I might just as well appear to be in an equally strong position.

"You heard the story of the trumped-up charge of theft which was brought against me, and afterwards retracted?" I asked.

"Yes. Had that anything to do with the photographs?"

"Everything. I really did go to Harry Vernon's den, in the middle of the night. I knew where the things were kept, and I abstracted them——"

"So, Miss Beresford, you are, on your own admission, a thief after all!"

Shall I ever forget the distress inspired by these dreadful words, which were hissed at me by Mrs. Grainger. Unnoticed by either of us, she had crept silently up to the arbour, probably with no worse idea in her mind than to surprise what she suspected to be a lover's *tête-à-tête*. Seeing us in close converse, she had stopped to listen a moment before showing herself, and an evil Fate would have it that the one sentence she heard was that in which I apparently showed the justice of the accusations brought against me by the Vernons!

"No! No!" I gasped. "You are making a horrible mistake! I——"

"I made a horrible mistake yesterday in believing your protestations of innocence, and in ignoring the warnings of my friends. I shall go back to the Towers and apologise to both Mr. and Mrs. Vernon—as soon as you have relieved my house of your wicked presence."

"Look here, Mrs. Grainger," protested Mr. Taskot, "you

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are jumping at preposterous conclusions It was quite an innocent little matter that we were talking about."

"Exactly! It must be a very innocent matter that makes a young lady visit somebody else's room, in the middle of the night, and abstract things that do not belong to her!"

"But she had more right to them than the Vernons. It was they who had stolen a march on Miss Beresford first—and on me. And she was only——"

"Pardon me," was the angry interruption, "if I refuse to listen to such nonsense. I suppose Miss Beresford has fascinated you to a remarkably foolish extent, or you would never countenance her barefaced iniquities."

"Countenance them? I identify myself with them."

"Then your case is indeed hopeless, and I advise you to devote yourself in future to championing the cause of a person whose behaviour will have to alter if she is to continue escaping with no further punishment than expulsion from the houses she disgraces with her presence."

There was not much breeding about Mrs. Grainger, or she could not have expressed her opinions with such brutal frankness before the humiliated girl whom this terrible blow had almost stricken dumb and motionless. Mr. Taskot had his own reasons for wanting to keep me in his power, but I will certainly give him credit for resenting the treatment to which I was being subjected by my present hostess.

"Thank you for the suggestion, Mrs. Grainger," he said, looking almost dignified as he drew himself up to his full height. "I shall be only too happy to be of service to Miss Beresford at any time, and I repeat that, in spite of the manner in which you have misconstrued the remark she made to me, there is no reason why you should not give her your entire respect."

"And I decline to accept your standard of morality, Mr. Taskot."

"After that," was the grim retort, "there is no alternative for either of us but to clear out of this at once. Only, Mrs. Grainger, let me tell you one thing—you will very likely be made to pay for your folly, if you believe a word the Vernons say against anybody, and if——"

But Mrs. Grainger, with scant ceremony, cut short anything more Mr. Taskot intended to say, by turning her back upon us both, and marching into the house, leaving me choked with grief at the strange fate which pursued me so relentlessly.

For some little time I was absolutely incapable of judging what was best to be done, and my fatal inability to argue sufficiently in my own favour at the critical moment left me without hope of being able to remove Mrs. Grainger's ill opinion of me.

"I say," said Mr. Taskot, after he had given me what he believed to be leisure enough to recover my self-possession, "it's no good your trying to stop here any longer, you know."

"I should be very sorry to stop a minute longer than I can help now," I returned indignantly. "I am not sorry to leave anyone who could so readily believe ill of me."

"No, but the mischief of it is, Mrs. Grainger will tell everybody her version of the story, and you will have no means of disproving it, unless you don't mind my explaining all about those little snapshots."

Of course I could not think of such a thing, even if Mr. Taskot really meant what he said, which I doubt, and I was nearly distracted at the disgrace which had overtaken me. But I no longer felt helpless, and I soon explained my immediate intentions to the man who seemed to be so strangely mixed up with all my misfortunes.

I felt just the same here as I did the day before at Vernon Towers—I could not eat another bite under the roof of a person who believed me to be a criminal, and I hastened to pack my belongings, ready to depart as soon as Mr. Taskot could procure a vehicle to take me to the nearest station.

But I was warned by yesterday's events, and insisted upon Mrs. Grainger either examining my luggage or owning that she could not accuse me of my attempt to add any of her property to my own.

The position was dreadful, though necessary in my own future interests, and when at last I drove away, escorted by Mr. Taskot, who was also leaving the neighbourhood, it seemed as if my cup of humiliation could hold not another drop.

For the first mile of our drive we were both silent. Then Mr. Taskot startled me out of despairing apathy by remarking: "I'm awfully sorry things have turned out so awkwardly, Miss Beresford. But it seems as if Destiny intended you and me to run in harness together."

"In harness together? Whatever do you mean?" was my astonished rejoinder.

"Oh, it's not difficult to guess what I mean. I think you and I are cut out for one another. So don't you think we'd better marry?"

"No, no! I couldn't dream of such a thing!"

"Excuse me, Miss Beresford, but you will find it to your interest to marry me. With my co-operation, you can recover your hold on Society. Without it——"

"My hold on Society is too slight for me to want to recover it. I shall go back home, and live as I have previously done, among people who will never come into contact with those who have made my life a misery these last few days."

"On the contrary, you will become my wife! Otherwise there will be so many awkward disclosures that you will be irretrievably disgraced everywhere. I shall haunt the neighbourhood you live in, until you consent to marry me. And if you think of proving obdurate, nothing that has taken place at Vernon Towers or at Mrs. Grainger's house will remain secret. Perhaps you would not like your old friends and acquaintances to know the estimation in which you are held here. But marrying me is your only alternative."

"Oh, you coward! I gasped. "You dare to threaten a defenceless girl!"

"My threat, as you call it, involves nothing worse than marrying a man whom lots of other girls would jump at. And don't you forget that I have more evidence against you than either the Vernons or Mrs. Grainger."

Hitherto, I had been shocked and frightened. Now I was so angry that my fear left me, and I felt only contempt for the creature who could be cruel enough to try and terrorise me into subjection just when I most needed consideration.

"Mr. Taskot," I said scathingly. "If there were not another man on earth, and if, as you say, there were no alternative between marrying you and being disgraced for life, I would still refuse you. Now, sir, you may do your worst. You cannot humiliate me more than I have been humiliated already, and if people in England refuse to believe in my innocence of real fraud, I will change my name and go to live in another country. Now you have my answer."

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"You shall rue this!" were the next words that were levelled at me. "I have been told something about the quixotic individual who made the Vernons and Fisher eat their words yesterday. Perhaps that individual is in love with you. And perhaps you return his passion. Hence your refusal of me. Very well, this Mr. Maurice Ray shall be disillusioned, and we'll see what he thinks of the snapshots which prove guilty collusion between you and me. I know him by reputation, and I know that he cannot afford to marry a woman whose character will bar him from mixing with the people upon whom his livelihood depends, so you may put him out of your calculations."

This last shot told. How could I hope to retain the respect of any honourable man, if such frightful odds were to be raised against me? No wonder my face paled! And no wonder Mr. Taskot, thinking he had scored a point, began to look triumphant again.

"Look here, darling!" he exclaimed, hardly troubling to lower his voice so that the driver of the open fly could not hear us. "I have sworn to win you, and no man would ever make you a more devoted husband than I would."

"I shall never marry you!" was my steady answer. "And nothing you can ever say will make me alter my mind."

An evil gleam shot into Mr. Taskot's face, and his monocle hung unheeded on its cord, leaving the full malevolence of both eyes staring into mine.

"I can *say* nothing to improve my case," he hissed. "Then I will *do* something that shall."

And, before I could guess what the man intended to do, he had gathered me in his arms, and was showering kisses upon my face, which his superior strength kept upturned to his, in spite of my frantic struggles to free myself.

"There!" he muttered, when at last I had wrenched myself out of his grasp. "Tell me now if you think the other man will ever look at you again?"

I was already almost choked with anger. But despair was added to my distress when I noticed that the vehicle was at a standstill, and that Maurice Ray, his face full of contempt, had been an astounded spectator of the scene which must have stamped me as a person whose conduct was beneath respect.

(Another long instalment next week.)

TOMMY: "Papa, is the lieutenant a tailor?" Father: "No, my boy. Whatever made you think so?" Tommy: "I saw him yesterday measuring Fanny's waist."

MABEL: "Why do you always buy two kinds of note paper?" Maud: "Well, you see, when I write to Tom I used red paper—that means love; and when I write to Jack I use blue paper—which means faithful and true."

PRETTY CASHIER: "You might give me a holiday to recruit my health. My beauty is beginning to fade." Manager: "Why do you think so?" Pretty cashier: "The men are beginning to count their change."

ALGERNON: "But are you sure, Madeline, that there are not times when you regret our engagement?" Madeline: "Haven't I had proposals from many men—handsome, honourable, cultivated, delightful men—and yet" (tenderly) "didn't I choose you, dear?"

LILLLE WILLIE: "Are you going to marry my sister Maude, Mr. De Jones?" Mr. De Jones (Maude's admirer): "Why, Willie, that's a funny question to ask me. What do you want to know for?" Little Willie: "'Cause I heard her tell mamma she would give five shillings to know, and I want the money, do you see?"

"I HAVE it on good authority that you let young Smithkins kiss you last evening," said a young man to his *fiancée*, and he frowned darkly as he spoke. The maiden did not deny the accusation. She pouted as she replied: "You don't love me! So there!" "Not love you!" replied the young man, "why, I adore you, and you know it." "No, you don't! True love is unselfish, and you seem to be selfish enough to want all my kisses for yourself."

Your Editor Chats.

ALL loyal Britishers, and most especially the sons and daughters of the bonnie land north of the Tweed, look forward, I know, with great delight to the appearance of the Tartan Cover numbers of this paper. This week depicts the gay apparel of the Clan Macquarrie, and I honestly believe that a prettier design is practically unattainable. The mingling of the various shades of colour is exquisite, and the whole tone superb. For the benefit of those who would like to make—as many are doing—a complete set of our Tartan numbers, I will state here when the previous ten appeared. The Menzies, the first of the series, came out on August 2nd, the Macpherson on August 16th, the Macleod on September 13th, the Rob Roy on October 4th, the Macmillan on October 25th, the Macdonald of Sleat, on November 29th, all of last year; and the Erskine, the Clergy, the Bruce, and the Macfie on January 3rd, February 7th, April 25th, and July 4th of this year respectively. All can still be obtained.

I HAVE a very pleasant surprise in store for you. At present it's a secret, and though I know you love to be confided in, I am afraid you will have to wait till next week before I divulge everything. Then I will tell you more about a most entertaining series of stories relating the exciting experiences of a young girl, that will soon be commencing, written by the heroine herself. I can only say that, knowing your excellent taste as I do, you will enjoy this new feature immensely, and I think it will be one of the greatest successes we have had for a long time.

BUSINESS took me the other day into the East End of London, amongst the sordid surroundings of slum life. Presently I came across a youngster, looking delightfully brown and happy, and I could not help noticing what a contrast he made to his companions. Curiosity compelled me to speak to the lad and ask him why he looked so healthy. He answered, and his face lit up with a glad remembrance, "I went into the country all day yesterday, sir; down near Epping Forest, with the FRESH AIR FUND." Thousands and thousands of London's waifs and strays, who seldom in the great turmoil of the metropolis catch a glimpse of the sun, have been cheered for one day in their miserable existence by the help of those charitable people who subscribe to PEARSON'S FRESH AIR FUND. To them it is a red-letter day. Won't *you* help a fellow-creature? Ninepence is all that is required to procure a whole day's freedom for one hapless child. The fine weather is almost gone; you have had and enjoyed your holidays. Lest you forget, send at once a small donation to the Hon. Sec., F.A.F., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

AN important announcement regarding the "Buried Station" competition will be found on page 375.

Your Editor.

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"Old Ratch."

The Story of a Man's Misfortune and a Woman's Love.

CAPTAIN GERALD BRAIDTHWAITH, late of His Majesty's Seventieth Lancers, sat alone in his lodgings. Careless and light-hearted, as averse to reflection as any mortal could well be, the time had come when he was obliged to look facts squarely in the face.

His handsome features wore an expression of unusual seriousness, for his prospects certainly furnished no subject for elation.

Assets—he ran over them lightly—a handsome person, expensive tastes, good connections, and that was all. Then the liabilities—innumerable debts, damaged credit, the memory of some few years of a gay, wild life, the ordinary harvest of a plentifully sown crop of wild oats.

He had quarrelled with his elder brother, Lord Radigar, on account of a love-affair with a pretty and portionless cousin; his modest patrimony had long since been dissipated.

Radigar had intended that Gerald should marry an heiress, and had even selected a portly, consequential damsel, the heiress of a Glasgow distiller, who had appeared not insensible to the younger brother's attractions.

Miss McCuaig was still to be had, but Doris Wynyatt effectually barred that prospect—poor little Doris, who turned so bright a face to the world, and whose cheery courage deprived the buffetings of fortune of half their sting.

Doris had been confided to the care of Lady Barbara Streathfield, a spinster of ancient lineage and limited income—a high-nosed, thin-lipped, keen-eyed old lady, whom her nephew Gerald cordially feared and hated. The Gorgon he always called her, regarding her not altogether unjustly as having acted as Radigar's chief adviser against Doris and himself.

Then Captain Braidthwaith heaved a deep sigh, which was almost a groan, as he realised the fact that the only choice which lay before him was between beggary and enlisting as a private soldier, and for Doris nothing remained but Lady Bab's tender mercies, until "the long, dull anguish of patience" had vanquished youth and beauty.

It was very hard. They were both so young, they loved each other so dearly, and life was so strong within them.

Just as he had reached this point in his meditations, a thundering knock resounded through the house, and glancing carelessly from the window, Gerald saw that a smart brougham had drawn up before the door. The whole equipage was perfect in its appointments, and bore an air of unostentatious luxury and fashion.

"And please, Captain Braidthwaith!" cried the lodging-house slavey, "a gentleman in 'is carriage wishes to speak with you."

"Then show him up," responded Gerald, listlessly.

"But 'e is a hinvalid gentleman, and 'e says with 'is compliments, would you be kind enough to step down to 'is carriage."

"Cool enough!" muttered the young man, as he stretched himself lazily, but anything was preferable to his own depressing reflections, and he sauntered leisurely down the stairs.

An obsequious footman threw open the carriage-door.

It was a warm Spring day, but the occupant of the brougham was so covered with costly furs that at first Captain Braidthwaith believed it to be empty. Then he perceived an elderly gentleman leaning languidly back on the cushions.

His overcoat was buttoned closely to his throat, a comforter was wrapped round the lower part of the face, his cap was pulled down very low, a green silk patch covered one eye—in fact there was nothing of the face visible.

"Captain Braidthwaith, I presume?" said a voice so deep and sonorous as to appear manifestly discordant with the infirmities of its owner.

Gerald bowed in silence.

With many courteous apologies for the liberty he had taken, the gentleman explained his errand.

He was a Mr. Vandeleur, he stated, a West Indian, who had come to England for medical advice. Though he had retired from active commercial life, his business interests were still extensive, and he required a secretary. Having heard of Captain Braidthwaith, he imagined that they might mutually accommodate each other.

Gerald hesitated. The offer appeared like a new vision of hope. For the sake of Doris, dared he reject any opportunity? On the other hand, he knew absolutely nothing of business, and he held a very modest opinion of his own abilities.

However, Mr. Vandeleur overruled all his scruples.

The remuneration offered was exceedingly liberal, while the duties appeared to be almost nominal.

He was to present himself each day at Mr. Vandeleur's residence in a fashionable part of the town. A few hours would suffice to write the few letters and execute the few commissions that would be required of him; the remainder of his time was at his own disposal.

Captain Braidthwaith entered upon his new duties with a light heart. Two weeks passed before he found an opportunity of discussing his prospects with his betrothed, but at last a day arrived when Miss Wynyatt contrived to meet him.

"And the Gorgon actually allowed you to escape for an hour?"

"The Gorgon is not so bad as she is painted," laughed Doris. "She has a soft spot in her heart. One day I may be able to teach you to like her."

The lovers, elated by the new vista which hope was opening before them, strolled through Regent's Park together.

They looked into each other's eyes, exchanged tender confidences, while the wine of life ran tingling through their veins, and youth, and hope, and love coloured all existence with roseate hues.

"It's strange Mr. Vandeleur is willing to pay liberally for duties so light," remarked Doris, who was very quick-witted and observant.

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"Duties!" laughed Gerald hilariously. "My only duties consist in paying accounts and buying lottery tickets. For a stranger, Mr. Vandeleur has the most extraordinary number of bills to settle. He must be a veritable Crœsus, and always pays in new, crisp Bank of England notes. More money has passed through my hands in the last fortnight than I ever had in my life before. He is not quite so confiding as he would like to appear, though. I wondered that he trusted me so entirely until I perceived that as I went on my errands his daughter shadowed me from first to last. She always looks intent upon something else, but I am persuaded that her whole business consists in watching me."

"He has a daughter, then?"

"Yes; a pale ghost of a girl. She is deaf and dumb, but appears to be wonderfully intelligent."

"Have they any friends?"

"Yes, but of a lower class than you would expect to find a man of Vandeleur's culture and refinement associating with. It is one of his whims that I should act as host at his entertainments to relieve him of the trouble; and, though the company may not be very select, it must be admitted that the entertainments are on a scale of unusual magnificence."

"Does he appear greatly attached to his daughter?"

"He idolises her. Twice since I have been with him he has bought her diamond ornaments, and he is now negotiating with Messrs. Goldstein, Chaine and Co., for a necklace worthy of an empress. There she is."

A very handsome open carriage rolled in, in which was seated a lady, clothed from head to foot in black velvet.

She was excessively fair. Her faded blue eyes and colourless flaxen hair afforded no relief to the peculiar pallor of her complexion. Her expression was one of the most languid and listless indifference.

"What a white witch of a woman! She never even looked at you."

"No. I am only her father's humble secretary," laughed Gerald.

"There is something mysterious about it that I don't like. Be careful, Gerald," intreated Doris.

Gerald, however, was of a sanguine temperament.

"I feel as though this were the beginning of fortune," he replied.

The next morning, at Mr. Vandeleur's desire, Captain Braidthwaith completed the purchase of the diamond necklace The young man received Bank of England notes to pay the large price demanded by the jewellers.

"It's a good round sum to give, but the stones are cheap at the price. I never grudge money for a first-class article," remarked Mr. Vandeleur loftily.

Gerald sighed as he reflected how charming it must be to dwell where money was actually of no moment.

"Miss Vandeleur will accompany you. When she has satisfied herself by actual inspection of the diamonds, you can pay for them. She has an excellent taste."

Miss Vandeleur appeared very cool and composed. She examined the jewels critically, and in her emphatic sign language professed herself dissatisfied with one of the stones, in which she insisted that she had detected some slight flaw.

Two members of the firm who were present eagerly explained that her impression was quite erroneous.

Grasping the case containing the gems, she advanced toward the light, and then wrote rapidly on her slate—

"I believe I am satisfied after all, Captain Braidthwaith, if you will kindly settle."

The interview had taken place in a private room, behind the brilliantly-lighted shop. Gerald promptly counted down the notes.

"You will find that correct, I believe," he said.

Without taking up the money, Mr. Chaine regarded the young man steadily. A firm grasp was laid upon his shoulder.

"Not so fast, this is once too often, Old Ratch," said a quiet voice, and turning in utter astonishment, Gerald encountered the keen scrutiny of Warren, the most renowned of London detectives.

"What do you mean, sir?" questioned Braidthwaith fiercely. "I do not understand your action."

"Captain Braidthwaith, I arrest you in the King's name!"

"I mean that the game is played out; you are caught at last. I arrest you in the King's name, Captain Braidthwaith."

"Good Heavens! This is all a mistake," insisted Goldstein, the senior partner. "Captain Braidthwaith is brother to Lord Radigar, of Redfern."

"I don't care if he's brother to the Archbishop of Canterbury," protested Warren, doggedly. "I can prove that Captain Braidthwaith and Old Ratch, the cleverest counterfeiter in England, are identical. The Bank of England has offered five hundred pounds for his capture, and I mean to have it. Many a turn and shuffle and rebuff has he given me; eighteen months have I been on his track, but he always slipped through my fingers just as I grasped him. Very clever he has been—that I'll allow."

"If this is any practical joke, you will answer for it!" cried Gerald.

"If you can find a joke in Old Bailey and a trial for felony and forged Bank of England notes, you are about the first that ever did," smiled the detective.

"I appeal to Miss Vandeleur!" exclaimed Mr. Goldstein excitedly.

"And of course you have secured the diamonds?" demanded Mr. Chaine abruptly.

But Miss Vandeleur and the diamonds had both disappeared.

* * * * *

The trial of Captain Braidthwaith was one of the sensations of the day. It furnished an exciting topic of conversation for the clubs. Society revelled in all the details of the affair, and Doris Wynyatt wept until she was blinded and heart sick.

"Gerald, the best and noblest of men," sobbed Doris.

"Gerald was a fool, but he never could be a rogue," insisted Lady Barbara, holding her Roman nose very high in the air.

"It's some terrible mistake, but we have no clue to the mystery," admitted Lord Radigar dejectedly.

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Doris sobbed violently. Lady Barbara surreptitiously wiped the moisture from her keen eyes, and then in atonement for her momentary softness turned fiercely upon her favourite nephew.

"What is the use of being a man if you sit down and do nothing, Radigar? It is your bounden duty as head of the family to clear your brother. Gerald appearing at Old Bailey as a common felon, known as Old Ratch! I wonder you permit it, Radigar?"

Gerald had often accused his brother of miserliness, but to save the family reputation he was willing to spend money like water. Lady Barbara made her nephew's cause so entirely her own that she quarrelled with half her acquaintances, and so systematically persecuted the remainder that it was only by avoidance they could escape the infliction.

The most able counsel in London were engaged for the defence, but from the first the case was admitted to be a hopeless one. Warren was not the man to be easily deceived, and the evidence against the prisoner was most clear.

He admitted having passed the counterfeit notes, he had certainly acted as host at the gorgeous mansion in Curzon Street; latterly he had spent money liberally, though when he had left the Army he was known to have been in difficulties.

He had evidently traded upon his social advantages in order to continue a career of crime. Then he was a criminal of such marked ability that the recital of his clever stratagems actually extorted an unwilling admiration.

As one witness after another was heard, Gerald's brain reeled. He almost doubted his own identity. Could he, Gerald Braidthwaith, really be the clever rogue described.

With a dreary, puzzled look in his handsome eyes he looked around upon the surging sea of curious faces, but when he caught sight of one eager, girlish countenance, which had grown thin and haggard in the agony of intolerable suspense, everything swam before him in the mist that dimmed his eyes.

Later, there came a more terrible moment still, when Gerald Braidthwaith stood, very calm and grave, to receive his sentence, which was the heaviest the law could inflict.

When it was pronounced a woman's voice rang out in a faint, agonised cry, and a young girl, with a face like death, was hastily carried out by her friends.

"That poor child's death will lie at your door, Radigar, and your brother's as well, yet there you sit like a statue. Don't allow yourself to be a Cain, Radigar," insisted Lady Bab vehemently.

Just at that moment Doris entered the room. She held a newspaper, and there was a new expression of hope and courage in her white face.

"I have formed a plan by which Gerald may yet be saved. It may be a desperate one, but the case is desperate. I must be allowed to act according to my own judgment."

"If you can clear Gerald, I will settle ten thousand pounds on you!" cried Radigar.

"Listen to this advertisement:

"'WANTED.—Wanted a young lady of good social position as companion to a deaf and dumb lady. Duties light and remuneration liberal. Unexceptional references required. Address in person, No. 36 Berkeley Square.'

"I firmly believe those are the people who have ruined Gerald. At least let me try."

That same day a young lady presented herself at an aristocratic mansion in Berkeley Square. She was ushered into a tastefully decorated drawing-room, where a lady and a gentleman, apparently an invalid, were sitting together.

The lady was tall, with dark hair arranged in crisp, picturesque curls and a vivid dash of colour on each cheek, but as she encountered the keen scrutiny of the pale blue eyes, Doris Wynyatt's heart throbbed so violently that it seemed to stifle her.

The gentleman wore a deep green shade over his eyes. He apologised for not rising. He had only lately arrived from South America, and as his health was in a most precarious condition, the dampness of the English climate affected him most unfavourably.

His daughter and only child, being much isolated by her affliction, required a companion, in whom, he gracefully added, they hoped she might also find a friend.

Doris explained that Lady Barbara was willing to give her satisfactory references. She was at once engaged, and requested to come that very day; so before night Doris found herself domiciled beneath Mr. Treherne's roof.

A week passed, and no clue reached Miss Wynyatt. The most decorous dullness reigned in Berkeley Square. The chief duty required of Doris was to read aloud long sermons, upon which Mr. Treherne delivered the most edifying comments.

The girl was devoured by a fever of impatience. If these people should suspect her design her life would not be worth anything. If she failed, what would be Gerald's fate.

She dared not allow herself to think of anything except the present, but, composed and vigilant, watched with the closest attention.

Mr. Treherne questioned her adroitly, and in return confided to her many particulars concerning his friends and business connections, his religious opinions, and his daughter's virtues and misfortunes.

Then Mr. Treherne insisted that his daughter should engage in an extensive shopping expedition. He privately informed Doris that he wished to arouse in his poor Ada some of the tastes natural to her age, sex and station.

She would require a complete outfit. Her affliction rendered Ada ignorant of the value of money. Would Miss Wynyatt kindly carry the purse, in which he placed a large sum in new, crisp Bank of England notes.

It was the custom in their country to pay for everything at once. Would Miss Wynyatt be particular that everything selected was of the very best?

However, Miss Treherne in her choice displayed a luxurious taste rather strange in so unsophisticated a being. She selected silks, velvets, brocades and satins of the richest.

"Send the things out to the carriage and I will wait there while you settle the account," Miss Treherne wrote upon her slate.

Doris promptly requested an interview with the proprietor of the establishment, to whom she was well known.

"Can you tell me if these notes are genuine?" she inquired.

Mr. Payne examined them carefully.

"If not, they are very clever imitations, but I can ascertain for you beyond a doubt."

Part of the goods were sent out to Miss Treherne's carriage, with an apology for detaining her a few moments until the remainder were packed.

When a little later a policeman entered the carriage and arrested her, that lady speedily recovered her lost senses, and gave voluble explanations which were of no avail.

Soon after, the veritable Old Ratch, *alias* Vandeleur, *alias* Treherne, *alias* half a dozen other cognomens, was safely lodged in Newgate.

* * * * *

"I'll give you the ten thousand pounds as I promised. You and Gerald shall be married the day after he is set free, and I am proud to call so brave and noble a woman my sister," cried Lord Radigar impulsively.

"That is just what I always told you. If you had followed my counsel, Radigar, we might have all been spared this misery," insisted Lady Barbara.

A. G. Horton.

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Not Declined With Thanks.

JACK: "I am afraid that if I ask you to be my wife you will treat my proposal as a joke." Molly: "But all jokes are not rejected, Jack."

In a Railway Carriage.

CHAPERON (meaningly, leaning towards young lady sitting next a young man): "Hadn't you better come this side, love? We are coming to a tunnel." Her charge (whispering): "Oh, no, aunt; one more tunnel, and I am engaged."

Not to His Liking.

"UNLESS you give me aid," said a beggar to a benevolent lady, "I am afraid I shall have to resort to something which I greatly dislike to do." The lady handed him a shilling, and compassionately asked: "What is it, poor man, that I have saved you from?" "Work," was the mournful answer.

She Let the Cat Out.

YOUNG LADY: "I should like to embroider a nice pair of slippers as a birthday present for my aunt." Shopman: "We happen to be quite out of new patterns just now. Wouldn't something else do as well?" Young lady: "Perhaps a cigar-case."

Wouldn't Stay So Long.

SHE: "Papa says that when coming to see me you must not come in a 'bus any more." He: "Really! Does he expect me to walk all this distance?" She: "Of course not. He says all he asks is that you will come in a carriage, hired by the hour."

She Knew the Feeling.

HARRY: "She has jilted me, and I know I shall die. The disappointment will kill me!" Aunt Hannah: "I know how disappointments affect one, Harry. But you will get over it. I felt just as you do now when I set that yellow hen on thirteen eggs and only just got one poor chick out of the lot."

Civilised Barbarity.

MRS. DE FASHION: "What perfectly horrible creatures the Chinese are! I am told that in China the men actually buy their wives." Mrs. De Style: "Yes, isn't it horrible? By the way, when is your daughter to marry Mr. Bullion?" Mrs. De Fashion: "As soon as he recovers from his last attack of gout."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

HE: "Miss Smyth—Clara, I love you. Will you be my wife?" She: "Really, Mr. Brown, this is so sudden. I must have time to——" He (interrupting): "As you please. This solitaire diamond ring will keep until——" She (interrupting him): "As I was saying when you interrupted me, I must have time to at least try on the ring before giving you the answer you wish."

Very Kind Man.

"You say the popular Miss Smith can play the piano. I never heard her." "That's just the point. She can, but she doesn't."

Then He Dodged a Plate.

MRS. SKIMPEN: "I think Mr. Jones must have liked the beefsteak pie. He had two helpings of it." The Tactless Boarder: "Possibly he did it for a wager."

Not Digestible.

"THEM chops were good, mum," said the tramp. "but I allus likes to finish a meal with sweets. Yer ain't got any cakes, have yer?" "I have cakes of soap." "Thank yer, mum. But I never touch 'em."

Tit for Tat.

"EXCUSE my coming to dinner in a business suit, old fellow. My way, you know." "That's all right. You won't mind my giving you a small table all by yourself in the pantry, will you? It's a fancy of mine to do it, old chap."

It Takes a Long Time.

MR. BINGO: "We may as well talk over this question of getting the house painted." Mrs. Bingo: "But, my dear, it doesn't need to be painted for at least a year yet." Mr. Bingo: "True. But you have got to decide what colour you want."

There's a Future Before Him.

"MAY I wake the baby, mamma?" asked five-year-old Johnny. "Why, what do you want to wake her for?" asked the mother. "I want to see if she can cry loud enough to drown the noise of my new drum," replied the small investigator.

But the Doctor Didn't Strike.

MR. MUCHBLEST: "Yes, doctor, I have a frightful cold. But what did you say was your special method of treatment?" Physician: "We strike at the cause or origin of the trouble." Mr. Muchblest: "That's odd. However, you'll find the baby in the other room."

That Was the Reason.

"I THOUGHT you believed in training girls for household rather than business affairs?" "So I do." "And yet your daughter is learning typewriting." "Yes, but that's an exceptional case. The poor girl hasn't enough aggressive independence to be a cook."

Then Silence Reigned Supreme.

SHE: "You know, Reggie, that girls are being called by the names of flowers now, and my sister suggested that I should be called Thistle." Reggie: "Oh, yes, I see. Because you are so sharp." She: "Oh, no. She said it was because a donkey loved me."

He Had—Once.

"TELL me honestly," said the novel reader to the novel writer, "did you ever see a woman who stood and tapped the floor impatiently with her toe for several moments, as you describe?" "Yes," was the thoughtful reply, "I did once." "Who was she?" "She was a clog-dancer."

Occupation for the Unemployed.

"CAN'T you give me employment, ma'am?" said the tramp. "I haven't had anything to do for a month." "Poor fellow. What can you do?" "Well, ma'am, I'm a good watcher. If I could sit out here on yer front porch, an' watch the front gate so's no one could steal it, you'd find I was very content."

Unbecoming When Angry.

"SIR," she said, stamping her foot, "I must beg you to cease all talk of love. I am becoming angry!" "Pardon me," he corrected, with great suavity. "Getting angry. You are not becoming angry." After that, somehow, she kept her temper.

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LOVING AN IDEAL;

or, The Ministering Angel of Paradise Row.

"AND how has Paradise Row been getting on while I have been away, Mr. Constable?" asked the grave-faced "district visiting woman," as Miss Kate Green was generally named.

"You look all the better for your holiday, miss!" said the good-natured policeman sympathetically. He tried to evade the question deliberately addressed to him. "You had fine weather, and it's wonderful how a change of air 'livens you up, don't it? Sha'n't be sorry when my turn comes!"

"I expect not!" cried Miss Green, with a look of commiseration. "Your duty is rather trying. But you haven't told me about the people in Paradise Row!"

The constable saw that she meant to have a report, so he spoke plainly.

"What gets over me, miss, is why they give such lovely names to such dreadful streets!" he cried, in disgust. "It isn't only down here where you can see that sort of thing; you can find it in London and in lots of towns! Now, Paradise Row ought to be called—well, it ain't polite to mention the other name and I've forgot what my little boy said as was the Greek name for it! It was Aydees, or something; it means the same only it's more polite to say that than the English word. Well, miss, it's been worse than ever, I'm sorry to say! I think it's the hot weather and partly the new couple!"

"The new couple!" echoed Miss Green, wonderingly. "Are there some people in the downstairs at No. 12?"

"Yes, miss, and they're a bright lot! Only a man and woman, but he's always making trouble with his wife and anybody else that comes in his way!"

"I'm sorry to hear that!" observed the visiting woman, reflectively. "I must see what I can do! Good afternoon!"

The policeman returned the compliment and watched the grave-faced woman down the street.

"It's wonderful what she can do with those brutes!" he muttered, involuntarily feeling his right arm with his left hand, as he recollected an injury received during a drunken affray in the disreputable locality. "But I think that fellow won't be softened! He's a terror!"

Catching a back view of her as she walked lightly along, no one would have guessed that the figure was that of the woman whom boy had heard spoken of as the district visiting woman. The term conjures up the image of a middle-aged person, slow and sedate of movement—and, well, to cut matters short, the figure of Miss Green was altogether different from that on which the mind would fix. It was the dainty form of a comparatively young woman, perhaps not even thirty, and it did not seem to fit the character. When she turned, the observer saw a face that possessed a grave charm of beauty; there was no doubt that it had been beautiful, but trouble or illness, or both, had changed it somewhat. It was impossible not to be struck by the charm of it, even in its gravest aspect, but when lighted by an expression of sympathy or a smile of encouragement, its power of attraction was very great. This little lady—so some people termed her, for she was of medium height and looked shorter than she was—had obtained a wonderful hold on the worst population of the important southern seaport, and this influence was due to her personality.

No one knew the past history of Miss Green, with the exception of the clergyman in whose parish she worked; everyone believed that she had seen a lot of trouble, but they actually knew nothing. She worked among the poor, helping or trying to help them in various ways, but she never intruded religious ideas. She endeavoured to improve their lot and to inculcate general goodness by example. Her salary amounted to fifteen shillings per week; it was not a large sum, but it sufficed for her wants.

When Kate Green returned to her own little bed-sitting-room, she saw a note lying on the table. Perhaps, if the sun and open air of the country had not bronzed the usually pale face, an observer would have noticed a slight flush. She opened the letter and read it; the letter was signed "Robert Harding" and, after expressing the hope that she had benefited by the change, informed the recipient that an old woman in a certain street was very ill and had asked that Miss Green would call on her. "It is rather too bad to call for your services so soon," concluded the writer, "but your inherent kindness is responsible for these demands upon you. It will be well for you to spare yourself a little; you were very near to a breakdown when you went away!"

"I must go to see her," mused Miss Green. "But I must select a time when Dr. Harding will not be there! I must not encourage—oh, dear! I wish he would get a better practice elsewhere and leave me to live out my life alone. I feel what is coming, and that will force me to tell him the past! I gave my heart to one man; they tell me that he was not worthy of it, but for me it is different! I cling to the man as I thought he was! It may be, as they have told me, that I loved a phantom, that the man who captured my heart did not possess the qualities with which I clothed him, that I was loving an ideal and not a real man! Ah! Do I not know that? Did not the discovery nearly kill me? Yet I still cling to that ideal, and regret that it was but imaginary! I feel that I gave my love once, and I mourn the loss of the ideal as a bride mourns the loss of her beloved! I have no room in my heart for another, and I would spare Dr. Harding."

Kate Green slowly tore the letter into tiny pieces. She was

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somewhat perplexed to know how to divide her time for the rest of the day; she wished to see this sick woman, but she also desired to pay a lengthy visit to Paradise Row, the inhabitants of which she had taken under her special care. She believed that she had done some good there, but a great deal of falling-back may occur in a fortnight and the example of this new couple was not beneficial.

Kate smiled as she remembered the remark of one woman in the Row: "You're like an angel, miss, the rows stop and they all seem to be better, somehow, when you git here!" she had said, and after that incident Dr. Harding and the curate had foolishly nicknamed her "the Angel of Paradise Row" till she had stopped them. But the nickname had spread, and it was used frequently, although not in her presence.

"I will go now!" she determined. "He will be visiting his patients elsewhere, and then I can go into the Row later."

She paid her visit to the old woman, who was greatly pleased to see her again. "It is so nice to have someone to come in and read a bit and make things more comfortable-like," she said gratefully. So Kate Green wended her way homeward with a sentiment of satisfaction; it was an ill-paid office, doubtless, and her work was rough at times, but when she saw the effect of her ministrations in such cases as that of old Mrs. Blount, she felt that she had other remuneration than the mere pittance of fifteen shillings a week!

"I like to think that, if I had married my lost ideal, this is the work which he would have wished me to do—devote myself so far as possible to the improvement of those about me!" she murmured.

Her eyes grew moist, obscuring her vision; and, as she still hurried along, it was not wonderful that she nearly blundered into a pedestrian coming round a corner. "Miss Green!" she heard a voice cry in a surprised tone, and she knew that her little scheme of evading Dr. Harding had been only partially successful.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Doctor!" she cried in some confusion. "I am afraid that I was not taking proper notice of where I was going!"

They exchanged greetings and Dr. Harding asked if she had been to see Mrs. Blount. He looked disappointed when he found that she had already paid the desired visit.

"I am going home for a cup of tea, and after that I must look up my friends in the Row!" she said simply. "I must not let any more time pass without going there! I have been away two weeks and I shall lose some of my influence."

The man let go his hold of her, and the stick fell to the ground with a crash. "Kate!" he gasped, "*you* here?"

"I do not think so," he cried involuntarily. "It would be impossible for you to lose your beneficent power over——" He stopped abruptly; he had spoken eagerly, but an expression that crossed her face caused him to think that he had uttered his sentiment with too much warmth.

"If you are going to Mrs. Blount, you will find her pretty well," observed the visiting woman, extending her hand, in farewell.

Robert Harding pretended not to see the outstretched hand.

"I am not going," he said somewhat lamely. "I—I am going your way, and I will accompany you if I may."

Kate Green could not refuse, although she was perturbed. The streets were quiet and they walked for some distance in silence.

"I do not like the idea of your going to the Row quite alone just now, Miss Green!" suddenly observed the young medical man uneasily. "I hear ugly rumours from that unsavoury quarter, and you must really be careful! A case of diphtheria was taken from there two days ago, and I believe there are worse dangers than disease to be encountered."

"I am not afraid, doctor," was the tranquil rejoinder.

"But you must be cautious," he urged. "You owe it to those who—to your friends, I mean. And then," he added, as an idea occurred to him, "if you were incapacitated in any way, your usefulness would be nullified or at least greatly decreased."

He felt quite glad that this idea had flashed across his mind; it was such a splendid argument and it covered his own anxiety on her account.

"I am always careful," she told him, and with that he had to be content. Neither spoke till they reached the door of the house in which she lived. She waited for him to raise his hat in leave-taking, but he hesitated, then boldly looked her in the face and asked:

"May I come in and speak to you?"

So the critical moment was at hand! Well, it was best that the ordeal should be faced. She bowed and led the way into the landlady's small parlour, the use of which was granted her for the reception of an occasional visitor. She stood on one side of the little round table and he faced her on the other. He won her admiration by his manly frankness

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"Miss Green, will you give me the right to accompany you on your visits to the Row? I have loved you from the first moment I saw you, when I took up this practice three months ago. As my wife, your sphere of usefulness would not be lessened, at least. Forgive my abruptness, but I cannot find many words. My heart is too full!"

She gazed at him with compassion and with a little thrill at her heart which surprised her. She was sorry for him; and she was glad that she had heard his confession. Yes, glad! How paradoxical, she thought!

She never exactly knew what she told him, but she conjectured that she bared some of the past. Her first clear recollection was of a vehement protest from him.

"It is not fair," he cried with fierce pleading. "You are deceiving yourself by revering a mere vision, and you are not just either to yourself or to others—to me! You are sacrificing yourself to a shadow! You are denying happiness to yourself and to the man, whoever he be, who would find his sweetest occupation in watching over you! It is wrong, it is even selfish!—to waste on a vision the power of love which is implanted within you by your Maker! No, no! I will not take your answer now! I will ask you again one day!"

The strong man quivered in his agony. The woman remained standing, outwardly like a statue, but inwardly agitated by strange and violent emotion. He caught her hand, raised it to his lips, and hurried from the apartment, his last glance at her showing him the same motionless, grave-visaged woman, as rigid as if carved from a block of marble.

An hour later, when the visiting woman arrived at the entrance of the blind alley known as Paradise Row, the appearance of her eyes indicated weeping. Otherwise, she was as unruffled as usual.

It was curious to watch her progress from house to house; she did not enter them on this call, but spoke to the women at the door, making earnest inquiries concerning the children, or whether this or that trouble had been overcome. She knew something about them all, and she gained a few words of genuine thanks from most of these disreputable denizens of the Row for her solicitude and thoughtfulness. She passed along fearlessly to a place where the police did not care to venture singly. Even the rascally men, loafing against this or that doorpost, gazed with awe and admiration at her, although not one of them would have hesitated to attack and rob any other woman either there or in the more open thoroughfares of the town.

The power which she possessed over these people was shown when she stood before the closed door of No. 12 and was about to knock.

A man reclining lazily against the opposite wall suddenly straightened himself and hastened towards her with a warning on his lips.

"I wouldn't go there, ma'am," he said earnestly, and it was noticed that his agitation was so pronounced that he actually took his pipe out of his mouth in order to speak plainly—a most uncommon occurrence! "You see, the new party ain't 'xactly as perlite as he ought ter be! He's very wi'lent sometimes, and he knocks her about!"

Her was doubtless meant to signify the violent party's better half. Miss Green, remembering that the speaker himself had more than once been guilty of playfully attacking his wife, felt that the new tenants of No. 12 were very rough. Just a little tremor affected her, but after a moment's hesitation, she smiled and replied firmly:

"It's very good of you to tell me. Still, I must not permit my feelings to stand in the way of my duty."

The man grumbled something about "If you git hurt, don't say as I didn't tell yer," and retired. Kate Green, her heart beating a little more quickly, knocked at the door.

It was one of those small houses where the door opens direct into the front room. Kate, listening for a response, fancied she heard a sound from the back room; accepting this as a rough invitation to enter—by no means an uncommon experience—she turned the handle and went in, closing the door behind her.

The apartment was empty. The door leading to the back room was open, but that, too, was empty. The stairs leading to the upper rooms were masked by a door in the back room and from this direction Kate heard sounds that filled her with dismay.

Some kind of a struggle was taking place. The man was probably beating his wife! Kate was about to return to the front door to call for help, when a cry of pain from a woman caused her to pull open the door masking the stairs and quickly mount the steep steps. In the upper back room, which was devoid of furniture save a rickety cane-bottomed chair, she saw a woman on her knees, her back to Kate, struggling in the grasp of a man who held both her wrists with one hand while his right arm was above his head, swung back ready to deal the woman a terrible blow with a heavy stick.

His face was partly hidden by a heavy moustache and beard, which, like his hair, was unkempt; his eyes were bloodshot, his features distorted with passion. It was a spectacle to make any woman quail, but Kate Green, with a half-murmured prayer, sprang forward and gripped his uplifted arm.

"Hold!" she said firmly. "What are you doing?"

"I'll show you what I'm doing," cried the man hoarsely. "Who are you to come interfering? I'll serve you as I was going to serve her, then you'll know what I'm going to do!"

He threw the woman to the floor, seized Kate by the wrist and, with a quick turn that caused her to cry with pain, forced her to her knees. Death seemed very near to Kate Green at that moment; she saw the terrible weapon that would stretch her lifeless when it descended; she was powerless to arrest it! Ah, if Robert Harding had had the right to accompany her!

Then two things happened simultaneously—two things which Kate Green accepted as an answer to that half-murmured prayer for help. The man's eyes fell on a little golden cross which Kate wore; it was attached to a strong ribbon round her neck. And in the same instant Kate saw a scar on the man's right brow and she cried aloud, in an agonised tone: "Frank! Frank!"

As though confronted by the vision of an avenging angel, the man slowly released his grasp and stepped back, allowing the stick to fall to the ground with a crash. The face, inflamed with rage and drink, turned pale; the fierce light in his eyes gave place to an expression of mingled fear and shame. He stepped backwards, his hands half-raised as if to keep her away, till his back touched the wall.

"Kate!" he gasped. "Kate! *You! Here!* No, no, it is not Kate; it is her shadow, come to punish me! Mercy, mercy!"

This man, who a moment before would have shed blood without thought, fell on his knees and implored clemency. Kate had risen to her feet. The positions were reversed!

He cowered before her; she gazed at him, half-comprehending, half dazed. To such a low pass as this had come the man to whom she had given her love when barely a woman! His forgery and flight had affected her career by a kind of reflex action; people had thought that it was to take her about and give her presents that he had overstepped his income and had done wrong, so she had had to leave the old place and struggle to begin life afresh! What a struggle it had been!

She had forgiven him, but had clung to the ideal, and the sight of this wreck of a man forced home the lesson which she had begun to learn that afternoon. Was it fair? Had she any right to cling to it and to mourn for what had never existed? Was it in accordance with the will of the Great Ruler? Her train of thought was interrupted by the man who cried in agonising tones:

"I wronged you, Kate! Say you forgive me! Say you forgive me and I will try to make amends! I swear I will! It is all clear to me now; I never saw how vile I had been till this minute. Let me stay in the world a little longer and I will make amends!"

A sob rose to Kate's throat. The woman had scrambled to her feet and had hurried down the narrow stairs to the street, to seek refuge, careless of the danger of her rescuer.

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Kate choked back the lump in her throat and spoke gently, forgivingly.

"I forgive you, Frank, for the sake of what you once were! I will not say 'what I thought you were' because I like to think that I was not mistaken in the beginning! Get up and keep your word! It is not I who have power to let you live or to cut short your life, for I am mortal flesh and blood, as you are! Come, let me clasp your hand for a seal of the promise just made!"

She held out her hand, he stood erect and held his behind him.

"No!" he cried. "I am not worthy! This hand has done wrong; even now the police may be on my track. I——"

The door at the foot of the stairs was flung violently back and the voices of men were heard. The man looked about him like a hunted animal.

"They are after me!" he cried in a raucous whisper. "They'll drag me to prison! Where can I go?"

Kate stood in front of him, her back to him and her face to the door, as if to protect him. In her agitation she scarcely knew what she was doing. Dr. Robert Harding entered, followed by two constables.

"Kate!" cried Harding gladly. "Thank Heaven you are safe!"

Then he remained motionless, as did the policemen, not understanding the strange scene. The rescued woman had shouted that he was murdering the district visitor, and Robert Harding, hastening to the Row, in order to be near Kate, had heard these awful words and had ran thither, meeting two constables who were going to the same house to arrest the man for highway robbery with violence. And now they saw the district visitor ready to protect him!

An exclamation from the three men and a crash behind her caused Kate to turn. The man had fallen to the ground in a fit.

They carried him to the next room where a wretched bed afforded a slightly more comfortable resting-place. Harding attended to him, assisted by Kate, while the policeman looked on stolidly. After five or six minutes the constables left, intending to keep guard outside till Dr. Harding should summon them. This he did half an hour later; during the interval as they watched the motionless figure on the bed, Kate told him the history of her visit.

"You need not trouble about your prisoner," said Dr. Harding gravely. "He has escaped and has gone to obtain a free pardon from a Merciful Judge."

And Kate Green, with one hand in those of Dr. Harding, wept for the man who had caused her so much suffering. But the bitterness was tempered by the feeling that a new and brighter life was opening before her!

G. Merriam.

"You've been losing flesh lately, haven't you?" "Yes, I've been shaving myself."

"Who was that lady you spoke to?" "That's the lady that lets my mother go out Thursday and Sunday evenings."

"Poetry doesn't pay nowadays," remarked the long-haired lodger. "Neither do poets," replied the landlady coldly.

Cashier: "But why do you object to bringing in a friend to identify you?" The Man: "Well, you see, the cheque is for only £12, and he'd be sure to want to borrow ten of it."

Mrs. Cobwigger: "I bought a necktie here yesterday, and the one you sent home wasn't anything like it." Haberdasher: "The one we sent, madam, was picked out by your husband a month ago, in case you ever bought one for him."

Cholly: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me, and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate, as though hesitating to pain you?" Cholly: "No; she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

BURIED STATIONS COMPETITION.

Up to the time of going to press it has unfortunately been impossible to finish checking all the attempts. A list, however, has been prepared of all the words admissible so far as the checking has gone. This list is not necessarily a complete one, as further words may be added as other attempts are gone through. The names of the winners will appear next week.

1.—Over, Hilgay, Heather, Cam, Seven Sisters, Sandwich; 2.—Endon, Daybrook, Hockley; 3.—Hay, Preston, Pant, Awre, Hay, Ayr, Five Ways; 4.—Tain, Knock, Llong, Dore, Eye, Shaw, Hyde; 5.—Halfway, Horse and Jockey, Hay, Fulwell, Ayr, Fishponds, Hythe, Ayr; 6.—Lye, Ash, Dover, Waterfall, Sandy, Banks, Ayr; 7.—Eye, Browndown, Ore, Capel, City, Ince, Manors, Willbrook; 8.—Mallow, Rosemount, Ashbury, Sandy, Cornwood, Nigg; 9.—Hay, Wressle, Wreay, Starcross, Over, Eridge, Round Oak, Honor Oak, Victoria; 10.—Errol, Shotts, Donamon, Awre, Morningside, Par, Earley, Ewell, Awre; 11.—Four Crosses, Four Stones, Willington, Umberleigh, Claxby; 12.—Condover, Manuel, Langho, Tain, Botanic Gardens, Peartree; 13.—Float, Newry, Verwood, Carrick, Lymm, Ore; 14.—Hay, Over, Cliffe, Seaside, Awre, Looe, Awre, Angerton; 15.—Church, Doune, Valley, Awre, Three Counties, Privett, Row, Bridge; 16.—Ayr, Rookery, County School, Boyle, Towyn, Birr; 17.—Horseleap, Highgate, Torre, Crosshill, Sandal, Hawes; 18.—Verwood, Twenty, Ore, Crewe, Brigg, Lye, Swansea; 19.—Hayle, City, Southgate, Llong, Bare Lane, Awre, Flint; 20.—Box, Tain, Dover, Twenty, Rye, Ferns, Seedley; 21.—Haigh, Talk, New Buildings, Soho, Oyne, Pwllheli; 22.—Post Office, Methil, Morriston, Travellers' Rest, Wemyss Castle; 23.—Rye, Cole, Lower Ince, Diss, Heywood, Notton; 24.—Moira, Guyhirne, Ashey, Hurn, Birr, Grotton; 25.—British Museum, Tain, Coalport, Worcester, Abbey, Olton, Belleek, Ware; 26.—Quorn, Cam, Kilwinning, Mount Vernon, Fleet; 27.—Stoats Nest, Plains, Recess, Gordon, Hoyland, Holme; 28.—Roade, Lye, Greystones, Shap, Lye, Triangle, Haigh, Brightside, Thurso, Row, Moss; 29.—Hope, Freshwater, Lye, Newhouse, Ayr, Leigh, Wells, Ore; 30.—Leigh, Ningwood, Awre, Great Coates, Reddish, Paignton, Crosby; 31.—Ore, Quin, Bluestone, Ayr, Brill, Praze; 32.—Awre, Saddleworth, Looe, Penns, Theale, Ingham, Boston, Bow; 33.—Torre, Grange Con, Radcliffe, Lye, Manors, Ore, Finedon; 34.—Biggar, Legacy, Hanley, Hadleigh, Dinmore, Ore, Ore, Llong; 35.—Tain, Point Pleasant, Sway, Diss, Row, Ewell, Lydd, Rye; 36.—Aby, Bourne End, Hay, Hayle, Torre, Worstead, Wardhouse, Croft, Birr, Knowle; 37.—March, Gailes, Broughton, Wreay, Diss, Over; 38.—Forden, Hatch, Arley, Grafton, Ash, Liss, Harold Wood, Lymm, Tain, Haigh, Leigh; 39.—Duns, Awre, Lenton, March, Twenty, Risca, Consall, Par; 40.—Clara, Haworth, Idle, St. Mary's, Schoolhill, Ford, Ore, Diss; 41.—Giant's Causeway, Leigh, Bray, Worle, Dover, Dess, Ore, Godstone, Stow, Awre; 42.—Trew, Awre, Roby, Hyde, Peartree, Tivoli, Islay, City; 43.—Eaton, Currie, Street, Kentish Town, Ayr, Littlemore; 44.—Ingrow, Nailsea, Merton, Hook; 45.—Port, Newbridge, Reston, Lenton, Haigh, 46.—Enzie, Amotherby, Hatch, Woodend, Paignton, Eye, Ince, Row, Llong; 47.—Worthing, Selling, Cattal, Tintern, Sale, Willington, Rye, Awre; 48.—Rhyl, Ayton, Ryde, Theale, Rayne, London Bridge, Denton, Lyne; 49.—Llong, Roade, Leeds, Patrick's Well, Eston; 50.—Swine, Minster, Ore, Rye, Ennis, Wreay; 51.—Awre, Llong, Crewe, Tal-y-Cafn, Sale, Rigg, Penns, Cole, Lye, Gailes; 52.—Oyne, King Edward, Skares, Hose, Victoria, Ewell, Liss; 53.—Reading, Poole, Awre, Twenty, Lea, Looe; 54.—Brynn, Penicuik, Leigh, Awre, Little Mill, Boyle, Potton, York, Awre; 55.—Trinity, Church, Ludlow, Hatch, Arley, Peel; 56.—Wreay, Diss, Cove, Lymm, Oldcastle, Stokesley, Frome, Oyne, Schull; 57.—Crick, Lea, Seaside, Leven, Wick, Leigh, Bold; 58.—Battle, Trooper's Lane, Twenty, Ford, Leigh, Leven; 59.—Hay, Rushall, Awre, Oyne, Bow; 60.—Nigg, Ardleigh, Manuel, Ayr, Leigh, Leeds, Trew, Leigh, Pill; 61.—Awre, Bay Horse, Hose, Wreay, Ewell, Leigh, Ince, Errol, Rye; 62.—Ayr, Cove, Bushey, Roath, Smallthorne, Leigh, Peartree, Over; 63.—Haigh, Old Leake, Deal, Waterfall, Errol; 64.—Wryde, Ore, Downhill, Pill, Llong, Over, Eye; 65.—Standon, Bridge, Lye, Leigh, Rushall, Rayne, Looe, Port; 66.—Wreay, North Road, London, Biggar, City, Roade; 67.—Par, Looe, Twickenham, Ferry, Toward, Richmond, Eskbank; 68.—Biggar, Rye, Tain, Theale, Kinsale, Ewell, Knowle, Awre; 69.—Valley, Rayne, Torre, Settle, Wetherby, Cam, Slough, Bridge, Dover; 70.—Stoke, Lye, Ardleigh, Peel, Roughan, Reddish, Lynn, Coal, Notton; 71.—Fareet, Wreay, Earley, Knowle, Ennis, Lydd, Tresmeer, Leigh, Awre; 72.—Ayr, Wreay, Fawley, Holme, Ayr, Thurso, Ongar, Tain, Rye, Rye.

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GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold

A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • BY • •

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He is elected as an M.P.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who is betrothed to Eric.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery."

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who is engaged on "The Meteor."

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Rescue on the River.

AGAIN that cry came nearer, nearer.

For Ronald was round the bend, and, still pulling, for dear life, glancing over his shoulder he saw that punt drifting down towards him, broadside on, with no river nymph this time to guide it!

Fiercely, frantically, he plied swift, strenuous strokes. For dear life? Yes! he was pulling now for *her* dear life. One—two—three moments, three swift, herculean strokes—he was past the drifting punt, there ahead of him was her face like another lily on the bosom of the stream.

"Hold up for just one moment!" he shouted. "I shall save you!"

Ere he had finished speaking his boat was alongside her. He scrambled into the stern, leaning overside he seized her with one strong hand, then steadying the boat, resolved to save her at all hazards, whether he lifted her out or went in with and swam out with her.

"Keep steady!" he cried. "You're quite safe. I'm holding you!"

But he had no easy task, for he soon learned what had happened.

A clinging, winding wisp of weeds had twined around her, and supporting her with one arm, leaning over the gunwale with his pocket-knife, which he had opened with his teeth, he had to cut away the slimy, tenacious, cord-like bands; but it was done at last.

Using all his strength of limb and all his skill in watercraft, he had dragged her into his boat, placed her drenched and exhausted on the storm cushions, once again had saved her life.

So it was fated they should meet and that their meeting should be fraught with what would insure remembrance. She seemed to realise that fully as voluntarily as he, with such sweet docility she placed herself in his hands and obeyed his guidance. It was Kismet; she had neither the power, and she could not conceal from herself the pleasing truth—she had not the inclination to rebel, even to resist.

He sculled her back down stream to the little cosy, not too fashionable river-bank hotel where he was staying, a quaint old, red-brick building standing in pleasant grounds and gardens, covered with trellis work that wanton roses, red and yellow, clambered over, and gave her in the charge of a motherly hostess.

An hour later Madeleine, clad in comfortable attire, which, if it did not exactly fulfil lovely woman's many requirements in the matter of fit and style, was by no means unbecoming, and to his eyes she would look sweet in anything, seated opposite him at a tea-table beside the open window looking on to the flower-spangled lawn, and beyond it the limpid, bough-reflected river, the river that Ronald, who had always loved it, now adored since it had given its fairest nymph into his arms.

Ronald, too solicitous for her to think of aught beside, had sent a waterside man in quest of Miss Lorraine's punt, and a little later that worthy individual appeared at the open window, hat in hand, to inform the lady with many tugs at his forelock, that he had brought the punt back safe and sound without a scratch, pole cushions, luncheon-basket, and all.

"Oh! and my book—my book!" said Madeleine.

"Yes, marm, there were a book, which I brought it along," and he handed through the open window a daintily-bound volume, and his fidelity being substantially recognised by Madeleine's companion, he tugged that forelock in his direction.

"I'm so glad it's saved," said Madeleine to Ronald, "it's the best book I've read."

"Really!" he remarked, "may I ask the title?" and she answered:

"It's 'Flotsam and Jetsam,' a collection of complete stories and lyrics by the new man."

"The new man?"

"Yes, quite my favourite author, I'm rather enraptured with him."

"Happy man!" said Ronald ecstatically, and she went on, with a radiant smile lighting her lovely face,:

"You've surely heard of him—his name is Harvey Bligh."

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SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Gold for Gilt and Gilt for Gold.

LORD LYNTON was hard up. That is, in his sense of the word, for one can be hard up in a variety of styles.

Fitz-Crœsus, born in the purple, with a silver spoon in his mouth and cradled in rose leaves, finds himself shockingly pinched when his extravagances have reduced his income to within five figures; whereas Jenkinson, of the Cosmopolitan Bank and Camberwell, dreams that on five hundred a year he could banish care from the vocabulary.

And, by the same token, Fitz-Crœsus, with a list of debts totting up to, say, fifty thousand pounds, never lets a thought of them disturb his nightly dreams, while poor little Jenkinson will lie awake listening to the church clock telling the slowly crawling hours, thinking with horror of that twenty pound bill to be met upon the morrow.

But agricultural depression, the death duties, and other matters, had reduced Lord Lynton's fortunes materially, though he was some distance removed from penury. It was beginning to be whispered of him that there was a good deal of his paper about, which is a bad thing to be said of a man or a theatre.

Therefore, in his extremity, Lord Lynton had approached Mr. Scrimshaw.

Now, different men had different ways of approaching Scrimshaw. Lord Lynton's way was that of a cavalier—patronising, indeed, condescending.

No doubt he thought it didn't matter, but, as a matter of fact, Scrimshaw had a way of dealing with people according to their way of approaching him, for this Napoleon of finance, like his prototype of Austerlitz, had his vanities.

Lord Lynton, on Geldart's introduction, had first repaired to the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited as a speculator.

He would have repudiated the term "a gambler," for it was his habit at the meetings of the Mutual Improvement Societies, the Mechanics Institute, and kindred institutions at Little Claverton and elsewhere, to wax fiercely eloquent against the besetting vice, whether it took the form of cards, or dice, or race betting.

But purchasing stock, dear me, that was an investment, the investment underlying and stimulating the commercial and industrial energy of the country, and buying that stock to sell again at a profit, that was fair trading, and trading was the backbone of the Empire; and running an account with a dealer in "differences," paying or receiving, according as the balance stood on a given date, this, of course, his lordship would have argued, was a mere development of ordinary business.

Thinking that with his experience and his sources of information he could make money out of the Cosmopolitan at this game, he played—and lost, played high—lost heavily, then played rashly, with the result that notwithstanding his contention that his transactions were business dealings, utterly distinct from gambling or anything so vicious, his experiences very much resembled those of a punter out of his depth, and his feelings were frequently allied to those of the man who, rising in the grey dawn from his chair, staggers wearily across the card-littered floor—"Hard Hit!"

So that later Lord Lynton resorted to Mr. Scrimshaw in another capacity, still cavalier, condescending, patronising, intimating that he must have a little money, a few thousands, to tide him over till his rents fell in. Of course he could get it from friends, but he didn't care to be under an obligation to anybody.

"So you see, Mr. Scrimshaw," he added, accentuating the "Mister" by way of emphasizing that he was addressing an inferior, "I came along to you. You know the detail work which I've never had to trouble myself with in these matters, and you may as well have your so much per cent. as anybody else, and I understand from Geldart that you combine this sort of thing with your business."

"Oh, yes, my lord," laughed Scrimshaw; "all's fish that comes to my net." And he whispered to himself, "and when the bait is gold they come in shoals."

"I don't know that I particularly care to be compared with a fish," said the Viscount, "and I don't know what on earth you're muttering. What I want to make clear is I want some money, between thirty and forty thousand, and I must have it soon, in fact I must have a few thousands at once. You and my lawyer fellows can fix up the details; they have most of my deeds in their keeping."

"A few thousands at once." Mr. Scrimshaw was thoughtful. "What's the immediate security?"

"I tell you it's no good talking business to me; my lawyer fellows do all that."

"Well, will your lordship make an appointment for me to meet them?"

"Oh, that can be done, I suppose, but, don't you see, my good man, I want a few thousands at once."

"Oh, I quite understand that," said Scrimshaw; "indeed, I meet so many people who want exactly the same."

"But Geldart told me you could arrange all these things," said Lord Lynton testily.

"Oh, yes," said Scrimshaw blandly, "on terms." And he named his terms. They were steep; even his lordship, with his contempt for business detail, thought them far too steep.

Mr. Scrimshaw put his cheque book back in the drawer, and Lord Lynton bethought himself that the hills immediately ahead were even steeper, with the result that he requested Mr. Scrimshaw not to be in such a confounded hurry, and in result he appended his signature to certain red stamped blue slips and other memoranda.

"And, by-the-bye, my lord," said Scrimshaw, "an idea has just occurred to me—but, I'm afraid your lordship's a far too busy man to entertain it."

The stony glare in Viscount Lynton's face relaxed, and Scrimshaw went on. "Though there's money in it."

"I am, as you say, Mr. Scrimshaw, tolerably well occupied, but of course one is always ready to consider a remunerative matter."

"Simply this," said Scrimshaw, briskly, watching his visitor. "I am concerned in a small company that's been recently floated for the exploitation of a new bicycle tyre; it's the Pneumatic Intacto."

"Really!" exclaimed the Viscount, with a face of granite, "I am not exactly at that period of life when one is keenly interested in—er—bicycles."

"Jusso," said Scrimshaw; "but I thought you might be interested in the sale of 'em."

"Nor in the sale of them, sir," said Lynton, then struck by an afterthought, "although, of course, as you say, Mr. Scrimshaw, one may be interested in the sale of an article that of itself doesn't interest one in the least; so much depends on the scale of the sale."

"Exactly," said Scrimshaw, "a lot depends upon the scale. The man who kills another man goes to the drop, the man who sets two millions at each other's throats obtains a coronet, sometimes a crown; the man who swindles another scamp, intent on getting someone else's money easily with the three card trick or some other paltry fraud, goes straight to clink, and the man who works a mammoth swindle on the Bourse rolls through the West End in his chariot wrapped in his furs, smoking half sovereign cigars—you're right—it's scale!"

"But how does all this affect the subject?"

"Not at all, my lord. I was merely moralising—a great liberty on my part, especially in the presence of a peer. But I was going to say that this Pneumatic Intacto is a sound affair, and it would be to your lordship's advantage to be upon the Board."

"And perhaps to the advantage of the Board," said Lord Lynton, to which Scrimshaw replied,

"You wouldn't be invited if it weren't."

Lord Lynton rose.

"I think I'll wish you good morning, sir, if you have no other subject to discuss, except an investment I'm not particularly inclined to consider."

"Very well, my lord."

The Viscount moved to the door, then, with a puzzled air, turned, and coming back, said:

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"Look here, Scrimshaw, you're too shrewd a man to bring up a matter like this without there's something behind it. You know very well I've no money to buy the qualification shares, even if I took the slightest interest in your Pneumatic Intacto, or whatever you call it, which I don't. What's the game?"

"Simply this," said Scrimshaw, "the qualification will cost you nothing. Promise to come on our Board and to take up and pay for two hundred and fifty ordinary shares of one pound each at par and I will place a cheque—no, no, not a cheque, bank notes for five hundred pounds—at your lordship's credit at your bankers', or trouble your lordship to do so."

"But what do I know about bicycle tyres?"

"What do you know of gutta percha? What do you know of celluloid? What did you know of the Ping Pong Accessories Syndicate, or the Nubibus Gold and Silver Mines?"

"Scrimshaw, no unpleasant memories, pray! Is this a sound affair?"

"My dear Lord Lynton, the Pneumatic Intacto Company is as unpuncturable as the tyre which, according to its memorandum of association, it is incorporated to trade in."

"Five hundred pounds! It isn't a lot."

"No, but strike while the iron's hot; buy Pneumatic Intactos with the lot of it; they'll be at a premium within a week of issue, within a fortnight they'll be at a quarter; but don't sell then, there'll be a slump, but don't sell, wait for the rebound which is bound to come; the one pound shares will be at fifty shillings within three months after allotment."

"By Jove, Scrimshaw, you're a wonderful man. I'll think about it."

"You mean, my lord, you'll join our Board. Come, say the word; I have the draft prospectus here shall I add to the list of our directors the Viscount Lynton? Just as you like, my lord; you see you're in good company."

Lord Lynton, glancing at the proof prospectus, screwed up his lips a moment, for a moment blinked his eyes, then said:

"Well, yes, it seems to me a most praiseworthy enterprise, calculated to foster an important home industry, and I think I am fulfilling a public duty imposed upon me by my position in lending my name and my co-operation in the furtherance of its interest."

Then he left Crosby Square with Mr. Scrimshaw's open cheque for five thousand pounds. Mr. Scrimshaw let his lordship out of the private door of his offices, then quietly closing this, went upstairs and knocked at the door on the second floor.

"Come in," said Old Mystery's voice.

He entered, and there was Old Mystery seated at his writing table with huge masses of papers all around him, covered with figures—figures of all kinds, figures of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, tens of millions, fractions, vulgar and decimal, denoting infinitesimal divisions of the unit, calculations, the very sight of which made the brain recoil and reel.

"Aha, Old Twopenny, still at it?"

"Yes, yes," said Old Mystery, "still pegging away."

"Still the System? How's it getting on?"

"Oh, it's developing wonderfully. I'm almost nearing the end of it, and then, Scrimshaw, we will paralyse the world. The bourses, the markets of Europe shall awaken one morning to find themselves fettered hand and foot, bound round and round in our meshes and helpless at our mercy."

The financier smiled a little sceptically.

"I have known lots of men with systems," he said, "systems for backing horses, for backing this or that jockey's mount, for winning at cards. I've known some men go Tommy Dodd for sovereigns on a system, but in the end the system as a rule breaks down, and it very often breaks the man who built it. I should think that the Casino at Monte Carlo would feel a draught if people left off devising systems."

"Ah, yes, yes!" Old Mystery replied impatiently, "because they are speculating on Chance, or rather outraging the laws of Chance, coercing Chance to become a renegade and apostate from her own dogmas.

"But, my dear fellow, we are not dealing with cards, and wheels, and things inanimate, we are not dealing with little horses or with big ones either, big ones that have got to obey the whip, the rein and the spur of the man who's got to obey the owner, who very often has got to obey a backer or a bookie.

"The strings we pull are the cables which make a network over the city's heart, and, as we touch those strings, so we awaken chords responsive in the markets of the world, and with these little strings we'll play our little game," and, as the old man spoke, his eyes ablaze with the fervour of his aim and end, to Scrimshaw, it seemed he might have posed for a miser wallowing in shimmering heaps of gold, a fanatic going to the stake for his creed, exalted and transfigured with the passion that possessed his soul.

"All right, Old Mystery," he laughed. "We'll do it right enough, though, upon my soul, I don't know how it's going to benefit us."

"What, not benefit us? To have more gold at our command than Midas or Crœsus ever dreamt of, to have our grip on the exchequers and chancelleries of every civilised power! Why, man, our word will hold the armies of the world in check, or let them loose as we will.

"No Tsar, no Pope of Rome, no patriarch will ever yet have wielded such a rod and sceptre as we two shall wield.

"Scrimshaw, old Bacon was a fool; it isn't knowledge that makes for power; the man of science, the philosopher, ever so often lives in penury, and often goes down to his grave inside a pauper's shell; it's money that makes for power, gold—gold—gold that men and women worship, that Jupiter himself rained down upon the tower that yielded Danae. We'll circle round them and we'll shepherd them, the great and small into our toils, and then we'll hold them fast, inmeshed and captured by the Snare of Gold!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" Scrimshaw, leaning against the wall, his hands in his pockets, chuckled as he watched and listened to Old Mystery. Then he said, pitching on the table a bundle of blue slips and folded sheets of foolscap, "Enter these in your register and keep them in your safe when you've just looked them through."

"Lynton! Lynton!" said Old Mystery; then it was his turn to chuckle.

"And, by the bye, old man Mystery, when you take this revised proof round to the printers see that they note the addition to the Board."

"Oh, yes, the Viscount Lynton!" said the old man, reading the red ink delineation. "He's not much good on the Board."

"No, but his title is."

"True, true, it's not the head you want, but the coronet he wears on it, and he isn't lending you that for nothing."

"No, Mystery, Lynton does nothing for nothing. You see, if you want the gilt of his coronet you must put down gold for gold; that's the art of financial angling, you fish for gilt with gold, and then for gold with gilt."

"It's like mackerel fishing with a line," said Old Mystery "where they cut a strip from one of the fresh caught fish to bait the hooks to catch others. Gold for gilt, and gilt for gold. Tut, tut, tut! The Snare of Gold!"

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

"I Will Drag you Down with Me!"

MADELEINE LORRAINE recked little of the troubled waters of speculation in which her father was floundering out of his depth.

Lord Lynton had never quite forgiven his daughter for not being a son, and, although he would have indignantly resented the insinuation that he was wanting in paternal care or affection, he could never quite live down the disappointing reflection that, though by the terms of the patent creating it, the peerage would devolve on his decease on Madeleine in her own right, the family name, of which he was considerably.

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prouder than of his coronet, would, so far as his branch of the family was concerned, die with him.

My lord belonged to the old school that considered intelligence in regard to matters beyond hats and frocks, babies and housekeeping, unwomanly. Then, again, Madeleine had been staying a deal away from home, and very little correspondence had transpired between them.

Eric Geldart, dropping in to lunch at Lorraine House, was charmed and surprised to find Madeleine at the head of the table, returned from a summer spell up river.

"With whom were you staying?" and she answered:

"With Lady Harwardine, at her place at Taplow."

"Weren't you rather bored?"

"Oh, no!" with a sudden light in her face she seemed to him more winsome still. "One is never bored on the river."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Weren't you very lonely?"

"Oh, dear no!" she replied demurely. "Of course, there was auntie!" And he wondered why on earth she suddenly dropped those wonderful lashes and why the apple blossom tint deepened in her cheeks.

Anyway he was thankful for her return to town, even for the fag end of the season, though he reflected with dismay he would soon be losing her again, and for the thousandth time the question sprang to his brain, "Why not claim her for ever?"

He had never met any woman who stirred his pulse as she did. True, her father was not a rich man, and was getting into difficulties that made it possible that ere long he might become a poor one, but if he had not wealth he had influence.

Besides which, Eric, ever cool and cautious, took to heart the consoling fact that the family estates were entailed, and Madeleine herself was well secured under her parents' marriage settlement and the late Viscountess' will. And then she would be some day a peeress in her own right, and Eric, besides dearly loving a lord, still more dearly loved this future fair my lady.

After luncheon she left them to their wine and politics, and, though she guessed it not, to the discussion of the Viscount's financial entanglements.

"I don't altogether care for that fellow Scrimshaw," said Lord Lynton. "I don't care for the men who are so very, very shrewd; they're sometimes dangerous."

"My dear Lynton," said Eric, "in business or in politics one's likes and dislikes have to be kept severely in the background."

"I suppose so, but I can't help thinking it was a mistake your council selecting him as candidate for Brixwell after Blagdon's retirement."

"I had no choice." Then Eric checked himself. "You see it was like this: You must have monied men in your party; plenty of men with very little money are active parliamentarians; they may influence, they may even lead, but they don't make a party. A political party without money is a boiler without a furnace."

"And then, I suppose, considering the startling circumstances under which Blagdon retired, you were rather in a corner, and there was a difficulty in finding quite the right sort of man at once? By the bye, what a startling affair that was!"

Eric, shifting uneasily in his seat, kept silence, and Lord Lynton went on—

"Well, anyway, if only those Eldorado Exploration shares go up, as I'm led to believe they will, I shall pay the man off, and wash my hands of him."

If only—only if! What a world of worlds the little words contain!

Later Eric Geldart found Madeleine in the conservatory, a lily amid the palms. She was seated in a wicker rocking chair close to a plashing fountain; the perfect oval of her face, and

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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her wavy wealth of hair framed in a background of cool and shady green. He seated himself beside her, and, having asked permission to continue his cigar,

"I can't understand," he said, "your not being dull and weary up there at Taplow."

"What nonsense!" she laughed. "What, with my governess cart, my punt, my skiff, my fishing-rods and my books?"

"Oh, yes, your books! What are you reading now?"

She showed him the cover.

"Flotsam and Jetsam."

"Oh, another book by that new fellow, Bligh. You seem quite gone on his work."

"You are not an admirer of his?"

"I'm not a great admirer of anything or anybody, with," he went on, fixing ardent eyes upon her, "one glorious exception. I have so much admiration for you, Madeleine, I have none left for others."

"Don't, please," she said, trembling like the aspen leaf close to her, for he had seized her hand.

"I can't help it, Madeleine. There are times when I feel I must clasp you to me, and cry aloud, "I love you—I love you, Madeleine!" But rising, she slid from him.

"Mr. Geldart," she said, "no more of this, please."

"But, Madeleine, you do care for me, you will care for me?"

"No, no—I'm sorry—I can't."

"But you must—you shall!"

"No, no; besides, there is another girl to whom you are pledged. I have heard of it all; the girl your late father adopted, a Miss Armitage."

"No! No!" he exclaimed angrily, almost fiercely. "Who has told you that? It is quite false, I swear——"

"Mr. Geldart, you were priding yourself just now on your self-restraint. Ah, here comes my father!"

"Yes," he said, recovering himself, "and we are discussing books. Now, for instance, this fellow, it makes one quite tired to be asked, 'What do you think of Bligh? How do you compare him with so and so?' I begin to hate him."

"Have you read him much?"

"No, no, I've no time to dabble with fiction."

"Then how can you judge?"

"Oh, if I haven't read him I've glanced at him in the reviews. I'll show you something of his I dipped into, I think it's published in that collection. Allow me?"

He took the book from her hand, turned over the pages, read her the passage that had struck him.

"Now, that's very fair," he said, "but it's by no means miraculous." Then carelessly he glanced at the title page. A name was written on the fly leaf in a hand that somehow seemed familiar. "Harvey Bligh!" and it was dated that current year, that current summer month. "Is this his writing?" he said, almost demanded, and Madeleine, blushing, said:

"Yes."

A deeper rose blush mounted to her cheeks, and Eric Geldart's jealous heart began to understand why and how she had passed such a joyous river holiday.

"Then you have met this fellow, Harvey Bligh?"

"I have met Mr. Harvey Bligh," she said, drawing herself up, resentful of his insolence.

"The usual style of literary chap, I suppose?" he went on. "Lean of limb, lank of feature, long of hair, and limp of bearing."

"The very opposite—with broader shoulders even than yours; a face full of sunshine when not grave and thoughtful; an athlete every inch. Why, twice he saved my life!"

Then Eric, who had been merely impatient of the man whom he had never seen, but whom in his heart of hearts once for all he guessed had robbed him of his heart's desire—the love of Madeleine Lorraine, hated him with all his soul and all his strength. So that an hour or so later he left Lorraine House, chafing with impotent anger.

What did it matter that he had achieved success, that there were hundreds of women, fair to look upon and well dowered, who would gladly have flung themselves into his arms to share in a career of promise, social and political, so abundant. She was his heart's desire, and he felt that he was wooing her in vain.

When their guest had gone, Lord Lynton, fixing a scrutinising look upon his daughter, said:

"Were you and Geldart indulging in a tiff just now?"

"Hardly that," she smiled; "only Mr. Geldart is a trifle self-opinionated and obstinate, and so perhaps am I, so that we occasionally cross foils, but never without the buttons!" and she laughed.

"Strong men generally are self-opinionated; that goes with strength of mind," said the Viscount, "and Eric Geldart is a very strong man."

"The strongest men are not always the pleasantest," answered Madeleine.

"What is pleasant is not always best for us," said Lord Lynton, and he went on gravely: "Geldart has a brilliant future, he is fairly well-to-do, is a partner in a flourishing concern that runs on wheels as it were by itself, and his late father left him a very comfortable income."

"Yes," answered Madeleine, "at the cost of disinheriting his brother, I was told."

"The brother was a bad lot and deserved all he got, and to lose all he didn't get!" said the Viscount; "but it isn't wealth I'm thinking of, though that is necessary to happiness."

"Father!"

"Oh, yes, poverty of purse means poverty of heart. But that man has a political future before him. Some day he'll be a Cabinet Minister. It's on the cards he may be offered an Under-Secretaryship in the lifetime of the present parliament. He has made his mark in the House and in the country."

"People seem rather undecided about him, nobody quite seems to know with which side he and his little band will ultimately throw in their fortunes."

"That's Geldart's generalship, and that's the importance of his force," said the Viscount. "Madeleine, I know he's tremendously interested in you and I should be sorry to see you discourage him."

"Oh, but father, I—I——"

"What do you mean?" asked the Viscount testily and suspiciously, noting the tell-tale crimson in her cheeks. "You haven't formed any prior attachment—you appreciate your position too thoroughly to indulge in either flirtation or sentimentalities, I trust.'

"I mean, father," said Madeleine, with some confusion, "that I am not merely negative to Mr. Geldart. I admire him certainly for his cleverness, and I am interested in his career.

"He is so bold, and in a way so brilliant, and I think he's wonderful to listen to at public meetings and in the House and to read about in the papers, but, personally, there is a nameless something about him that jars on my nerves, and there are times when he is absolutely repellant to me."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said Lord Lynton impatiently; "he's a splendid fellow! Why, already the Opposition have, through his influence, been made to see the blunder they made in passing me over for the Lord-Lieutenancy without even a solatium, and I've heard a whisper from present Ministerial circles that if anything happens to Lord Brentwood—and his physicians are in daily attendance on him—they will at once recognise my claims. And understand, Madeleine, it is my special wish that you should be particularly polite to Mr. Geldart—my particular wish, remember!"

He left her, and Madeleine returned to her wicker-chair in the conservatory to dive again into the fascinating pages of Harvey Bligh, and, reading him, to dream that once again she was listening to him in the shade of the willows where foxgloves clustered by the river brim and his mellow voice mingled with the drowsy hum of bees the whisper of the summer breeze amid the quivering rushes and the murmur of the weir.

* * * * *

"Eric!"

A hansom drew to the kerb and stopped, and Clare

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Armitage sprang on to the pavement.

"I've been wanting, oh! so badly, to see you—to have a long, long talk with you. Where have you been all this while and why have you avoided me?"

"Tut, tut, Clare; people can hear."

"What does it matter?"

"A deal to me, I assure you! You know I loathe effusiveness and detest a scene."

"Eric!" There were tears in her voice and her reproachful eyes were dim. "I think you are very cold and harsh to me, especially after all that has happened. Ah, me! how soon men can forget!"

"My dear girl!" he said impatiently, "if you have anything to say, by all means write to me; but, for Heaven's sake, don't improvise a dramatic scene in Piccadilly; besides, your hansom's waiting."

"Eric, I must speak with you, I will speak with you, where you choose. I have something to say that has been on my mind, that's been scorching in my mind. Take me somewhere where we can talk."

With an ill grace he gave way, paid and dismissed her cab, and together they turned into a fashionable tea-room and selected a table in an alcove where they could converse without being overheard.

"Now, Eric," she said, "let us once for all come to an understanding."

"By all means," he said nonchalantly; "you don't mind my cigarette?"

"You told me the last time that we met there was nothing between you and Lord Lynton's daughter, and you repeated a promise you had made a hundred times, that I should be your wife, I who helped you to be what you are, who risked so much for you, dared so much for you—Heaven help me!—sinned so much for you."

"My dear Clare, what's done is done."

"I know; and if you'd kept your bargain I should never have complained, however things befel. But you're not doing that—you're turning traitor, cutting me adrift. When I told you what I was hearing, that you were courting Lord Lynton's daughter, you told me it was false; but it was you who were lying, you were at her heels everywhere, you who once were my shadow now are hers."

"Well?" he asked.

"Well! Oh, Eric, think! she doesn't care for you, she wouldn't dare for you what I have dared for you; think before it's too late! Because I swear if you throw me over you sha'n't swim long; I'll tell the truth and the world that thinks so well of you shall know you for what you are!"

"And your proofs?"

"My proofs!" She paused, all the more furious than ever because she was compelled to pause, because she had no answer to that mocking taunt.

"Your ultimatum?" she cried passionately. "That promise you made me a hundred times—is it to be kept or broken?"

"My dear girl, I am a Member of Parliament, therefore you can quite understand I have made innumerable promises. To which particular one do you refer?"

"Eric Geldart, don't mock me!" she said; "for I warn you you are playing with fire. You have made me your tool and you are flinging me away. I have proved to you that I can be docile, useful, even priceless was your term, but I warn you I can also be dangerous. Taunt me with the ease with which you have fooled me and I swear to you that you shall find an enemy as deadly to you, your fortunes and your hopes as ever mortal man encountered."

He smiled scornfully. She was playing his game; it suited his plan best of all just then that they should quarrel, and that he should wrench himself free from all bonds between them.

"I must remind you," he said caustically, "it was you who sought, indeed, insisted upon this discussion. For my part my anxiety is to end it and avoid a repetition."

"You mean you want to be friends again, Eric?" she said hopefully, pleadingly, clutching at every straw of a chance of winning back his smile.

"As you please," he said; so coldly that her heart sank back again.

"You want to get rid of me," she said; "you are tired of me; besides, I know too much."

"Your first two premises I am prepared to grant; the third I unequivocally deny."

She looked him full in the face.

"I know, I know!" she said; "it's Madeleine Lorraine you want—the cold, marble blonde, who, if you win her, will never give you half the devotion I have showered upon you. You know it's true, you traitor! Yes, your brother, whom you wronged, named you Judas, and he was right!"

"And you?" he asked mockingly. "Remember that even had you the power as well as the will to substantiate your story and drag me down, you would have to sink with me."

"I wouldn't care for that, Eric; I may sink with you, but I'll drag you down."

He made a gesture of contemptuous impatience. Her breast heaved, her colour came and went, and with a giant effort of self-repression she went on:

"You think my threats are idle, you think that I, though able to help, am powerless to harm; very well then, from this hour I spare no pains, relax no efforts to find your brother Ronald, and tell him all the truth."

"You Jezebel! you dare not!" he hissed fiercely. But she had swept across towards the door, was already descending the velvet-covered staircase.

For some time he paced to and fro in deep thought. What if she kept her word? Why then—but at all hazards she must not keep her word, her quest must be frustrated and her angry tongue silenced. Even if—well, desperate cases need desperate remedies.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Is it the Same Girl?

A FEW weeks ago "DISCONSOLATE LOVER" told me the story of his meeting years ago with a factory girl, for whom he since developed a tender feeling, but from the day of his meeting till now he has not seen her. "EDNA" now writes to me, on the chance that she is able to help the disconsolate one. Here is her story. Does it tally with that of "DISCONSOLATE LOVER"?

The meeting took place in the Lea Bridge Road, and the girl was working in Homerton. She was with a friend on a day's outing, and both the girls were dressed in pale blue blouses and fawn skirts. One is since married, the other single. "DISCONSOLATE LOVER" will at once recognise if this is the lady to whom he refers, and if so, no doubt will communicate with me.

Edna takes the opportunity to deny the suggestion that factory girls do not read newspapers. "One of the girls in question," she says, "was the daughter of a captain, R.N., the other's father held a good position in the G.P.O. Both were highly educated, and you may be surprised to know that very many girls who work in factories are in similar positions."

Business Girls and Future Husbands.

"My daughter wishes to go into business," writes "MATER," "but I am afraid if she did she might spoil her chances of meeting a suitable young man whom she might marry. Do you think this is likely to be the case?"

No, "MATER." If a girl has the qualities which attract "suitable" young men, she will find them as useful in business as at home. True, the general run of men nowadays do not regard the business woman with any favour, but that is often due to the ungracious attitude of the woman herself. If a girl has the right womanly qualities, they will be better appreciated in business than anywhere, and your daughter is quite likely to meet the right sort of man, as usually girls who have had a sound commercial training make excellent economical wives.

Cross Purposes.

"OURS is rather an uncommon affair," writes "PERPLEXED." "We are two old Eton boys of independent means. Whilst staying at Scarborough for a day or two we met a charming young lady. I just took a casual liking to her, but my friend fell hopelessly in love. The girl, on her part, will not listen to his overtures, but always seems to delight in my company. What can I do?"

As your friend is in love with the girl, and you yourself are not, you should show your friendship by withdrawing yourself from competition. The girl may have taken a fancy to you, but unless you feel that you return it in kind you had better not have anything to do with it, especially as your friend is already in love.

Early Morning Courtship Not Advisable.

"ANNIE" writes: "My sweetheart and I live in the same street, and he passes our door every morning on his way to his train. Now do you think I ought to walk with him to the station? I have often thought of doing so, but don't know whether it would be a kindness to him or not. Please offer your advice."

"ANNIE" is evidently a most well-meaning sweetheart. However, I don't, as a matter of principle, advise her to walk to the station in the morning. After all, the young man might be induced to lose his train out of desire to remain as long as possible with her, and even if he caught it, love making so early in the morning is not the best prelude to a day's business. I have known love letters which have utterly unfitted many an admirable young man for his day's work. What "ANNIE" might do would be to meet him as he returns at night. That is the time when a man most feels that he wants a little relaxation from business cares, not early in the morning. I am sure if you take my advice you will not regret it.

Actresses' Love Affairs.

"MASIE" writes: "We are two actresses on tour. We are both in love with the same young man. How are we to know which of us he loves best, as he treats us both in the same way? As he sends up flowers and chocolates often, we are sure he means something serious. By the way, is it proper for us to ask him to supper at our rooms after the theatre? We do not see any harm."

Depend on it, it is one of you two that he has taken a fancy to, but as a nice-minded fellow, he would not like to show preference to one while the other was present. As you are both in love with him, naturally you will neither of you wish to give way to the other. Better leave it to the young man to decide. As to asking him to your rooms, we know that amongst actresses ideas are rather different on the matter of propriety to those in general vogue. An actress has so much to do with the opposite sex that she is fairly capable of looking after herself. If the other girls in the theatre do not think it right of you to ask the man to supper, I should discontinue doing so. After all, propriety depends on custom, and even in touring companies there are unwritten laws on such matters which ought to be obeyed.

Life of a Stewardess.

TO BECOME a stewardess on a liner, "ELLA," you would not have to pass any examination. A good education, and plenty of tact and patience, besides, if possible, a knowledge of some foreign language, are the most useful qualities, and would stand you in the best stead on board, when passengers are apt to be very trying. Of course, a stewardess has to go through grades of service, beginning, generally, with the third-class passengers and passing to second and first. The stewardess has principally to attend to the ladies on board, make beds, wait on them with their morning tea or coffee, look after them when unwell, and take care of children.

Stewardesses are generally women of a good class, and often ladies' maids and nurses prove very fitted for the work. The work is perhaps the best of all kinds of domestic service, as a good stewardess is an invaluable servant to a company. As to details and pay, they had best be ascertained from the offices of a company. I believe pay is generally from £3 to £4 per month, and tips are, of course, generously given.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 769.] Week Ending September 26th, 1903. [One Penny.

A Trial of Strength.

The Story of a Daughter's Devotion and Determination, and of a Lover's Dilemma Between Love and Duty.

"Whose portrait is that, Dorie?" asked Mr. Pearse, placing his hand affectionately on his daughter's shoulder.

She looked up hastily from the cabinet photograph which she had been so intently surveying; both her cheeks and eyes betrayed some confusion, but she answered simply and unhesitatingly:

"It is the portrait of Mr. Lionel Marlowe, father; he is a good friend of mine!"

Mr. Pearse's face became slightly more grave; it had worn a worried appearance when he had entered, but this expression had deepened in intensity on hearing his daughter's reply. He took a seat by her side on the small couch in Mrs. Hiller's somewhat diminutive drawing-room and held out his hand for the photo.

"Let me have a good look at this gentleman, Dorie!" he remarked earnestly. "I conclude, from a little tell-tale blush, that he is a *very* good friend!"

The colour on Dora Pearse's cheeks became deeper, but she gazed fearlessly in his eyes as she handed him the photo, with the two words "He is!" uttered emphatically.

There were many persons who did not understand the character of Dora Pearse, for it was a strange mixture of meekness and fearlessness. She could be gentle and yielding in the extreme, where love or compassion ruled her, but in other respects there was an almost masculine determination about her. Even as one admired the lovely face, with its well-moulded features and crowned by a wealth of nut-brown hair, one was forced to recognise that the lines of that countenance indicated great strength of purpose. "She is a woman who would go through more than the proverbial fire and water for those whom she loved, but also in the cause of justice and honour!" was the opinion inaudibly expressed by this same Mr. Lionel Marlowe; "and yet who can gauge the treasure of love and tenderness also denoted by that face?"

"I like the look of him, Dorie!" Mr. Pearse remarked slowly. In spite of the fact that it was not to his liking to speak out—so much was evident—yet he gave a truthful opinion. "It is a good face; he seems to be the kind of man whom you could trust, but in such an important matter, my dear, you must know more about him than a picture can tell you!"

"I am glad you like him, father!" cried Dorie, drawing a little closer to him and gazing steadfastly at him. "You have always told me that I am a good judge of human nature, and that I can deduce a person's character from the countenance. I am sure that I am not mistaken in Mr. Marlowe! Moreover, I have learnt to know and love him during my stay here! But," she added suddenly, "you have not told me if your business was successful."

"H'm! Partly!" responded Mr. Pearse hesitatingly. He shifted uneasily on the couch. "Are you sure that you are a good judge of character, Dorie?" he continued, turning the conversation to the former topic. "Now," he added, with a smile that was plainly forced, "you often tell me that I am a good, dear—what else is it? Well, for all you know, I might have committed some crime. Do you think that impossible?"

"Oh, father, don't talk in that way! I declare you make me feel creepy! As if that were at all probable! No—you are—but I won't repeat myself! I half believe you are doing it in order to hear me extol your virtues!"

This last suggestion amused her, and she laughed merrily. Mr. Pearse forced a more pronounced smile, but it died quickly away.

"I was trying to show you, Dorie, that it is not, after all, safe to judge by appearances. I have altered my notions lately; I feel that it is possible to believe in the goodness of a person who may yet have something against him! That is why I say that you must learn Mr. Marlowe's character more thoroughly before trusting him or bestowing your affection irrevocably upon him!"

"I cannot understand you to-day, father! You are not yourself, and I am sure that the horrid business is troubling you! Now, tell me the truth about your journey to Wigan!"

Mr. Pearse did not reply for some seconds, at the end of which time he said slowly:

"It will be better to tell you exactly how matters stand,

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Dorie! That is, so far as I know myself! I shall have to leave England and go to the Antipodes, my dear! It is for that reason, in great part, that I am sorry to hear about Mr. Marlowe."

"Why is it, father dear?" she asked, putting her hand caressingly on his cheek. "Have you lost your money? Do not fear to say so; I am brave!"

"No, it is not that—at least, not yet! If I go to Australia I may lose nothing, but if I remain here, I may be a beggar! Perhaps——"

He stopped abruptly and a frightened expression passed swiftly across his face.

"Perhaps what, father?" asked Dorie anxiously.

"Oh, we won't think of anything else than the necessity of leaving this country! I must clear up certain matters, then I shall leave our house as it is and try to sell it, furniture and all, through an agent! Now, my dear, don't bother any more about it! The whole affair is too complicated for you to understand, and I am too worried to dwell on it at present! We must get back to Bramhurst at once; in fact, I am thinking of going back this evening and you can follow to-morrow. I must thank Mrs. Hiller for having had you here! Have you enjoyed the stay in London? Oh, well, I suppose so! This is proof of it!" he concluded, handing the photograph to her.

He rose to his feet to ring the bell, but a sudden thought flashed across his mind, and he turned to his daughter with a genuine smile.

"I haven't asked about the gentleman's means and position, or his 'prospects,' Dorie!" he remarked. "You know, my dear, that I am not a stickler for position, and I shall, if all goes well, be able to provide for you; but a man should have some occupation and be able to hold up his head! I don't want a fortune-hunter!"

"He is about seven years older than I am, father, and I am twenty-three; old enough, as a lady visitor remarked to Mrs. Hiller, to be married and settled. He is not a man of means, but he is rising in his profession, and is considered clever. He has already been sent abroad on several missions on account of his knowledge of languages and his abilities in other directions. He is engaged in a profession which has always had a fascination for me. I am somewhat romantic, you know!"

Mr. Pearse started. "Not——?" he began, but Dora interrupted him.

"Yes, a detective! He chose the profession out of love for it and his father has disinherited him in consequence, or he would be well off! He has told me of some of his work, and I long to be able to help him!"

The girl's eyes flashed with excitement and enthusiasm; her father turned very pale and moved towards the bell. A minute later Mrs. Hiller entered, and the conversation became general on the subject of the return of father and daughter to Bramhurst.

Ultimately it was decided that Dorie should not return till the following day, or the day after that; but Mr. Pearse declared that he himself was bound to go at once.

Dora Pearse was far less gay than usual after the departure of her father, and good-hearted Mrs. Hiller wisely considered that it was better to leave her to her own thoughts. It was not a pleasant outlook. She had given her heart to Lionel Marlowe, whose acquaintance she had made in a manner that appealed to her romantic nature; no formal engagement had been entered into, but she loved him, and the engagement was a mere formality, to be consummated after her father's return. And now she was torn between two troubles; if she married Lionel Marlowe, she must remain in England, while her father, whom she loved with a devotion rarely met with, must live alone at the other end of the world; and if Marlowe gave up his friends and his career here, in order to go with her and her father, that step would probably blight his prospects.

Then there was her father's unhappy position. They had lived comfortably during the last ten years in a modest country house at Bramhurst, Sussex; her father had told her that he had made a fair amount of money by a lucky speculation, but that he had determined to live quietly on the interest instead of endeavouring to increase it by continuing in business.

"I might live in grander style," he had said, "but I think that I am happier in this modest way and without the worries of commerce. Of course, I am somewhat interested in business, so to speak, as my money must be made to bear fruit in the way of dividends."

It had not always been so; in the earlier years of their married life Mr. and Mrs. Pearse had known hard times, and the great grief of her father was that Mrs. Pearse had succumbed to typhoid fever within three months of the lucky speculation.

All had gone well till within the last week. Dora had come to London for a month's holiday, while her father had gone on a fishing excursion, with the intention of rejoining her at the end of a fortnight; but business had first taken him back to Bramhurst and then to Wigan, with the result that has just been made known to us.

Dora's rather unpleasant reverie was broken by the arrival of Mr. Lionel Marlowe. For a time all Dora's sadness was dispelled, and it made Mrs. Hiller sigh for the hopefulness of youth, and live her own courtship over again as she watched the frank greetings exchanged by the lovers.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Marlowe!" said Mrs. Hiller candidly. "I hope you will be able to drive the blues away from our young friend!"

Marlowe turned an anxious look of inquiry towards Dora, who did not answer, but moved to the couch. Marlowe followed her, and they sat together at one end of the room, while Mrs. Hiller was busy with some lacework at the other.

"What is it, dear?" asked Marlowe earnestly, taking her hand and gazing with a lover's ardour upon her beautiful face, now slightly pale. "Let me know all about it, and perhaps I can chase the trouble to—to the other side of the globe!" he finished, unwittingly touching the very topic.

"That's just what is the matter!" cried Dora, smiling in spite of herself. And she told him.

Marlowe was grave. It was a severe blow to him to think of throwing up his career in the old country, but his mind reverted to an heroic moment, and his love for her conquered all else.

"If it really comes to that, I will go with you!" he declared decisively. "So that settles it, and we will not think of it any more, except to hope that your father's affairs will right themselves swiftly. Now let me explain a fresh task that has been given to me!"

"Yes, yes! What is it?" asked Dora eagerly.

"It is a curious case, in its way," said Marlowe. "It seems that about ten years or so ago, a man's life was insured for £10,000 by an outsider; that is, not by the man himself. The insured person was healthy, and the premium was ordinary. But it proved to be a bad bargain for the insurance company. The insured, to use the technical term, went to a certain seaside town not very well known to holiday-makers, contracted typhoid fever, and died. The insured lived rather a nomadic existence, being a man of independent means, staying at this place and that, so that the insurance company were more particular concerning proof of identity than would otherwise have been the case. However, the proofs were forthcoming, and the money was paid.

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"Nothing more was thought of the case till a few days ago, when a man made a death-bed confession which was forwarded to the insurance company. This man stated that the whole thing was a fraud on the insurance company; he was the man who impersonated the insured, and he was employed by Palmer, the insurer, to do it. He went about the country with the avowed object of getting hold of a body—there are many unidentified dead bodies picked out of the rivers, or found in unwholesome localities. This body would be passed off as that of the insured, and certain papers would be inserted in the pockets to insure success. Of course, the live man would disappear, and Palmer would come forward and identify the body as that of the man whose life he had insured.

"Fortune appears to have favoured these rascals, for they got hold of a man whom they found unconscious on the roadway of a West of England town. It seems that Granger—that's the impersonator—knew something of medicine, and said that the man would not live long. He took the unfortunate man in hand, and exchanged the contents of his pockets for certain papers. He even had the audacity to exchange clothing; or rather, he got some new clothes for himself, then dressed the poor fellow in his (Granger's) own. All this time the wretched man was dying of typhoid fever."

"How terrible!" murmured Dora, her eyes moist with pity for the hapless man at the mercy of rascals. The next instant they were aflame with indignation. "And now there is an opportunity to bring them to justice and you are to do it?"

"Granger is dead," returned Marlowe. "I thought that the two villains had contributed to the death of the stranger by their treatment of him and by the delay, but Granger on his death-bed vowed that it was not so, and that the stranger could not have recovered. It was arranged that Granger should inform the police and see that the man was removed to the hospital, where he died. Palmer went off to London to avoid suspicion. The stranger was not unlike Granger in appearance and it was less suspicious to die of typhoid fever than to be pulled out of the water. That is why I said that fortune favoured them.

"When the stranger died, Palmer's address was found among his papers. Palmer was communicated with and identified his friend. The insurance company made inquiries, but the rascals had planned the thing well, and the money was paid. Granger, I find, did not know the amount of the insurance; he thought it was for £2,000, and he received £1,000—half the proceeds, as he thought."

"And have you any clue to Palmer?" asked Dora eagerly. "He ought to be severely punished!"

"Granger did not know his real name or much about him, and ten years have elapsed, remember. Granger described him, and the description was communicated to the police both there and in London. And just now I have been told that one of the policemen of Wigan says that he caught a glimpse of a man answering somewhat to the description only yesterday, but was unable to follow him for the obvious reason that the officer was leaving the railway station in a train and saw the man on the platform as the train ran out. Subsequent inquiries have produced other information, which I needn't repeat to you, and to-morrow morning I am going to Bramhurst, Sussex. What do you think of that, dear?" he cried with a laugh.

He had not noticed her countenance for the last two or three minutes, and he was struck, on raising his eyes, to observe the deathly pallor of her face. He did not know that she was repeating to herself: "Ten years ago! Wigan! Bramhurst!"

"What is the matter, Dora?" he cried in alarm. "Are you ill?"

Then the determined nature of the girl manifested itself; with an effort she recovered herself, laughed, and forced some colour into her cheeks by a strain of the breath.

"I think your story unnerved me for the moment!" she cried, with a semblance of gaiety. "What is the description of Palmer? I know most of the people in Bramhurst, you know, and I might help you!"

She waited with bated breath for his reply, and her heart sank as she recognised a rough description of — her father! In spite of her great effort, the blow almost stunned her for the moment; but the effects passed away quickly in the face of the great danger that threatened her parent. Perhaps he was not the guilty man, yet—— Merciful Heavens! how the details fitted in with certain facts! Her father's own words, too, about having committed crimes! She sat still for a moment; she had forgotten Lionel's presence. He reminded her of it by asking:

"Do you recognise him?"

"I am afraid I cannot help you!" she rejoined, shaking her head slowly.

He did not know that it was an evasion, so he merely smiled and said that he hoped to get to the bottom of the matter in double-quick time when he reached Bramhurst, for which place he would take an early train in the morning.

"You once said that you would be willing to do me any favour that I might ask, Lionel!" she said suddenly, laying her hand on his. "Do you mean it? I may claim that favour!"

"I will do it if it is possible!" he replied with a laugh. "I am only human, mind, so do not expect the supernatural!"

At this juncture, much to Dora's relief, Mrs. Hiller intervened.

"You don't look well to-night, Dora! You have been worried! I really think that you ought to lie down or go to bed, notwithstanding the early hour!"

"I agree, Mrs. Hiller!" observed Marlowe, rising. "I will take my departure and leave her in your care. If you go to Bramhurst to-morrow, my dear, I may see you there, and I should like to be introduced to your father!"

It was with difficulty that Dora repressed a shiver at this remark, but she contrived to escape observation by stooping to pick up her handkerchief.

Scarcely had Marlowe quitted the house than Dora astounded Mrs. Hiller with the statement that she must return to Bramhurst at once.

"But, my dear child," expostulated Mrs. Hiller as soon as she had recovered from her amazement, "you couldn't get there till nearly midnight! And——"

"Don't stop me, Mrs. Hiller!" pleaded Dora. "But help me by coming to the station with me!"

Finding all expostulation vain, Mrs. Hiller acceded to the request for help. And so it came about that Dora Pearse entered Bramhurst Lodge at midnight, twelve hours in advance of the detective-lover, who was to seek and arrest her father for a grave crime!

To her dismay, her father had not returned and she was left to conjecture that he had not carried out his original intention of going straight to Bramhurst at once. She did not go to bed; it was unlikely that he would appear before morning, but she could not rest, although she assured the startled housekeeper (whose repose she had interrupted) that she would retire within a few minutes.

The night dragged its weary length away, but Dora remained waiting, and racked by the anxiety that the arm of the law would reach her father before she could warn him. In the morning breakfast was brought to her, but she could not eat. It was near mid-day when she heard the sound of wheels; she started to her feet and looked out, half expecting

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to see Lionel's figure in the cart, but it was her father—at last!

When he entered the room and saw her, he shrank from her and for an instant he seemed inclined to flee. That movement confirmed her suspicions! She went to him with outstretched hands.

"Father!" she cried in tones of agonised appeal. "Is it true?"

The guilty man trembled; with a wild cry he fell on his knees before her and gazed at her beseechingly.

"Dora, Dora!" he wailed piteously. "Are *you* going to turn from me?"

It was a terrible picture, the father kneeling before the daughter and appealing for both forgiveness and help in that wild cry!

"I was poor! Your mother was ailing, and you were wanting better nourishment as well as she! Luck was against me! I was desperate and temptation came! But I have suffered for it, suffered bitterly! And now the police are after me, and it will be prison for me, and disgrace and poverty for you, unless we get away before my identity is discovered!"

Despite his guilt and degradation, the inborn love for her father conquered every other feeling in Dora's breast. She caught his hands and raised him to his feet. She was calm and determined.

"No, I will not turn from you, father! Hasten, for you have no time to spare. Get your things together and fly as quickly as you can, for the police are already in the village, searching for one whose description resembles yours!"

Hurriedly, and with scarce a word, the father and daughter made their preparations for flight, but they were too late. As they left the Lodge on foot and hastened down the road and walked swiftly along the main street, hurrying towards a lane that would take them to another village where escape would be easier, Marlowe's figure appeared higher up the uneven thoroughfare.

Dora uttered a little cry. Pearse instinctively divined its meaning, and dashed forward in order to get to the lane and disappear.

Marlowe saw the burly figure, but in his excitement failed to recognise Dora. In a moment Pearse had vanished down the lane, and Marlowe was running at full speed to the narrow turning, down which he also disappeared.

Summoning all her strength, Dora followed, calling to Lionel to stop. He did not hear her, but raced after his quarry.

Suddenly, as she ran along the lane, Dora heard a splash, and then there was a cry uttered by Lionel Marlowe. She reached the bend in the lane and saw her father struggling in the centre of a wide and very deep pool, while Marlowe stood aghast at the side.

"The fool will drown!" cried the young detective. But then his professional pride took the upper hand, and he exclaimed: "Not if I know it! He sha'n't escape me like that!"

He threw off his coat and waistcoat and was about to leap into the water to save and capture the would-be suicide, when he felt his arm grasped by a hand that closed over it like a vice. Turning with an angry exclamation, he saw the white, set face of Dora Pearse!

What followed was a matter of seconds, although it may take minutes to tell it.

"He is my father!" cried Dora. Her voice was calm, notwithstanding the storm that was raging within her. "He must not be taken alive! Will you let him go free for my sake? Shout to him that he may live and escape—for my sake! I claim the favour you promised me, Lionel!"

She had saved him from terrible injury, perhaps from death, when his bicycle had skidded on the wet road and had thrown him almost under the feet of the omnibus horses. It crossed his mind in a flash how that this apparently weak, slim girl had seized the heads of the horses and had turned them aside, saving him before he had properly realised the position! And now she claimed the reward, and asked him to act dishonourably to his chosen vocation!

The struggle was sharp, but brief.

"I cannot be false to the trust placed in me, not even for your sake, my love!" he cried in anguish. "Unhand me, Dora, and Heaven have pity on us all!"

He strove to free himself, but she held him tightly.

"You shall not save him to take him to prison!" she cried. "He is my father and you shall not save him!"

"He will drown!" he cried desperately. "Would you have him die? You do not realise that he is drowning!"

"Better death than the disgrace of the prison!" she replied, with terrible earnestness.

He had been one of the very few who had really comprehended the complex character of Dora Pearse, but even he was not prepared for this stoical conduct. It staggered him for an instant; he heard the appealing cry: "For my sake!" and then he threw her aside roughly and sprang into the water, while Dora Pearse fell on her knees and in her heart she hoped that he might be too late!

She watched him as he swam to the spot where she had last seen her father, and then the awful ordeal proved too much even for her, and she fainted.

It was nearly a month after that terrible scene before Dora Pearse returned to a full consciousness of her surroundings, for Heaven had been merciful to her, and an attack of brain fever had prevented her from knowing what was passing. When she recovered, the affair was forgotten except by those immediately concerned. The money unjustly obtained from the insurance company had been safely invested by Pearse and had been added to; therefore, when the amount of the premium was deducted from the £10,000, it was found that the balance was intact, and this was restored to the company. Of course the company had lost the interest on the money for a long period, but it was glad to have the capital returned.

It was not till Dora was on the high road to recovery that good Mrs. Hiller ventured to mention Marlowe's name.

"He wishes to see you, Dora!" she said simply. "Don't break his heart by refusing!"

So Dora assented and Marlowe came in. Each noted how much the other had aged in that one short month!

"Can you forgive me?" asked Lionel softly. "I, too, have suffered since then, but it was my duty!"

"It is I who should ask for forgiveness for tempting you!" she replied gently. "But he was my father!"

He took her hand and kissed it, and shortly afterwards he left her.

Two years have passed; Lionel Marlowe gave up his vocation, and his father withdrew his malediction, and has even gone so far as to say that if Lionel *will* marry Dora Pearse, why, "I suppose I must agree, for it will look foolish to disinherit him again!" From this it will be seen that Lionel still hopes to be united to his loved one, while Dora herself is coming to the conclusion that there will be a day when she can give him her hand to accompany the heart which passed into his keeping long ago!

G. Bramley.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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. . TWO . . ENGAGEMENTS.

A Tale of Happy Coincidences.

NINA is sitting on the fresh young grass, among the apple-blossoms. The bright girl was not unlike an apple-blossom herself, in her pink-and-white dress of clear muslin.

Nina was not a beauty by any means; but nineteen healthful, happy years had given her the charms and graces of a pure contented maidenhood—gentle eyes, a smile like sunshine, oceans of light-brown hair, and a strong, quiet heart.

The young man whose length of supple limb lay stretched beside her, among the devastated clovers, was decidedly handsome, with his light curling hair, almost golden in its brightness, and dark eyebrows, arched over lovely, melancholy dark eyes.

His straw hat was on the grass beside him, and he was leaning rather uncomfortably on his elbow, with his luminous gaze fixed persistently on the absorbed, yet smiling face above him.

There had been quite a long silence between these two, who were here alone in this blossoming orchard, with the soft, fragrant petals showering down around them, and no other company but vagrant butterflies and hard-working bees to share their solitude.

When the young man spoke at last, it was in a very discontented voice:

"You know very well I want to speak to you, Nina. You know I sent the children away for no other purpose; I must speak to you. But you sit there counting your stitches, and looking so cool——"

"I don't count them," she answered good-humouredly, and letting her eyes rest on his an instant. "Dear me! what a frowning forehead! Well, then, why don't you speak? I shall be delighted to hear anything you may have——"

"I don't want you to be delighted," he interrupted shortly. "And do, for mercy sake, put that eternal needlework away! I would like your undivided attention for once."

The tatting was instantly disposed of in a convenient apron-pocket, and the nimble white hands clasped each other, at rest.

"Am I not good and obedient? Now for the wonderful story. If you really are coming to confession, Star, why, that is just splendid!"

"For the listener? See here, Nina, you have heard me speak of—of Laura Dalton, haven't you?"

"Never. You have never mentioned her name until this moment, Star, and you know it!"

"Of course I know it. Who said I didn't? Well, I'm going to mention her now. I met her at my aunt's when they lived in Ashington three winters ago. She is an orphan—a sort of ward of Aunt Maggie—and when I had known her two months we were engaged."

"Very rational on both sides. You were then nineteen. At what period of her infancy was Miss Dalton?"

"Well, sixteen, perhaps. She has been at school in Germany ever since, until a month ago. But the worst of it is, Nina," he added, stretching out his hand and laying it on hers, "we are engaged at this present moment."

If he had expected to meet any stormy demonstration of surprise, or grief, or anger, he found himself wonderfully mistaken. The tranquil blue eyes widen a little, and the colour deepens slightly in the rounded cheeks, but the sweet voice replied, in its usual clear tone:

"How strange of you, Star, not to speak of this before? And why should it be 'the worst of it' that you are still engaged?"

"Because I am very unhappy, and because I do not love poor Laura. She is such a foolish, frivolous creature—just a big, warm-hearted child, that is all. Tell me, Nina, dearest," strengthening his pressure on the passive fingers, "haven't you known all along—ever since that first night when we walked home through the beech woods from Aunt Maggie's—haven't you known that I loved you?"

"Yes," she said, in almost a whisper, "I have known it, Starwood."

"And you wondered that I could keep silence?"

"Yes," she said again, very softly. "But then you knew of *my* engagement."

"Your engagement? Nina please don't begin about that. A wretched arrangement between fathers and mothers. I've no patience to speak of it. You know very well you will never marry Doctor Leslie."

"Of course I will marry him," opening still wider the soft blue eyes. "I wonder at you, Star."

"You won't marry Doctor Leslie, and for a very good reason, Nina; you will marry me."

"Starwood!"

"For Heaven's sake, don't look at me like that; I have not proposed to kill anybody. It is only this, dearest—I *cannot* marry Laura Dalton when my whole heart belongs to you, and I know, too, that you care for me dearly—dearly."

"I care for you too much to let you act dishonourably," she answered steadily; but there were tears in her drooped eyes, and she unclasped her hands to take his own into their gentle embrace. "You should have spoken before. It is all so strange to me. And the girl—Starwood. Does she love you?"

"That's the trouble. She loves me to distraction. Her little letters break my heart. She is so happy in the thought of our marriage. It was arranged to take place next month. And she is coming to Aunt Maggie's the day after to-morrow. Nina, I think I will run away!"

"You could not be a coward, Star."

"Come with me, Nina," he said, a world of intreaty in his tone. "No, but I *am* in earnest. Why should we sacrifice ourselves to lives of misery. Doctor Leslie cannot feel for you as I do. It is almost a year since he has seen you even.'

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"He does love me. Oh, Star, if you knew. I am all the world to him, and he has waited and worked. I could not be so wicked. He is coming back soon. He has finished his course in Paris, and—do you think we two could ever be happy together if we had made others wretched. It is sin to speak of it, even. No, dear, there is nothing for us but to do our duty. We have been so happy, as friends—we can be friends still."

"But you love me, Nina? Tell me truth, dearest; nothing will seem so hard to bear after that. Only say it."

He had drawn so near that his cheeks rested against her slender shoulder.

Nina did not answer, but her arm slipped timidly round his neck, and she rested her cheek against his curling golden hair. After the fashion of maidens, she answered her love in silence.

This exquisite moment was suddenly broken in upon by the sound of scampering feet and ringing voices, and the children came rushing pell-mell through the orchard-gate.

"Mr. Burley! Mr. Burley! we couldn't find your cigarettes. We looked on the porch-seat and on the window-sill and everywhere, and they were not there. And, Nina, mamma says you are to come in and make the cake, and mamma says *we* can stay with Mr. Burley!"

"Oh, thanks!" said Mr. Burley.

But, after all, they were Nina's brothers, and that thought reconciled him to bear for a while the noisy infliction of their company.

* * * * *

A shadow darkened the morning sunshine. Nina looked up from reckoning the weekly household accounts, and saw in the long open window the loveliest young woman she had ever beheld.

"Miss Marble, Nina?"

Nina's heart quaked, but she went forward with a welcoming smile.

"I am Laura—Laura Dalton. You have heard of me?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Nina, blushly slightly, but looking bravely into brilliant hazel eyes—lovely, wonderful eyes, so thickly fringed with fine black lashes. "I am so glad to see you! It is so kind of you to come!"

"Star promised to bring me, but I would not wait. You will think it dreadful of me to rush in without ringing the door-bell; but I saw you from the garden, and I knew you were Nina. Star has written me so much about you! I ought to be jealous, but I won't be. You're too sweet. Aunt Maggie has told me lots about you. It is so nice for her to have such pleasant neighbours. What a lovely place they have! I have been abroad three years."

"Mr. Burley told me," said Nina, helping to divest her visitor of a coquettish hat and her coat, and laying bare her magnificent coils of shining black hair.

"He has told you everything, I suppose? Dear Star! I find him changed—so dull and spiritless."

"He was not very well," Nina hastened to say, with a tell-tale flush on her face. "At least, when he first came to Mrs. Creigh's, he was recovering from typhoid fever, and he—I suppose——"

"That was nine months ago," was the prompt rejoinder. "He wrote me all about the typhoid fever, and that he had entirely recovered. But he seems strangely altered. I think it is not good for a man to have enough money to live on without work. It would be better if he had a profession. You have seen a good deal of Star, I suppose, since you've been acquainted?"

"Oh, yes! My brother Clarence and he are quite intimate."

"He did not tell me about Clarence. He told me about you," said the young lady. "I was so anxious to see you! Of course you know that he—that I—— You do know, Nina, don't you?"

"About your engagement?" asked Nina, smiling gravely. "Star will have a beautiful wife."

"I hope he may have a happy one"—with a little sigh. "He is such a lovely fellow. But, somehow, I don't think it is nice to be married so very soon. The second of next month—just think!—and I am only nineteen! No one knew of our engagement except Aunt Maggie, and now she is so anxious to have every one know, and to have us settled; and I like to be single, don't you? It seems dreadful just to leave school and then be married. I haven't had any good time."

"Why not postpone your wedding for a while?" asked Nina, smiling at the frankness of her beautiful visitor. "You are both so young!"

"Ah, but poor Star would object! He would be so terribly disappointed, you know. He has been looking forward to our marriage. But I was thinking, Nina, perhaps you could talk to him. He has such confidence in your judgment. You might tell him that you think I am too young. You understand him so well. You would know just what to say. You will think I am the strangest girl in the world to come here and talk like this; but, don't you see, I can't speak to Aunt Maggie, and I dare not to poor Star, and there is no one else. I will be married before I know it, Nina, if I don't make some effort."

Tears were dimming the lustrous dark eyes.

Nina, touched and astonished, drew a little chair close to her new friend's side, and took her hand in a kind clasp. At this, Laura burst into tears.

"You will think I am a silly!" she said, presently, with a little sob now and then between her words, "but your lovely, sweet face won me in a minute. I don't mean that you are handsome, but you *are* so lovely! And that dear little calico apron! I couldn't be afraid of *you*, Nina. Of course, I didn't mean to be so frank with you all at once; but I could never like you any better than I do now, and I can't help speaking my heart right out. I want you to reason with Star—not reason exactly—but show him—make him understand—well, tell him something——"

"Ah, but you must tell me something first, Laura. Isn't there someone else—someone who has taken Star's place in your heart? Is not *that* the trouble, Nina?"

"Oh, Nina, Nina!"

"I thought so. Tell me, Laura, how it happened. Tell me all about it. Then we can consult."

"You little darling! I have felt like a criminal; but if you could only see him, Nina! I met him in Paris when I was spending the holidays with a schoolmate. He was studying with her father, Professor Vieux. There were lots of students, but this one is a young Englishman—so talented and so handsome—and we fell in love with each other at first sight. It was terrible, Nina—so awfully sudden and unexpected; but, don't you know, he was quite wild about me, and I was just as bad about him. And he is engaged to a girl out here—he would not tell me her name; but he does not love her at all—at least, since he's known me, he doesn't. But then, you see, his words bind him, and he is so honourable! He is coming over in a few weeks, and I thought, if I need not be married so soon—don't you see?—that possibly something might happen——"

Miss Dalton was so busy dabbing her lovely wet eyes with her damp handkerchief that she was not aware of the sudden pallor that had overspread the listening face beside her. Now Nina interrupted her in a curious voice, very steady, but very eager, too.

"What is your lover's name, Laura, if it be a fair question?"

"His name? Do you think I ought to tell his name? I *will* tell you. His name is Doctor Leslie."

"Ah!"

A little cry, a gasp, escaped Nina's lips, but was checked back instantly.

"Do you know him?" Laura asked, with a wondering air.

"I know the girl he has promised to marry, and I have seen the letters he has written her, so full of tenderness. She never dreamed his love could waver. Laura, this is terrible!—the surprise!"

"I know it, dear," said Laura penitently; "but what can we do? I'm sure we don't compel ourselves to love. Love compels *us*. How strange *you* should be acquainted with Doctor Leslie's affianced! It seems just like a story. Is she

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nice? He would never say anything about her except 'poor child!'"

"Poor child!" echoed Nina, with a smile. "She would only be poor child if she should marry him. I could tell you about her, too, Laura, how she has struggled to keep faith with her faithless lover, while her heart had given itself to someone else. She has suffered, but at least she has been strong. Ah, Laura, what must we think of men?"

"What must we think of women?" said Laura simply. "I am sure I am ashamed of myself. If Star could know——Nina, oh, Nina, there *he* is!"—rushing suddenly to the long open window—"but I tell you it *is* he! They must have told him I was here, and he is coming. Oh, oh, oh! what shall I do! Oh, Nina, I am so glad!"

Nina, following her impetuous friend, saw not Starwood Burley, but Doctor Leslie advancing up the gravelled path in travelling coat and with a small bag in his hand.

As he reached the verandah, which was liberally vine covered, Miss Dalton sprang through the window and rushed to him with outspread arms. At sight of this beautiful apparition an unmistakable delight flashed over his fine, dark face.

"Laura!" he exclaimed, and dropped his baggage to fold her promptly to his bosom; then he hastily released her, and his joy gave place to consternation.

He actually staggered back as his betrothed advanced, with her hand held out in greeting.

"Nina!" He said no other word as she lifted her little quiet face to kiss him in friendly fashion.

Miss Dalton stood amazed.

"You know, Nina, too? I thought Mrs. Creigh had sent you here? I thought you were coming to find *me*," she falters. "Oh, Gilbert!—oh, Nina! Oh, Nina, are *you* the girl?"

Miss Dalton was deathly pale, and Doctor Leslie groaned and hid his white face in his hands.

Nina was trembling a little, and tears were on her lashes, but she smiled up at them both.

"I am the girl—the happy girl, dear Laura. How strange you should come at this very moment, Gilbert! I did not expect you until the twentieth. Laura had just been telling me she had met you abroad, and all the little romance. But come in. We must sit down and talk together."

* * * * *

"Robbie—Robbie, will you run up to the house, like a good fellow, and tell Nina I want to speak to her. I'm going to bring you that new fishing-rod to-morrow—honour bright. Tell her I am waiting here at the gate; and don't let all the world hear you, that's a little man!"

Down through the twilight came Nina, a minute later, in her gleaming white dress, to find Starwood Burley lurking in the shadow of the trees at the gate, and smoking cigarette after cigarette.

The house-windows were alight, and the stars were brightening momentarily in the vast silence overhead. Fireflies were throbbing in and out of the dusk, and now and then a bat wheeled by in dark circles.

The dew was falling, and the fragrance of the garden was blending with the scent of Starwood's tobacco, which he hastily consigned to oblivion when Nina appeared.

"Will you walk along the road a little way?" he asked abruptly, without greeting of any kind. "That is, if you will be *permitted* to walk with me now—if you are not afraid."

"I am not afraid of anyone," said Nina brightly; "not even of you, and your scowling face is just terrifying, Star."

She stepped down beside him, and they walked away slowly under the great branches of the elms and chestnuts, along the quiet country road.

"I suppose I must congratulate you on the arrival of your—of Doctor Leslie. Laura informed me that he had arrived this morning, while she was with you."

"Thanks, yes. He came quite unexpectedly. He wanted to give me a surprise, and it was a surprise."

"You are delighted, of course."

"I am very, very happy," she answered gently; "I never thought to be so happy."

And of her own free will she laid her hand within his arm, and leant confidingly on its support.

"I suppose I ought to rejoice in your happiness, dear," he rejoined forlornly; "but I'm such a selfish wretch, and I've been so very fond of you all this time, it seems horrible that I must give you up, and try to live out my miserable life with someone else. I wish to Heaven I had never seen you, Nina."

"I don't!" glancing up at him with smiling eyes. "You are ungrateful, Star. Only think of the pleasant walks and talks which we had together, all the good quiet times. I know I shall never forget them, and I shall never be sorry we met. I wonder, dear, if we should always be so happy—if you would always like me so much, supposing we could belong to each other?"

"Oh, don't, Nina! don't talk about it!" He looked down longingly at the little clinging hand on his coat-sleeve. "You make a coward of me. In all honour, I have no right to be here with you now; but Laura intimated that you wished to see me, and I came, Nina, but only to say 'Good-bye.' I can't bear this sort of thing. We must not meet any more. By-and-by, perhaps——"

"Star," said Nina, standing still before him suddenly in the darkened road, lonely now as a forest-path. "I am the happiest woman in the world to-night. Do you know why? Because you love me. Something so strange has happened." And then she poured forth a story that Starwood could scarcely credit, in his amazement and delight.

"It is like a dream!" he stammered. "The other two will be happy together, and I can have you! Am I really awake? Doctor Leslie is willing, and it is all arranged?"

"Doctor Leslie has gone over to see Laura, and talk with Mrs. Creigh—I sent him off across the fields as soon as Robbie told me you had come. And Laura thinks it would be nice to have the two marriages at once. What do you think, Star?"

Mr. Burley's answer, though silent, was decidedly in the affirmative.

Madeline Bridges.

GET two words out of "enough" meaning "not enough." Answer: One hug.

CUSTOMER: "Waiter, this bullock's heart is very badly cooked." Waiter: "Well, sir, the fact is, the cook's been crossed in love, and whenever he has anything to do with a heart it so upsets him that he doesn't know what he's a-doin' of!"

WISEMAN looks at his watch with concern. "I can't understand," he says to his wife, "what has happened to my watch? I think it must want cleaning." "No, papa," chimes in little Fanny; "I am quite sure it is clean, because baby and I have washed it in the basin."

FIRST SERVANT: "I'm going to leave." Second Servant: "What's the matter?" "My mistress don't keep a cat." "What has her not keeping a cat got to do with you?" "Lots. When there is any cream missing there is no cat to lay the blame on, and I do love cream so."

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The Opportunity of Claude Harrington.

Telling of a Mean Trick and its Atonement.

Miss Durward stood on a rock which ran out into the sea, watching the waves which splashed against its slippery sides and which wetted her white canvas shoes with their spray. It was a blazing hot August day and scarcely a breath of wind ruffled her dark, curly hair, which was without any covering, in spite of the dangers of sunstroke. Her big frilled hat lay further away on the shore where she had been sitting. Her scarlet linen dress made her a conspicuous figure to anyone coming in that direction, and a tall man who came round the corner of the cliff which shut off her retreat from the rest of the world stopped for a moment to take in the picture. Then he made his way rapidly over the rocks to her side. So quietly did he come that it was not until he stood beside her and said: "Good morning, Miss Durward," that the girl realised his presence. She turned so suddenly that she almost lost her balance and nearly fell into the water at her feet.

"You!" she ejaculated in a tone of mingled astonishment and annoyance.

"Myself and no less; you seem surprised," he responded coolly.

"When did you come?" she asked, ignoring his remark.

"Last night by the mail train," he returned.

"And may I ask why? I thought you were in London and too busy to get away?"

"Well—I came because you are here."

"If that is the only reason you might have stayed away," retorted the girl crossly.

"As it happens, that is the sole and only reason; but I suppose you have not the only right and privilege of spending the summer in this retreat, have you, even though you may be allowed to be as rude as you like?"

"I am not rude, and if I were I have every excuse for it. I came here to be quiet and not to be worried, and it seems that is to be made impossible. However, I will leave you to yourself."

She turned round so sharply on the narrow ledge of slippery rock that she lost her balance, swayed for a moment, and then fell with a resounding splash into the deep water.

An expression of unalloyed joy overspread the countenance of the young man.

"And she can't swim," he muttered gleefully, then as he saw the dark head emerging from the sea, he pulled off his coat and jumped in after her.

The sudden shock of immersion in cold water had completely deprived Miss Durward of speech or hearing and she was quite at his mercy. For all her dignity she was really very small and slight, and her rescuer found no difficulty in swimming a little distance with his burden. Opposite to where she had been standing before her fall a large rock just showed its head out of the water which completely surrounded it. On this rock he placed the girl, and then, saying in a cheerful reassuring tone:

"Hold on tight, or you'll fall in again," he returned to his former resting-place, and sitting down, awaited events.

With an effort Miss Durward opened her eyes and looked about her in a dazed manner. Then the truth came to her with a flash, and rage got the upper hand. She carefully removed one hand from the slippery rock and brushed away the dark hair which fell into her eyes, and glared wrathfully at the impenitent and dripping young man who sat opposite to her, endeavouring to light a cigarette with a damp match.

She might almost as well have been in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean instead of only a few yards from the shore, so utterly impossible was it for her to reach land without getting far out of her depth, when she would again be ignominiously fished out by the man whom at that moment she hated with deadly and vicious hatred.

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself playing such childish tricks," she said angrily. "I insist upon your taking me off this rock at once—*at once*," she repeated with an attempt to be dignified which under the circumstances was a dismal failure.

"No," said Claude Harrington calmly. "Not yet. Not until I have said all I want to say, which you have never ye allowed me to do—now that I have a chance I am going to make the most of it—also you are going to make a promise before you get on shore again. In fact, on second thoughts, if you will make the promise first, I will land you and talk afterwards."

"I don't want to hear anything that you have to say and I will not listen to it."

"But, fortunately for me, for once in your life, you have no choice in the matter. Now *are* you going to promise?"

"How can I promise anything unless I know what it is."

"You will know if you have a little patience. You are to say 'Claude, I love you, and I will marry you one month from to-day.'"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" she retorted angrily. "I hate you, and I will never speak to you again."

A wave larger than the rest rolled up and almost swept over her seat. She clutched the rock with both hands.

"Pity you didn't learn to swim, isn't it?" Mr. Harrington remarked. "After all the lessons you have had, too. However, as it happens, it is rather fortunate for me that you were not successful in your efforts."

The girl made no reply and he continued placidly:

"You see, you made a little mistake for once in your life.

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You thought I was just like all the rest of your train—to be played with as long as it amused you and then dropped when you were tired of me and wanted a fresh amusement. Having kept me dangling at your heels all the season you thought you had settled the whole affair when you came to Devonshire just as I was beginning to get restive; but you overlooked the fact that two people can sometimes play at the same game. So I followed you, and here I am, and here I mean to remain, and Fate appears to be on my side," with a grin at the forlorn object facing him.

"You are a brute and I hate you—*hate you*," remarked Miss Durward viciously.

He smiled.

"Hate away," he said. "But you will find it more satisfactory to change it to the other thing as I told you if you want to get back in time for lunch. It is getting late."

"I will never, never say anything of the sort, if I have to stay here all day."

"Well, of course, if you prefer to remain there, you are quite welcome to do so. I don't in the least mind sitting here. I had breakfast very late, and fortunately my cigarette case is water-tight and well filled."

"I thought you were a gentleman, anyhow. I wonder you like to make such a fool of yourself with all these people about."

"There are no people about and *I* am not making a fool of myself in the least," returned Mr. Harrington cheerfully.

Uncomfortably conscious of the fact that it was she herself who was most likely to attract the attention of any passers-by, Miss Durward took refuge in dignified silence.

A long silence ensued during which her tormentor smoked two cigarettes while his victim sat motionless.

"Well," he said at last, as he flung away the end of the second. "This is getting monotonous. I suppose I had better come across and talk to you."

He slipped off into the water again and came over to her. Holding on to the rock with one hand he looked up into the grey eyes above him, in which in spite of her valiant efforts to keep up appearances there was a suspicious moisture; as they met his blue ones they suddenly dropped and a faint pink flush crept up to the roots of Miss Durward's dark, curly hair which was rapidly recovering from its bath.

"Say it," said Mr. Harrington softly. "And you shall get off at once."

Before she could answer their solitude was invaded by a party of people who came suddenly round the cliff. The girl uttered an exclamation of dismay, and said hurriedly:

"Oh, here are a whole lot of people—do, do, *do*, please, get me off this hateful thing before they see me—whatever will they think?"

"Say what I want you to then," he repeated obstinately.

She looked at the determined face—and yielded—anything to get away from her ignominious position.

"You are very, very unkind to take advantage of me like this," Miss Durward said slowly. "But since you are determined I suppose I must do it—to save myself from ridicule"—she hesitated, and then said with a rush, the crimson mounting again to her face, "I love you."

"And you will promise to marry me one month from to-day?"

"And I will promise to marry you one month from to-day—anything, only get me out of this, quick," she said with a return of her own dictatorial manner.

Harrington said no more but took her in his arms and conveyed her the short distance which separated them from the rocks on the shore. Without a word or a backward glance at him she fled along the beach and round the cliff.

He placed the girl on an isolated rock, and proceeded to propose to her.

Late in the afternoon, after a prolonged search he found her on the beach. She was clothed from head to foot in spotless white and presented a very different appearance from the forlorn maiden in the limp linen dress of the morning. She saw him coming and deliberately lowered her parasol, and turned her back, reading with great absorption. Mr. Harrington walked quietly round to the other side of the barrier she had raised and flung himself on the sand beside her. Miss Durward took no notice. Apparently young men had no place in her world at all at that moment. He endured it for a few moments and then as she continued to read, he quietly took the book out of her hand and threw it along the beach.

"Cecile," he said softly. "Are you very angry with me? I want you to say again what you did this morning."

"Isn't once enough to humiliate me?" she asked without raising her eyes.

"I had to do it, dear, because you would not give me a chance to say what you knew I wanted to; but I am sorry I teased you, and I want you to say you forgive me and tell me over again, only of your own free will this time, what you did this morning. You know you meant to say it all the time only you were so proud and wilful you would not give in? Isn't that right?" he asked eagerly.

Miss Durward's eyes wandered slowly round the horizon, away to the cliffs in the distance, down to the little waves at her feet, and finally with an effort to the face of the man beside her. Then her mouth curved and a smile broke all over her small mutinous face.

"But it was a mean trick all the same," she said.

B. M. Stuccy.

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Powerful Thrilling Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

Dramatis Personæ.

OLIVE BERESFORD, the writer of these confessions. She is a young lady who is lured into gambling by her friend, Annabel Vernon, whom she detects cheating. Miss Beresford arranges a secret code of signals with a Mr. Taskot, in order to beat Annabel Vernon at her own game.

HARRY VERNON, of Vernon Towers, who with his wife plans to catch Olive in a trap. He manages to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures passed between Mr. Taskot and the relater of these episodes.

ANNABEL VERNON, wife of the last-named. An old school friend of Miss Beresford. Her husband having obtained the proofs of Olive's alleged cheating, she holds the photos over her victim as a threat, declaring that, unless Miss Beresford does as she is ordered, she will be denounced as a card-sharper. She makes the unfortunate girl a tool to win money from her guests.

MR. TASKOT, who poses as a gentleman of means, but who is really a despicable bounder. He endeavours to force Miss Beresford to marry him.

MR. MAURICE RAY, a gentleman who rescues the narrator from a mad dog, and who since takes a kindly interest in the welfare of the young girl, treating her with great respect, and showing her much consideration.

MR. DEAN FISHER, a "Bridge" expert, and one of the guests of the Vernons at Vernon Towers when Olive Beresford was fleeced.

MRS. GRAINGER, a rich widow and an ardent gambler, another of the guests at the Towers.

MR. HAROLD BAINBRIG, a wealthy bachelor, who with his sister,

MISS EDITH BAINBRIG, loses heavily at "Bridge" whilst playing with the Vernons and the unwilling Olive Beresford.

EPISODE EIGHTEEN.

Compromising Circumstances.

SOME girls faint on the slightest provocation. Others sometimes find it convenient to feign unconsciousness at awkward moments. I belong to neither category. But I was not proof against the latest misfortune which had overtaken me. I remember making a wild attempt to rise to my feet, but a deadly sickness overcame me, and I sank back in the carriage absolutely helpless, and oblivious of my surroundings.

When next I came to my senses I was in the waiting-room at the little station whence I intended travelling homewards, and the stationmaster's wife was holding a bottle of smelling-salts to my nose. The pungent odour proved violent enough to effect its intended purpose, and I opened my eyes to see a comely face looking into mine with great concern.

"There now, dearie, that's better! I'm glad you are coming round again. You gave your husband a dreadful scare."

At these words, spoken in good faith by my kindly nurse, I awoke to the full seriousness of my position, and exclaimed passionately: "My husband! How dare he try to make anyone think he is my husband? I never want to see the man again as long as I live!"

"Well, miss, I'm sorry I made a mistake. But the gentleman has really been very kind, and he is dreadfully anxious about you."

"He has brought me nothing but sorrow, and I hope he will never cross my path again."

The woman saw it was no use arguing with me in the frame of mind I was then in, so she turned the subject, and asked me if I would have a cup of tea.

"I'll have it ready in a moment," she added. "And I'm sure it will do you good."

"Thank you," I answered. "You are very kind, and I shall be glad of the tea, for I——"

I was about to add that I had eaten no breakfast, but wisely refrained, and asked instead:

"Can you tell me when the next train to Idlebury Junction leaves here?"

"Not for an hour yet, miss, so you have plenty of time to come to my house, and tidy yourself up a bit before you go."

Thankfully availing myself of the invitation thus given me, I followed my new friend into her pretty little home, which adjoined the station, and rested in an arm-chair while she hastily prepared some tea for me. She also added some nice bread-and-butter and a boiled egg, and I felt very much better afterwards. Then I straightened my hair and made myself otherwise presentable, all the time wondering what had become of Mr. Taskot, and feeling relieved because he had had the sense to go away without obtruding his unwelcome presence upon me again.

By-and-bye I was ready for departure, and after thanking Mrs. Gorton for her kind attentions, I bethought me to take my purse out of my chatelaine bag, and pay for the services which I had no right to accept from a stranger without payment. But what was my dismay to discover that the purse only contained a few coppers! I knew I had not much. But surely I could not be mistaken in thinking that I had had more than sufficient money to go home with! Trouble could not have deprived me so entirely of my wits as to make me forget how much money I had!

Mrs. Gorton noticed the look of dismay with which I discovered my practically penniless condition, for she immediately observed:

"I hope there's nothing wrong about your money, miss? If there is, all I can say is that nobody here has touched it."

"Oh, I don't imagine anything of the sort," was my hasty answer. "But I seem to be terribly out in my reckoning. And how am I to get home with no money to buy my railway ticket with?"

"Oh, that's all right, miss. The gentleman, Mr. Kastock, or some such name, gave me some money, 'to pay for my trouble,' he said. Not that I wouldn't have done the best for a fainting lady, in any case, but he just pressed it on me. He had to go away somewhere. But in case you came round before long, he left a first-class ticket ready for you, so there is nothing to stop you from taking the next train, even if Mr. Kaspot doesn't get back before then."

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Now here was a dreadful dilemma! It was, of course, impossible for me to remain in a neighbourhood where I had been tricked out of the respect of everybody who knew me, especially as I was in a penniless condition. My only course was to get home as quickly as possible. But to do that, I should have to accept another favour from the man whose attentions had brought nothing but trouble to me so far, and the evident necessity of this step was so humiliating that I was desperately sorry for myself.

But of the choice of evils which I turned over in my mind this seemed the only one that would solve my present difficulties, so I forced myself to accept the ticket, and took my seat with a very sad heart when the train came in, my only crumb of comfort being the absence of Mr. Taskot.

Very bitter were my thoughts as I was being whirled towards Idlebury Junction, and it hardly seemed possible that but a few days had passed since I, a happy and light-hearted girl, had started on the visit which had proved so disastrously eventful.

"I must try and bury the memory of what has happened," I told myself. "So long as I remain in my own village I am not likely to meet any of the people who live near Vernon Towers. As for Mr. Ray—well, I must not think of him again."

Nevertheless, my thoughts were full of him. And when I changed trains at Idlebury Junction, I could not help regretting that Mr. Taskot's shameful behaviour to me would prevent Mr. Ray from ever again brightening my life with his aid and advice. I was not used to travelling alone, and I should have been glad of friendly help in seeing to the transference of my luggage from one train to the other. But I managed to dispose of it into the hands of a porter, and was settling down for the conclusion of my journey, when I received a disagreeable surprise.

Just as the train was starting, the carriage door was hastily opened, and another passenger jumped in. It was Mr. Taskot, and I knew in an instant that he was there of deliberate intention to persecute me! I rose from my seat, although the train was already in motion, and would have jumped out, if my fellow-passenger had not forcibly held the door fast.

"Miss Beresford," he exclaimed, "are you mad? To jump out now would kill you!"

"Better be killed," was my fierce rejoinder, "than to suffer your ill-omened proximity."

"I am sorry my presence is obnoxious to you, for it is really due to my desire to be of service."

"It is but an ill service that robs me of the esteem of respectable people."

"Look here now, Miss Beresford, I'm awfully in love with you, and when a fellow is in love, he'll do anything to win the woman he wants."

"A *fellow* might. But a *gentleman* wouldn't!"

"By Jove, that's good! I say, you do know how to rub it in! That's where you score over other girls. The rest are all so brainless—and so——"

"Excuse me, sir, but flattery from you is no compliment. Will you kindly confine yourself to matters of fact? And perhaps you will tell me why you are in this train? I thought I had seen the last of you."

"H'm! That's what it is not to be an artist, introduced under romantic circumstances! You wouldn't talk to Ray like that!"

"No, I wouldn't. Neither would he behave to me as you have done."

"Yet he turned his back on you when things looked a bit shady. And it was I who stuck to you, and who provided for your return home! And I got into the train a station before you got in, just so as to leave you to yourself until you had quite recovered your composure. I watched over you all the way here, too. Yet I cannot earn a word of thanks from you, no matter what I do."

"You can easily earn a great many words of thanks from me."

"Tell me how, and I'll do it like a shot."

"Give me all those photographs which Harry Vernon took. And write to Mr. Ray, owning that I was unable to prevent you kissing me in the carriage."

Mr. Taskot's eyeglass, which usually seemed to grow over his right optic, behaved just as it always did whenever he was astonished. It fell out of its place, and dangled for a few seconds on its chain, unheeded by its owner.

"Well, really," said the latter, "that's the coolest demand I ever heard!"

I had all this time remained standing. But as the train was now a long way from a station, I sat down again and looked my tormentor squarely in the face.

"Do you agree to my request?" I asked.

"By Jove, no!" was the answer. "At least, not unless you marry me!"

"That I will never do."

"Well, you are excited just now. We'll let the matter stand over till you have time to consider all the *pros* and *cons*."

"There are no *pros*."

"Pardon me—I can give you a strong one. By marrying me, you will make handsome provision for your own future, and will silence for ever any scandal that has arisen in respect of a—a—cardplaying. And of a—a—the fact that you and I have journeyed down here in the same train and at my expense."

Ah! now I knew why this man had forced himself into my company! He meant to make it so impossible for me to justify my conduct that I should be driven in sheer self-defence to accept him as my companion for life! The hopelessness of my position almost crushed me. But it did not crush me enough to make me yield my life and freedom to him, and I passionately reiterated my refusal to have anything more to do with him.

"Very well," he said, speaking so coolly that my heart misgave me, for the man seemed so horribly confident of ultimate victory. "Very well, Miss Beresford, I will not argue the matter any further just now. I will change into another carriage at the next stopping place. But mind you—I am not a man who ever relinquishes his purpose, and you may rest assured that you will hear from me again."

EPISODE NINETEEN.

"No Escape."

"I REALLY can't make out what's happened to you while you were away. You leave here to pay a country visit in the best of spirits, and you come back miserable and half dead. Worse still, you seem to be fretting all the time about something. Upon my word, Olive, your holiday hasn't done you much good!"

Mrs. Windsor, the friend with whom I had gone to live after my aunt's death, had more than once expressed herself as above, and I realised at last that if I would avoid inconvenient curiosity, I must throw off the depression which had possessed me during the fortnight that had elapsed since my return home.

So I answered with comparative cheerfulness:

"My dear Mrs. Windsor, I'm afraid you are worrying about me, and I'm sure there's not the slightest need. Vernon Towers disagreed with me, it is true. And I was disappointed to find that my old schoolmate and her husband were the reverse of nice. But I've nothing to fret about, and now that I have shaken off the effects of the chill I got while I was away I shall be jollier than ever."

Mrs. Windsor looked dubiously at me. But I appeared to be as good as my word, and was, outwardly at least, just as I had been before my memorable visit to Vernon Towers. Yet I lived in continual fear of being unpleasantly reminded of my card-playing adventures. And, worse still, I could not banish Maurice Ray from my mind. He was my ideal of all that was manly and noble, and I knew that the woman whom he might marry would be the woman whom I should envy all my life. For, little though I had seen of him, I had learnt to love him, and it was small wonder that my heart ached with grief at the conviction that he could never feel anything but contempt for me.

There was also another source of worry for me. I owed

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Mr. Taskot the price of my railway ticket. But, until my next quarter's income was due I could not count upon receiving any money, and I was thankful that Mrs. Windsor would not expect anything from me until then. Meanwhile, it behoved me to practice rigid economy, and I trusted to be able to repay Mr. Taskot without having to come into personal touch with him again, by forwarding the money in an envelope addressed to a club of which I had been casually informed that he was a member.

"Olive, we have some friends coming to spend the evening with us, and we want you to be there too. We can wait for you, if you will get ready now, to drive back with us."

The speaker was Alice Cheshunt, the daughter of some people who had recently come to live within three miles of my home. We had met at the vicarage, and had speedily become very friendly. The Cheshunts were all exceedingly nice, and I gladly welcomed the opportunity of diverting my thoughts from the subjects which had engrossed them lately.

So it came to pass that I was soon bowling along the country lanes with Mrs. Cheshunt and Alice. They made very kindly inquiries about how I had enjoyed my recent little holiday. But though I was careful not to hint at anything unpleasant, I was not enthusiastic enough to encourage much questioning, and I was very glad when the bustle of preparing for the guests who were presently expected put the subject out of their minds.

It had been arranged that I was to stay all night, so there was no need for me to follow the example of several people who had perforce to leave while the pleasure of the evening was still in full swing. For it *was* a pleasant evening, up to a certain point, with good music and witty conversation galore.

"I'm dying to have a game of Bridge. Can't you arrange one?"

The speaker was Mrs. Smedley, a lady who lived only a short distance away, and who was quite famous in the neighbourhood for her successful progressive whist parties. Her proposal was hailed with delight by several guests, and as my shining eyes proclaimed my willingness to join the players, I was forthwith pressed into service.

Of course, after what I had already endured through gambling, I ought to have steered clear of the temptation now set before me. But as I did not blame the cards or the game for what had happened, and as I was no longer in the company of people who wanted to fleece me, I saw no harm in consenting to make a fourth for "phantom stakes."

"My dear," said Mrs. Cheshunt, about an hour later, after hearing that I was a very lucky player, "I had no idea you knew anything about Bridge."

"I only learnt very recently," was my guarded reply as I turned to sort the cards just dealt to me. "Of course, one can soon pick up a game that is attractive."

"Just so," said a voice at my elbow. "The cleverest player I ever met was a lady who had only handled cards a few times before she won hundreds of pounds."

My heart almost stood still at these words. For they were spoken by a person whose very presence was of sinister omen for me, and I knew that they contained a veiled threat. I was not aware that the Cheshunts knew Mr. Taskot. Yet here he was, and I could but remember what he had said when last I saw him—"Mind you, I am not a man who ever relinquishes his purpose, and you may rest assured that you will hear from me again."

What should I do? Should I try to avoid too much attention by treating this man with the same civility that I would bestow upon any other chance acquaintance? Or should I mark my sense of his shortcomings by declining to speak to him?

I decided that the former would be the wiser course, and, schooling myself to appear thoroughly at ease, I turned my head towards the person who stood behind my chair.

"Mr. Taskot!" I ejaculated coolly. "I thought I recognised your voice. But I did not know you were expected here."

"Would the knowledge have prevented you from coming?" he asked in a low tone.

"You flatter yourself too much," I murmured, "if you think I regulate my movements by yours."

"Play!" exclaimed my partner, and, feeling cowed in spite of myself by the evil look in Mr. Taskot's unmonocled eye, I resumed the interrupted game. But my luck had deserted me, and I soon had reason to be thankful that my losses were only nominal, not real.

Mr. Taskot, it transpired, had come, on an open invitation, to visit Mr. and Mrs. Smedley, and, finding that they had come here, had not hesitated to join them, for he had already met the Cheshunts at their house. A presumably wealthy bachelor, of fair reputation, is never at a discount in Society, and Mr. Taskot proved no exception to the general rule, for he was welcomed as cordially as if he had been expected.

"A revoke!" called one of my opponents. "We shall exact penalty."

"Certainly," I agreed. "And my partner must forgive me. I suppose I am tired, or I would not have revoked, so I think I would like to cease playing after this hand."

The others had evidently played as long as they wanted, for there was a general break-up of the game, and those who did not need to hurry home settled down for a final chat before leaving.

"It is very good of you to allow me the pleasure of joining you," said Mr. Taskot to Mrs. Cheshunt.

"Not at all," was the pleasant disclaimer. "We are only too pleased to see you. But how odd that you and Olive should have met before!"

"I see nothing odd in it, if you will allow me to say so. Miss Beresford and I recently visited the same country house together, and I have such happy recollections of the delightful hours spent in her company that I ought to be forgiven for any apparent presumption I have shown this evening."

At this speech, which was instantly interpreted just as the speaker intended it to be interpreted, I felt myself flush scarlet with anger, and I was about to utter a scathing rejoinder when I saw Mr. Taskot take a packet of papers out of his pocket and proceed to arrange them in sequence. I knew only too well what they were. They were the fatal photographs which would convict me of cheating at cards, and horror at the idea of their being shown to my friends sealed my lips.

"What do you say, Olive?" smiled my tormentor. "Shall I show these little snapshots, and give their history now? Or shall I wait until after the—a—the little ceremony we talked of?"

"Oh, not now!" I gasped. "Not now!"

"As you will, dearest! Of course, your word is henceforth always law to me."

I heard Mr. Taskot address me thus, with unwarrantable familiarity, but I was for the moment incapable of any feeling but relief at my narrow escape from exposure, and it was not until I began to be overwhelmed with congratulations that I comprehended what had happened.

The photographs were believed to be the innocent evidence of a pretty little romance, and my answer to Mr. Taskot had been taken as a tacit acknowledgment of an engagement between us!

Of a truth I was now hopelessly in the toils, for even marriage with the man I detested was preferable to permanent disgrace.

(To be concluded shortly.)

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Rodney Ray's Revenge.

How a Woman's Refusal Wrecked a Man's Life.

THE scene was grand, the night was perfect. Scarcely a breeze stirred the air or dallied with the waves. The moon was full. The sky was cloudless. The temperature was such as left one no thought of there being either heat or cold in existence.

Far out to sea there was a long low line of smoke, that and a shadowy shape which one could call an ocean steamer—or a dream of one. Further still, down on the horizon's very edge there was a tiny speck of white that one might guess was a sail, or believe was the wing of some seabird, as one pleased.

Half a mile away, down the long level beach, there was a group of merry children enjoying as much of the early evening as was to belong to them, and with all the greater earnestness and zest because it was almost over, and there was to be a whole long night between them and the happy morrow. Under the blaze of the electric light they dug in the sand, they ran races, they rushed down to meet the incoming waves, and dashed back even faster. They did all the childish and pleasant things which free and happy hearts could prompt them to do—many things which we older ones (with nerves) blame and scold them for—many things which those of us who are blessed with good health secretly envy them the doing.

Further away there were music and dancing.

And the breath of the bounding sea stirred about the loitering man and woman, far from human companionship, other than their own, upon the lonely beach. The loveliness and mysteriousness of the night lay all about them and in their hearts. The distant steamer and almost invisible sail made the night more lonely; the voices of the children came faintly to them with the wash of the waves; everything seemed almost as unreal as the figures in a dream, and the throb of the music might have been from another and an unseen world. Indeed it might! Blended with the sea's voice, and the laugh of childhood, it was almost divine.

Rodney Ray thought that it was Paradise.

We will go up the beach. The man and the woman are walking there, you remember.

Rodney Ray has told his story. He has asked his question. He has known, and so has the woman—and for a long time, too—that it would be told some time.

I doubt if he went out with her to-night intending to tell her of his love. He has loved her long—he has loved her earnestly; let no one doubt that. But love must learn patience—it must wait.

Rodney Ray was scarcely a handsome man. He was a bit too stout to be graceful, and his face had more strength in it than beauty ever allows a man. His eyes were grey, and clear, and bright. His mouth spoke of will and determination. The poise of his head denoted pride. He was evidently an earnest man and a truthful one.

The woman was a vision of loveliness. Tall, dark, full of grace, faultless under the glare of the electric light, in the heated ballroom; perfect in form and complexion by honest daylight. By moonlight one would have felt justified in any flattering words. I believe that Rodney Ray had just called her an angel.

Suddenly he said, "Stella, darling, I love you dearly. Do you love me? Will you be my wife?"

Her answer was a terrible blow to him.

She looked him straight in the eyes and told him "No."

His head went down upon his breast. It was the only sign of his intense suffering. It was as though all life and hope and energy had suddenly been crushed out of him.

The woman tapped her dainty foot impatiently upon the sands. She stole a hurried, frightened glance at him—a glance he did not see. She loved power; she loved the power which she had over this man; but there was a doubt in her girlish heart as to whether she had been wise in attempting to use it.

She was not the first woman who had played with a man's heart and wrecked her own life by doing it.

"You've led me to this," he said brokenly, "and if you had no other answer than this for me, you had no right to do it."

He raised his head and looked at her. But she was looking at the sand now.

She made no answer.

"It was wicked."

She raised her head.

"It was cowardly to deliberately wreck a man's life as you have done, Miss Atherton."

Stella Atherton thought two things; first, that her lover didn't understand women, and second, that she was very, very angry.

We will agree that Rodney Ray did not understand women; we will agree that what he had said was quite enough to have angered Miss Atherton.

But, in this age, when a man does not understand a woman, she is a fortunate one who wins him.

For the rest, an angry woman will ride rough-shod over her own heart that she may hurt the one who has angered her. And she will but go the quicker and more bravely, the closer his words have been to the truth.

"Pardon me, Mr. Ray," she said icily; "but I could scarcely have guessed you intended marriage. Your profession, or calling, or business——"

"Don't!" he cried, sharply, turning away his head.

She paused.

He looked off to the ocean, and let the cool air touch his face. He wondered vaguely whether she had touched upon the truth in what she had started to say. He felt that he had frittered away too much of his life. Bohemian in all his tastes and habits, he wondered whether it were really that which had cost him the coveted happiness of his life. He could write—a little; he could paint—a little; he was a musician—in a sense

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Poor, as the world goes, he had not come to look upon the use of his powers in the gaining of wealth as a duty to himself, to the world, and to the power who had endowed him with a grand intellect.

Had it cost him his future? He could not tell. It looked so.

He groaned aloud. He never thought of asking the woman to reconsider her answer, though she was almost praying he would.

"How stupid he was!" she said to herself, forgetting that it would have been no compliment to her to have guessed she was a coquette.

She grew angrier with him. She threw the fact of her fortune in his teeth.

"Perhaps you thought I had enough for both?" she said pointedly.

He looked at her and his face darkened, but he made no answer.

"You blamed me for leading you on," she said, with slow deliberation. "Perhaps you will admit that all is fair with a man who is a mere fortune-hunter."

He turned quickly and caught her by the arm. He meant no violence to her, and never knew that he had done her any.

But she carried the prints of his fingers on her delicate flesh—yes, and kissed them and cried over them—for many a day.

His eyes blazed down into hers.

"I would kill a man who said that to me. Your sex saves you. You know that I am not what you have called me. You know that, Stella Atherton."

He looked away again. The sea was only an unquiet and relentless monster to his eyes now.

Low-lying clouds betokened storm. The childish laughter was gone from the sands. The distant music was only a discordant clang.

The scene was what it had been. The man had changed.

There are those among modern theologians who believe that the soul itself will make its own heaven or hell. Perhaps they are right.

"You have been cruel and heartless," he said, the agony of thorough conviction of the truth of what he said trembling in his tones, "and the knowledge that it is so will help me to outlive it."

She merely bowed her head, as though in approval.

"But the time shall come when you shall regret this night. And when it comes you shall find it has no end. The sorrow you find then shall be yours in life and in death, and only your grave shall shut it away from you."

She bowed again.

He turned away and left her there alone. He walked away with long strides, while she stood and watched him, and the dimness of her vision was not from spray nor mist from the sea.

Regret! Yes, from this moment, for ever!

And he never guessed it.

One word. One little cry from her. One pause in his rapid, reckless walk. Any of these, and I might lay down my pen and write "The End" over against their story.

But she stood like a frozen form.

And he never looked back.

It's the way of the world, alas! It's the way of the world!

It took Stella Atherton a full month to learn that Rodney Ray was really gone—gone without another word with her—gone without a message of farewell. I won't begin to tell you the time and money she spent in finding where he had gone. It took both, and she gave them freely. It meant much to her when she learnt that he had buried himself in the wilds of America and was hunting for gold.

She fought with her other self such fierce battles as our two selves can fight; her love and her tenderness, and her sense of justice against her pride and her anger.

Could she have seen him, had she even had his picture, I believe she would have won. As it was, she lost. She wrote one letter to him, and destroyed it because it was too short; she burnt another because it was too long; this one was too cold; that one was too tender.

It ended by her letting silence fall between them.

Other suitors came—all sorts and conditions of men.

One was persistent. No matter that he was old, and that this woman loved youth; no matter that he had money, and that she despised it because she had been so foolish as to pile it up as a barrier between her and the truest heart she had ever known; no matter that she told him "No!"

He was honest and kindly. He was thoroughly in earnest. He asked again and again. He won, as other men have done, a weary woman's promise, without love or heart in it.

But how was the exile in the mountains, reading of her marriage, to know that?

It was a hard life that to which Rodney Ray had condemned himself. He rose early and retired late.

He spared himself in no way. He worked in all weathers—he grew rich. He had gold stored away in more than one place among the hills.

He would smile quietly to himself as he thought of it all, although he sometimes wondered what the use of it would be, since he had failed to win Stella Atherton. Then again he would have a feverish desire to have as large a fortune as hers, and would hurry away to his work.

One year there was the news that the woman he had loved was the wife of another! What matter? She was no more dead to him than she had been when he walked away from her that night by the sea, with the glare of the moonlight all about him, and the hateful blare of the dance-music in his ears.

The next year she was a mother. A son had come to her—a boy who would grow up with the face of another man.

I think this hurt him more than her marriage had done.

It was much like the sensation one in a trance would have when the sods began to rattle down upon his coffin.

The third year death came near her. The man who had given her his name and his fortune went down through the silent gates, and left her only fortune and name.

Did she love him? Would she weep over him?

Rodney Ray could not guess. He would never know.

No matter for that. She was nothing to him—less than nothing.

The next year she went to America. A vain man would have at least wondered! Rodney Ray did not. She came, with money and furniture, and comforts and luxuries, and settled down in the village where he lived. Perhaps to trouble and annoy him, was his first thought—a thought which he put away from him as unworthy and unjust, and which he did not follow with another that was any more to the purpose. He said to himself that he had conquered his passion; he said that his wound was healed. He gave his words the lie by avoiding the newcomer. He moved further up into the hills and never saw her.

Perhaps she had done all that a woman could well do. Perhaps she would have done more. I cannot tell. The end has left it all unknown.

The snow lay deep in the valleys. There was an icy wind from the mountains. More snow was falling. The sun was set. The brief twilight was almost gone.

"Rodney," said a rich, womanly voice.

Rodney Ray might have wondered why his name had been given to the boy. Or he might not have wondered. I cannot say. There are men who will take a woman at her word, I suppose, and hold to it all their lives long.

"Rodney."

There was no answer.

"Rodney."

Her voice was louder and full of anxiety.

Still no answer.

A hurried search everywhere. No boy to be found. Then the mother hurried out to follow the tracks of the little wanderer through the snow. Only three years old, and he had not been gone a half hour. Surely she must find him.

She ran through the blinding storm, finding his tracks as far as the little foot bridge across the mountain torrent. Further than that, nothing certain. No footprints; no

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trace. Perhaps, in God's mercy, because the snow had covered them. Perhaps——

"Perhaps, in God's mercy, because the snow had covered them," she said to a neighbour when she reached the village again.

And the rough old man drew his hand across his eyes, repeated "in God's mercy" in a doubtful way, looked at the hills and shuddered.

She did not understand him then. There was certainly a mercy in that.

* * * * * *

It was late. It was so late that Rodney Ray was hurrying home, and beginning to look and feel anxious. There was a sound here and there in the forest that reminded him of the music across the sandy stretch of beach the night he went home from Stella Atherton, though why such a horrible suggestion should have come to him I can scarcely tell. Men listen as they feel, I suppose.

He reached his door at last, to find what? A line of tiny footsteps leading past it!

He shut his lips together tighter, increased his speed, and followed the baby's trail.

He found the child a half-mile away.

"What's your name?" he asked, as he caught him up in his arms, and rapidly turned to retrace his steps.

"Rodney," said the little fellow, looking up at him with eyes like Stella Atherton's.

Rodney Ray stooped over with a sudden impulse and kissed the boy.

The strong man shuddered.

"Oh, Heaven, give me help!" he said under his breath, as a wolf, cowardly because it was alone, slunk away.

Five minutes later it was evident that they could not reach Rodney Ray's house. There was a steep rock near the path, up which he climbed, carrying the boy with him. By dislodging a large fragment he made it impossible for either animals or men to follow them unless they had ladders.

The snow fell, the wind blew, the cold increased. And for hours the boy talked and laughed, to fall eventually into the sleep of exhausted childhood, protected from the cold by the clothes of the man who had found and saved him.

* * * * * *

They found them so in the morning. The wolves had gone home to their dens from their night-long riot of vain endeavour. The child looked up and smiled. He had lain with the coat and vest of Rodney Ray wrapped closely about him.

Rodney Ray smiled. But it was the smile that never changes—the smile that we always remember best because it comes last. In it was a prayer to the Heaven he had found. In it was thankfulness to the God who had given him the honour of martyrdom. No more sorrow, no more pain, no more care.

He had his revenge!

He gave his life for it!

Clarence Bontelle.

"THE PAPER A BOY CAN TAKE HOME."

The Third Number of . . .

. . THE . .

BOYS' LEADER

Pearson's New Paper.

NOW ON SALE. ONE PENNY.

"Funny Pips" is a separate paper Given Away each week with "The Boys' Leader."

Your Editor Chats.

Last week I mentioned to you that a series of stories very much to your liking would soon begin in this paper. "The Bridge of Ruin" has been immensely popular, as it thoroughly deserves to be, but all good things must have an end, and these episodes will soon be brought to a thrilling conclusion. I have no doubt that your sorrow in saying "Adieu" to Miss Olive Beresford will be forgotten in your pleasure at making the acquaintance of your new heroine, whom, I may say, is a brave girl who risks much danger for the sake of her absent lover. Her exciting escapades at the hands of relentless people, her stubborn courage, and her undaunted love will bring forth your ardent admiration, and I am sure that all my readers will thank me for inducing her to relate her experiences. But more of this later.

RESULT OF BURIED STATIONS COMPETITION.

The task of checking the attempts of this competition has been necessarily a long one on account of the extreme care which had to be exercised. A large staff of checkers was busily engaged, and their work is now completed. Most of the attempts contained a large number of words which, under the conditions of the competition, were inadmissible. After these had been eliminated from the attempts it was discovered that the greatest number of correct words was sent in by

Miss A. P. Sargent, Draycott, near Cheddar, Somerset, who is therefore the winner of the £50. This attempt contained 688 words in all, 520 of which were admissible.

The winner of the £25 is H. A. Upward, "Edfon," Romford, Essex, whose attempt contained 713 words, 517 of which were admissible.

The winner of the £10 is Alex. Smith, Oakamoor, Stoke-on-Trent. His attempt consisted of a total of 725 words, 513 of which were admissible.

The Twenty-Five Gramophones have been awarded to the following competitors, whose attempts come next in order of correctness.

D. Boardley, Mint Street, Kendal; S. Hill, 61 Kendal Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham; A. E. Roby, 27 Victoria Road, Stoke Newington, N.; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; P. A. Foulds, 37 Ribblesdale Road, Bolton; E. Birkenhead, 3 College Villas, Grays; F. Parker, Bruce Cottage, Sinderby, Thirsk, Yorks; F. T. C. Wickett, 38 Victoria Road, Exmouth; F. Simkin, Edmondthorpe, near Oakham; A. F. Marshall, 11 Whellock Road, Chiswick, W.; Miss Lily Peddle, 10 Raeburn Street, Brixton, S.W.; M. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; Rev. J. A. Beard, Melksham, Wilts; Geo. Laxton, 10 Raeburn Street, Brixton, S.W.; A. C. Ford, Station Road, Rainham, Kent; Mrs. Bell, 17 Castledine Road, Anerley, S.E.; W. Berry, 97 Gladstone Buildings, Willow Street, Finsbury; Jas. Cameron, Scotchman Lane, Morley, Leeds; H. Osborne, 90 Orlando Street, Bolton, Lancs; A. E. Oldham, 58 Westward Street, Middlesborough; B. R. Hill, 61 Kendal Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham; F. White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.; A. Backhouse, 15 Barton Street, Moss Side, Manchester; Mrs. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; V. Cameron, 32 Scotchman Lane, Morley, Leeds.

Your Editor.

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REPAID BY LOVE.

A Very Pretty Little Tale of a Borrowed Sovereign.

The air was chill and wintry, and the short uncompromising afternoon was already deepening into night as Max Villiers crossed the great open space of Trafalgar Square and turned into the Strand. A cutting east wind met him as he did so, and he buttoned his great coat still more closely about him. A couple of poor, ill-clad, hungry-looking children passed him, and he dived into his trousers pocket for a stray sixpence. He knew it was there, for his cash balance had now dwindled far below the limits of arithmetical calculation. Finding it, therefore, with very little difficulty, he tendered it to the astonished urchins, and, mumbling something about "buns" and "cakes," hurried off as though the police were on his track.

"Poor little souls!" he muttered. "It's rough enough for a man, but it's worse for kids!"

He walked on a few paces, and a smile—half sad, half humorous—crossed his handsome, thoughtful face.

"Six from six-and-three leaves five-and-nine," he mused. "That's bad enough, but I must have some tea, which is worse. True, I've still got one 'gold-boy' here"—he touched the sovereign purse which dangled at his watch chain—"but that I am afraid I must regard as the property of Mrs. Jinks. Her eye was more evil than usual this morning, and her hints about 'gents as didn't pay their doos to lone widders' savoured strongly of the personal. So *that* cannot be regarded as an asset, and I must limit my understanding to the contemplation of the aforesaid five-and-nine. Heavens, what it is to be an author!"

He turned into an A.B.C. shop, and, taking a seat at one of the tables, ordered an exceedingly modest tea. Then, while he waited for its arrival, he resumed his meditations and gazed thoughtfully into vacancy.

There was something very striking about the strong, handsome, intellectual face, and a quiet, shy-looking girl, seated at an adjoining table, found herself attracted by it in spite of herself. But Max Villiers was wholly unconscious even of her presence, and went on with his reflections as before. Eight or nine months ago he had been well-known in some of the second-rate and one or two of the first-rate journals as a tolerably clever short-story writer, and there had been no lack of guineas to reward his labours. But one day he awoke to the hitherto undreamt of conviction that he was destined for bigger things. A great inspiration had come to him—and he knew that his time had come. So he had cast his old, casual, purposeless work into the pit of oblivion, and sat himself down to a new and nobler creation—the writing of a great novel. Almost before he was aware of it, the work had absorbed his every faculty. He forgot everything else—even his growing difficulties and pressing needs—and lived only in the world he was creating. Slowly the many intricacies of the masterful plot spun themselves out. Bold and vigorous treatment, flashes of merry humour, touches of deep-stirring pathos—all found a place in this masterpiece of fiction. And now the work was done. With feverish haste and a new light in his grey eyes, he had read it through to himself, and then, with the flush of victory on his face, he had carefully wrapped the manuscript in brown paper and deposited it with a firm of publishers in the Strand. That was a week ago, and he had heard nothing since.

But when he had drawn that last dramatic picture—when the world he had created shook off its fetters of sordid selfishness and soared upward to a new millennium—and when, over this brightly glowing picture, he had drawn the curtain and written the last forceful word, then he had awakened to that old world—the world of bitter remembrances, of pressing needs, and of stern realities—and he knew that he was poor. But, with a brave heart, he had set himself to mend the situation, and had managed, in spite of the mental exhaustion following his greater work, to write and dispatch a short story to one of the magazines. So he waited, and hoped, and dreamt of the future, though now keenly alive to the difficulties of the present, and the great warm heart of the man shone out of those deep grey eyes as he lingered lovingly over his recent work, and anticipated the success which was to follow it.

He was roused from his reverie by the sound of voices at the adjoining table. For the first time since he had entered, he became aware of the presence of the girl whose eyes had more than once been attracted to his face. She was in obvious embarrassment now, though Villiers was as yet ignorant of its cause, and a waitress was standing at her side. The girl was fumbling nervously in her pocket, and a very slender purse lay on the table before her. There was a look of unbelief on the face of the waitress, which the girl was not slow to notice. Her embarrassment increased each instant, and a look of utter hopelessness crept into her face as her search revealed nothing.

"I had a sovereign in my purse," she said feebly. "I can't think what has become of it. Oh, dear, I hope I haven't lost it, for I haven't enough change to pay you."

The waitress preserved an uncompromising silence, and the girl grew more and more nervous.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she said, almost crying.

"Perhaps you might leave something instead, until you can get the money," suggested the waitress. "If a lady forgets her money, she sometimes leaves her watch or ring, and sends for it later on."

The girl shook her head.

"I have neither," she said, and the waitress sniffed significantly.

Max Villiers looked searchingly at the girl, and his heart softened at the sight. Her face was very pale, and there were dark circles under the large blue eyes that seemed to tell of recent tears. There was an air of gentleness and refinement about the girl too, that contrasted ill with the evident poverty

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of her attire. She was unmistakably a lady—Max Villiers could see that—but——

"Poor little thing!" he said to himself, as he saw the blue troubled eyes slowly fill with tears. "It's rough on a man but a girl——It's too dreadful to think about. But what can I do? It wasn't so difficult with the kids, but a sovereign is different. And then there's Mrs. Jinks!" Again he looked at the poor, troubled face of the girl, and he ground his teeth.

"Confound Mrs. Jinks!" he muttered to himself. "But how *can* I do it? She wouldn't accept help from me, even if I offered it, or I know very little of the sex. And even if she would——" And he touched his sovereign purse again. "Phew, what a mess I should be in!"

Suddenly an idea flashed through his brain. There was a brief conflict within him, and the sad face of the girl before him gained the victory. Secretly extracting his last gold coin from its receptacle, he stooped suddenly, noisily jerking the table as he did so. A moment later he rose and extended his hand to the girl at the adjoining table. Between the finger and thumb was a sovereign.

"Is this what you lost?" he asked steadily. "It was on the floor."

A rich flush suffused the girl's face as she rose from her seat.

"Oh, thank you!" she said gratefully. "It must have dropped out of my purse."

Instantly the tears vanished from the blue eyes, and a sweet smile lit up the pale face, and Max felt himself well rewarded. A few moments later, and she was gone, and Max, again lightening his pocket by the sum of sixpence, went out into the Strand and turned down a side street in the direction of the Embankment.

"An expensive outing," he said comically as he mounted the narrow stairs to his attic.

Mrs. Jinks, hearing him enter, came out of her sitting-room to meet him.

"Two letters for you, sir," she said, and looked at him significantly. "I 'ope as 'ow it's good noos, sir, for your bills arunnin' up and I'm only a poor widder, sir, and money's shocking tight, and the butcher he do say——"

She stopped. Max Villiers had torn open one of the envelopes and the pink flush of a cheque caught her watchful eye. She hastened to apologise.

"I'm sure I means no offence, sir. You've always been a good lodger, and paid me reg'lar up to the last few weeks. I wouldn't trouble you now, sir, but a woman must live, and it comes 'ard when you're a widder and 'ave to work hard like me."

"I know, I know," said Max hastily. "I'm not offended. I'll just go out and change this, and then I'll settle up with you."

Mrs. Jinks retreated with a satisfied sigh, and Max, left to himself, tore open the second envelope. One glance, and the colour leapt to his face and his eye brightened.

"Ah," he said, "it's come at last! 'Messrs. Caxton and Wall present their compliments to Mr. Villiers, and request the favour of an early interview in order to arrange preliminaries regarding the publication of the novel now in their hands. Both the partners will be in to-morrow morning, if that will suit Mr. Villiers' convenience.' That looks very much like business. Very well, to-morrow morning be it. I must drive a good bargain, I suppose, though that is not much in my line. At any rate, I shall stick out for royalties, for the book might sell like strawberries in summer."

He went out, cashed the cheque he had received for his short story, paid Mrs. Jinks' bill, and waited for the morrow. And when the morrow came, he found Messrs. Caxton and Wall surprisingly easy to deal with, and when he left, after an hour's interview, he carried with him a very substantial cheque and a copy of an agreement drawn up by that estimable firm for his future emolument.

* * * * *

Nearly two years had sped by since Max Villiers' first book had taken the world by storm, and its author found himself famous. A second book had just been published, and the

"Is this what you lost?" he asked, holding up a sovereign.

avidity with which it was already being read promised well for its success. The old-time poverty was almost forgotten, though there were still times when his mind went back to those early days, and that sympathy with the poor, awakened only by personal experience, warmed his heart with the love of humanity and led him to many a noble deed. It was early autumn, and he had accepted the invitation of a wealthy book-lover to spend a few weeks at his estate in Rutlandshire. Other guests, he was informed, would be present, all more or less of an artistic or literary turn of mind, and he anticipated an agreeable time. The place was not easy of access, and, after accomplishing about three-fourths of the journey, he had to catch a local train at a sleepy country junction, which would convey him to his destination. But even here there were complications, and he was directed to take his seat in the front part of a train. The third carriage was comprised of first and second-class compartments, and into one of the former he stepped. There were three other carriages in the rear of the train, but these were to be disconnected a few miles further on. He settled himself comfortably in a corner of the compartment, and waited for the train to start. Presently he heard the voice of the guard.

"Front of the train, miss. This way, please!"

There were footsteps on the platform, and, a moment later, the guard flung open the door of his compartment, and a young lady, pretty and well dressed, entered. She started at sight of Max Villiers, but took her seat with apparent unconcern.

"Straight through for Magden Park," said the guard as he slammed the door.

Magden Park! Villiers looked up from the newspaper he was reading, and across at the girl opposite him. *He* was going to Magden Park. Was this girl one of the guests his host had spoken of? He hoped she was, for she looked sweet and dainty, and the blue eyes were frank and sunny. As soon as the train moved out of the station, she picked up a book she had brought with her, and, opening it half-way, began to read.

There was a light in Max Villiers' eyes as he recognised it as

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his own recent production. It was clear the book absorbed and fascinated her, but, once or twice, he thought he caught the girl's eyes fixed inquiringly on his face, while a little puzzled expression lingered about the pretty curved brows. Perhaps she recognised him. A great many people did that every day in his life now, and he was not surprised.

Soon they stopped at the station where the latter half of the train was to be disconnected. The guard who had accompanied them hitherto, remained in his van at the rear of the rear half of the train, while a new guard, who had been waiting on the platform, took his station in a similar van between the engine and the three carriages which were to go on in front. The carriage containing Max Villiers and his fair fellow-traveller would therefore be at the extreme end of the first train.

There was some slight delay at first, owing to the mistake of a sleepy-looking porter who officiated at the little country station. It was his duty to disconnect the couplings of the train in order to divide it for its respective journeys, and, instead of doing this behind the carriage containing Max Villiers, he did so between it and the carriage before it. Fortunately, the guard chanced to notice the mistake before the engine moved on, and the porter was ordered to connect the couplings again and disconnect those at the rear of Villiers' carriage. A few moments, and they were off again.

The district was hilly, and, half a mile further on, they could look back at the sleepy little station they had just left, lying peacefully down in the valley below. They were going up now, and the gradient was unusually steep. But there was little to encumber the locomotive, and it sped up the steep incline as though it were on level ground. On they went, the ground still rising, until one could look over a vast expanse of fertile country.

But the girl was deep in her book, and Max Villiers' thoughts were divided between his newspaper and various speculations as to his fair companion's opinion of his own work. So the magnificent view passed all unnoticed, and the train approached the crest of a hill.

Suddenly there was a violent jerk, and, in spite of the speed at which they were travelling, the carriage came almost simultaneously to a standstill. Both its occupants were taken at a disadvantage, and assumed different but equally ridiculous postures. Recovering themselves, however, their eyes met, and the comicality of the situation made them both laugh.

"Some obstacle on the track, I suppose," said Villiers. "But the engine-driver might consider the dignity of his passengers with a greater degree of nicety."

The girl laughed and looked out of the window.

"But we are running back," she said. "I wonder if anything is wrong."

Max Villiers rose from his seat and put his head out of the window. They were, indeed, running backwards down the steep grade of a hill, and the pace was growing greater as they descended. But that was not all he saw. Glancing momentarily forward, he saw, far away in the distance, the remainder of the train, now disappearing over the crest of the hill. Something must have happened to the couplings, for their carriage had separated from the rest of the train, and, answering to the law of gravity, had come to a standstill on the brow of the hill and then run back down the steep incline. There was a catch in the man's throat as he drew in his head and looked at the girl's inquiring face.

"We have been separated from the rest of the train and are running down hill again," he said quietly. "There is no cause for alarm, however, and I will stand out on the footboard to keep a sharp look-out ahead."

The girl's face grew white and her lips twitched.

"The second half of the train is somewhere behind us," she said.

"It is in front of us now," corrected Max. "But have no fear. We are in no danger as yet, and we must keep up courage."

The girl nodded, and, rising, straightened herself bravely.

"That's right," said Max approvingly. "We shall come to very little harm if we both keep our heads."

He opened the carriage door as he spoke, and, stepping out on to the footboard, peered searchingly ahead. As yet he could see nothing of the second train, and hope rose within him. It would, he knew, be delayed some minutes at the little station, while a locomotive was connected. There was just a bare possibility that they might come in sight of the station before the second train had started. Yet, even if this were so, would their danger be thereby lessened? Would they not go crashing into the great mass of metal? He scarcely dared think—and he stood far out on the foot-board and waited till the carriage should turn the curve in the track and come in sight of the distant station. They were going much too fast now to think of leaping from the carriage. It was not so steep a little lower down, and the impetus would decrease. Perhaps he might risk it there. But the girl. He could not leave her—that was out of the question.

He had made light of their danger, but he could see she was not deceived. He looked back, and saw her still standing where she had risen, her face very white, but with the light of courage in her blue eyes. Even in that moment, Max marvelled at her mingled beauty and courage, and an admiration the like of which he had never before felt for any woman, entered his heart.

Presently they turned the curve, and Max saw the second train still standing by the station platform. It was just on the point of starting, and the first white column of steam shot upward from the locomotive. Then it stopped, and, with quick presence of mind, the driver reversed the propelling lever and the train steamed backward out of the station. But it was too late. The impetus they had gained was now too great to save them from collision, and the speeding carriage was almost at the station.

But another person was watching the racing carriage. Up in his box the station signalman stood, his hand on a long steel lever and his face pressed against the window. Not until he saw how inevitable was the impending collision did he jam the great lever down that altered the points at the little station. There was a short siding on the opposite side of the platform, where the locomotive waited until the first half of the train had gone on. A buttress of stonework and masonry was at the end, in which two black iron buffers were embedded. The impact here would be even greater than with the retreating train, but the signalman had to consider the safety of the train and its passengers, as well as that of the solitary carriage and its two occupants. Max saw the points jerked back, and, instantly realising what this portended, leapt back into the carriage, swung open the door on the further side, and stepped on to the footboard.

"Now for it!" he said. "You must trust yourself to me, and we may get off scot-free. Come close to me. You are not very big, and I am not a weakling. Do not be frightened. I am going to jump!"

He lifted her up in his arms as if she had been a child, and waited, his back against the speeding carriage. They were going less swiftly now, but still fast enough to make the leap he meditated perilous in the extreme. But there was that stout buttress of masonry ahead, and, going at that pace, the springs with which the buffers were fitted might as well have been wholly absent.

A few moments and they were abreast of the platform. Setting his teeth, and summoning up all the dormant strength in his manly frame, Max Villiers tightened his arms about the girl and leapt. The platform seemed to spin under him as his feet touched it, and he stumbled forward with a great gasp. But he kept his feet, though the great veins stood out like cords in his temples and neck, and beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead.

Then, placing the trembling girl on a seat close by, he sank down exhausted and leant his head on his hands. Even the crash of the carriage as it struck the buffers—the splintering and rending of wood and the twisting of ironwork underneath—failed to reach him. Man as he was, Max Villiers had fainted.

* * * * *

A fortnight had slipped by, and most of the guests in the big

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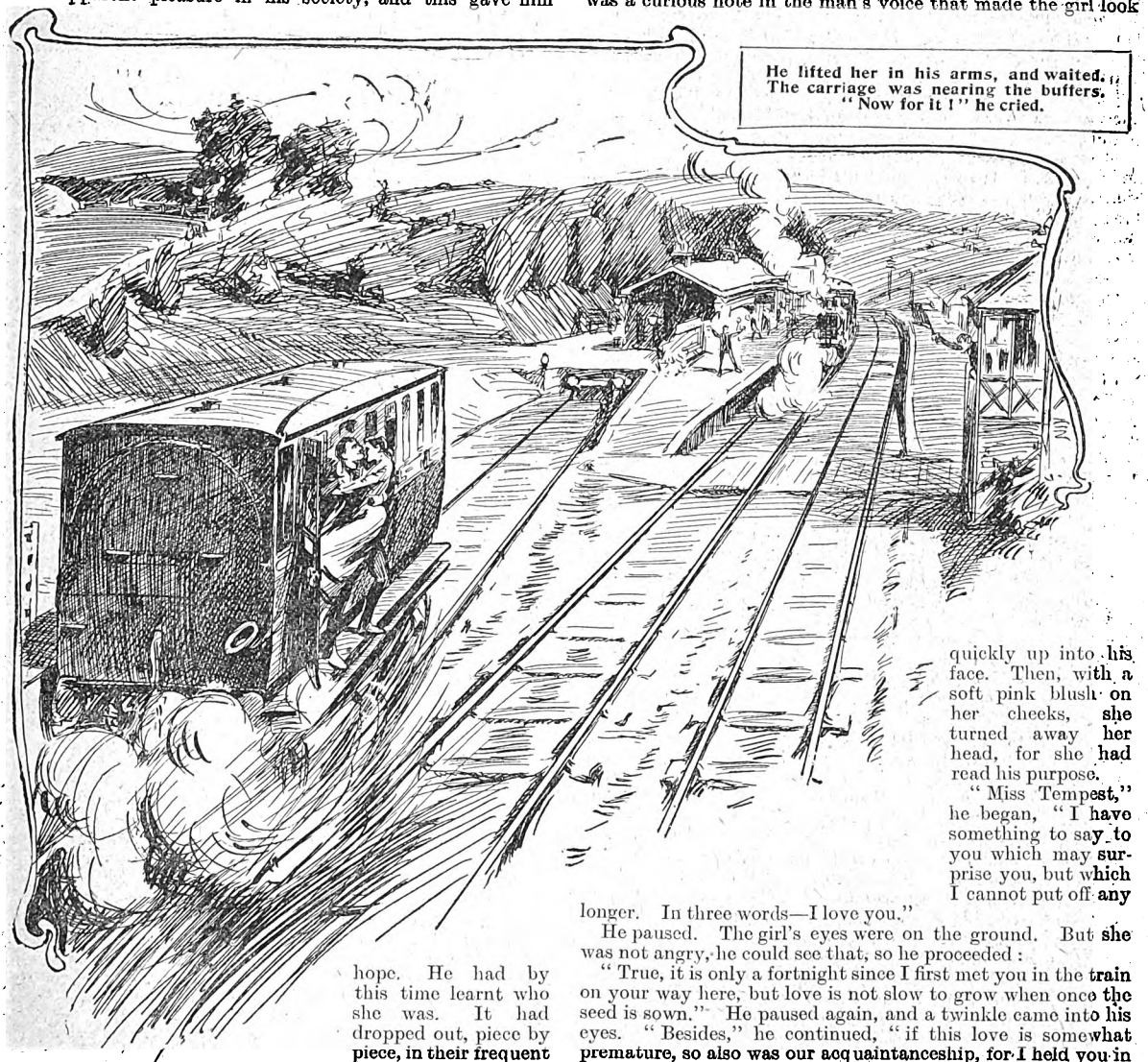
modern mansion at Magden Park had taken their departure. Max Villiers and his fair travelling companion of two short weeks ago were among the few who still remained, and more than one was heard to whisper a prediction concerning them regarding their future relationship. And there was, in truth, ample reason for such predictions. For the first time in his life, Max Villiers had yielded to an attraction so potent that it subjugated every other consideration. He was in love, and he fully realised it. But the lady? Well, he was not addicted to vanity, but he saw quite clearly that she, too, took some apparent pleasure in his society, and this gave him



He lifted her in his arms, and waited. The carriage was nearing the buffers. "Now for it!" he cried.

hope. He had by this time learnt who she was. It had dropped out, piece by piece, in their frequent conversations of late, and Max felt a growing sympathy with the girl whose early life had so nearly resembled his own. She was an artist, but, until the last two years, Success had eluded her. And then the turn of the tide had come, and she, like himself, had taken it at the flood. Steadily but surely she had mounted the ladder of Fame, and now stood not far from the topmost rung. One brilliant masterpiece—a conception of great originality and power—had effected the change, and now her progress was easy and her name well-known as one of the greatest living lady artists. And then Max told her his own story, so like hers that it seemed almost repetition, and their common experience bred that uncommon understanding which nurtures the truest sympathy and finds the warmest echo in the human heart.

And now they, too, were about to bid farewell to the lovely Rutlandshire scenery, and once more take their place among the toilers in the big city. But before they went away, Max Villiers was determined to know his fate. They had wandered out into the great shady park, and were sitting in a little arbour hidden away beneath the tall old elms. There was a curious note in the man's voice that made the girl look quickly up into his face. Then, with a soft pink blush on her cheeks, she turned away her head, for she had read his purpose.

"Miss Tempest," he began, "I have something to say to you which may surprise you, but which I cannot put off any longer. In three words—I love you."

He paused. The girl's eyes were on the ground. But she was not angry, he could see that, so he proceeded:

"True, it is only a fortnight since I first met you in the train on your way here, but love is not slow to grow when once the seed is sown." He paused again, and a twinkle came into his eyes. "Besides," he continued, "if this love is somewhat premature, so also was our acquaintanceship, for I held you in my arms within a quarter of an hour of our first meeting, and the experiment has given me an appetite."

Blanche Tempest looked up quickly.

"You mustn't be impudent," she said sternly, but there was no rebuke in her eyes.

"Ah," said Max earnestly, "I think you know enough of me to make you free from fear on that account. You are the only woman I have ever loved, dear, and it seems like a new world to me. But that world will know no sunshine until I have heard from your own lips that it is not I alone who love. Do not think me over-bold, dearest, but remember that your

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answer affects the whole of my future life. With you, that life will be untold happiness—without you, it must be an endless regret."

He stopped and looked down at the averted face of the girl at his side. She took out her purse, and, from an inner compartment, drew out a sovereign. She looked at it a moment, and then handed it to him.

"I think I owe you this," she said shyly. "Let me discharge the debt before we talk further."

Max Villiers was bewildered. His face flushed, and he rose from his seat. But Blanche rose also, and stood facing him, the gold coin still in her hand.

"I don't understand," Max faltered at last. "You—you owe me nothing. How could you? I have never lent you anything."

"It was nearly two years ago," said the girl steadily. "You and I were in an A.B.C. shop in the Strand, and we were both poor. I had lost a sovereign, or thought I had, and you pretended to pick it up. No one knows how grateful I felt to you, for that was my last sovereign. But when I got home, I found *my* sovereign in the lining of my dress, and then I understood. I tried to find you, in order to return it to you, for—for—I thought you might need it as much as I. But I couldn't. And it was only when I saw you in the train two short weeks ago that I recognised you. But you were prosperous then, and so I waited."

Max Villiers looked at the proffered sovereign in evident embarrassment.

"But I can't take it," he said. "Keep it in remembrance of that our first meeting."

Blanche shook her head.

"No," she said decisively. "You must take it."

There was a long pause, and then their eyes met. A great joy leapt into Villiers' heart, and he grew bolder than before.

"What about the interest?" he asked, taking the little hand, sovereign and all, into his strong grasp. "It accumulates in two years, you know."

"How much do you demand?" she asked archly.

"The biggest I can get," he said.

"Single or compound?" inquired the girl.

"A better than either," was the answer.

'And what interest may that be?" she asked again.

"Human interest," he said promptly. "I am a novelist, you know, and the demand is therefore appropriate."

They both laughed, and looked deep into each other's eyes. Then Max Villiers drew the girl into his embrace and took the first kiss of love from those ripe, sweet lips. For a moment or two they stood thus in silence—his arms about her waist, her heard resting on his shoulder.

Walter J. Mowbray.

THE INDECISION OF ELSA

Telling of a Waiter who Spoke French, and of a Happy Deception.

"TELL me, Elsa, what is it to be?"

"Oh, I do not know what to say; I feel differently every minute, Jack."

The speakers were Jack Selwyn and Elsa Cunningham. This made the fifth occasion during the past three months on which Jack had proposed to Elsa; but she could never make up her mind. She always knew that she was very fond of him but exactly how fond she was never certain.

"But surely you must know, Elsa. I know that I love you. It seems to me you must be certain one way or the other."

"I cannot help it, Jack; I really do not know. I have never had to do without you since I have known you well."

Neither spoke again for some time, and each appeared to be thinking deeply. At length Jack broke the silence.

"I cannot understand, Elsa, why you are unable to say 'yes' or 'no.' It is a subject on which I should think every man or woman would be decided."

She made no reply, evidently she had no answer to his attack. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"If you were to go away, Jack."

"Go away?" he cried in pained tones.

"Yes, just for a few months, then I should know. Besides, it would be a good test for you, perhaps you might meet some other girl you would like better than me."

"Elsa!" There was real pain in his tones now. And then with a little compassionate cry she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. A short interval ensued.

"I mean it, Jack," Elsa went on. "It would be better for both of us if we do not see each other for a few months."

"Not that, Elsa. I must have you," he cried.

"But, Jack, old boy, you must see it will be for the best."

"But why need we separate? You care for me a great deal, and that will increase as time goes on."

"Will it, Jack? That is just what I want to make sure of."

She put her arms round his neck again, and gazed right into his eyes. A wonderful pity seized her as she saw the mute pain that was apparent there.

"If I was certain, Jack, dear, I would not hesitate a moment." The upshot of it all was that Jack Selwyn agreed to Elsa's proposal for a separation. It was to be for three months; then, if Elsa felt she really could not do without him, she was to write. It was taken for granted that he would not forget her in that time.

After some discussion it was decided that an occasional letter might be written, but in no case were they to become frequent.

It was with very heavy hearts that they parted that evening. When the time for the last "Good-bye" came they found it much harder than they had anticipated. But they were resolved to carry out their plan. And so they parted.

It was at the end of June that they said "Good-bye." July had now gone and August was half over. Elsa was seated on the verandah of the High Cliff Hotel at Westport. She was engaged in reading a letter from Jack Selwyn; the third she had received since they parted, now nearly two months ago.

A wistful look was in her eyes as she read and re-read his letter. A look which, had Jack Selwyn seen, would have vanquished all his doubts for ever.

So she sat and dreamt dreams of days that were gone, and days that might be. Would he come back, she wondered, when those three months were over. But her reverie was disturbed by the entry of a waiter, whose slouching gait and dark, sinister face were just as foreign to the object of Elsa's thoughts as chalk is to cheese.

Elsa Cunningham and her aunt, Mrs. Crabtree, were staying at Westport for several weeks. The holiday did not seem to be doing Elsa much good, for she invariably wore a pensive, almost worried look. Mrs. Crabtree grew quite upset at times.

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"My dear Elsa," she would say, "you must look better or else your father and mother will be sorry that they ever let me take you away."

"That's all right, Aunt Lou. Don't you worry; I shall turn up trumps."

Elsa's style of speech was often rather slangy, but that is the mode of the present day.

"That Mr. Ward is a nice young man. Do you not think so, Elsa?"

"Cannot say that I'm particularly struck with him," replied Elsa, to whom young men, with one exception, bore no attraction now.

"I wish you would not use those slang expressions of yours, my dear. They do not sit well on you. Now, I think Mr. Ward is a very nice, gentlemanly young man, and I think he likes you, Elsa."

"Does he?" was the indifferent reply.

"Yes, I am sure he does, dear. In fact, I have asked him to take tea with us this afternoon."

"What!" Elsa started as if she had been shot. "Asked him to take tea with us?" she repeated. "Whatever for?"

"Oh, I like him," replied Mrs. Crabtree somewhat lamely. "And I thought he would be company for you."

"Company, I don't want his company," cried Elsa scornfully; and to herself she said, "Oh, Jack, Jack, why are you not here?"

"Surely Mr. Ward is near enough," she went on, "without asking him to tea. He is staying in the same hotel, and I should have thought that it was quite enough to see him at dinner, let alone inviting him to tea."

"Surely, Elsa, the young man is not objectionable to you."

"Oh, my dear aunt, no. Mr. Ward can come if he likes or stop away if he likes." Which was equivalent to saying that she wished to hear nothing more about Mr. Ward.

Mr. Frederick Ward was a young gentleman favoured with plenty of money and nothing to do but to spend it. I say favoured, for to have nothing to do but to spend money is regarded by many people as the greatest of favours. At any rate, Mr. Ward was honouring the High Cliff Hotel with his presence. Also he was very much smitten with Elsa Cunningham, and with the wiliness of a diplomatist, had set himself to woo the chaperon first. Thus it was that Mrs. Crabtree characterised Mr. Ward as "a nice young man."

He had introduced himself on the cliff, and had immediately rendered Mrs. Crabtree assistance by raising the hood of her chair so as to resist the sun's rays. In many ways he had made himself useful to Elsa's aunt, and had thus succeeded in the first stages of his campaign.

There was too much self-opinionated conceit about him to please Elsa. He smirked as he spoke, and smelt like a perfume shop. And when I say that Elsa loathed him, I am well within bounds. In fact, she had referred to him as "an insufferable cad."

However, he duly presented himself at the private sitting-room which his hostess occupied, and professed himself "charmed" to see Mrs. Crabtree and her niece.

The same waiter who had already offended Elsa's artistic susceptibilities brought in the tea. Not that I wish to infer that waiters are artistic subjects, but there are waiters and waiters, and this man was one of the other sort.

As he passed Mr. Frederick Ward his foot appeared to catch in a rug, with the result that a certain amount of hot tea disported itself on the immaculate clothing of Frederick. That gentleman swore, not loudly, I admit, but Elsa caught the words, and her lip curled scornfully.

The waiter apologised, and Mr. Ward was good enough to say that it did not matter, for it occurred to him that such an attitude would perhaps raise him in the estimation of the ladies. Inwardly, though, he was far from smiling, for, in common with many small-minded people, he was exceedingly mean.

When the waiter returned again with some more edibles, it occurred to Mr. Ward that this would be a remarkably fine chance of displaying how clever he was. Thereupon he turned to Elsa, and slowly, with a painful accent, said:

"*Voici encore le cochon gauche*," which, for the benefit of those who have studied other languages than French, is interpreted as "Here is the clumsy pig again."

If it had been possible for him to have sunk lower in Elsa's estimation he would have done, but I think it was impossible. Also I am perfectly sure she beamed with enjoyment when the waiter remarked:

"*Merci, Monsieur*," and his accent was admirable.

Ward flushed very red; how dare a waiter know French? He turned, and in agonising French asked the waiter how he came to know the language. Elsa has said she could have almost kissed him for his reply, which was:

"Pardon, sir, but I do not speak German."

Elsa laughed outright whilst Mr. Ward almost boiled with indignation. The waiter bowed himself out.

"These common fellows have too many airs, do you not think so, Miss Cunningham?"

"He seems a very well educated man, and speaks French as well as he does English, you should get him to teach you."

And with this Parthian shot Elsa retired from the room.

All this time Mrs. Crabtree had sat in bewilderment, glancing from one to the other. But when Elsa had gone out of the room she turned to Ward and said:

"My dear Mr. Ward, I am very sorry that this has taken place. You will please accept my apologies; Elsa is such a wilful girl."

Mr. Frederick Ward had been swearing to himself ever since the departure of Elsa. The calamities that he wished would overtake the waiter would have excited the admiration of the most barbarous of savages. He mentally resolved that the man should suffer for being the means of his discomfiture.

Some days passed by, and in the meantime Elsa had replied to Jack Selwyn's letter. Now, whether there was anything in the letter she wrote which gave him a clue to her more settled feelings I cannot say for certain; but I know that she received, just a few days afterwards, a very long letter in reply. In that letter he stated that his feelings had undergone a change, and that he loved her still more than ever.

Thereupon Elsa resolved that when she wrote again it should be to summon him to her. But she decided that it would not do to appear too hasty and came to the conclusion that it would be as well to wait a few days.

Frederick Ward seemed in no wise knocked under by the severe snubbing he had received at Elsa's hands, but became more and more attentive to Mrs. Crabtree and her niece. When I say Elsa snubbed him, I hardly express her real attitude, she seemed almost rude to him. But then, there are some creatures to whom it is not rude to be rude, to use a Hibernism.

But Elsa put up with it quite happily, the thought of Jack keeping her spirits high. She seemed quite a different girl to the dejected Elsa who had come to Westport. Mrs. Crabtree put it down to the attractions of Mr. Ward, and endeavoured more than ever to throw them together at every opportunity.

In her last letter to Jack, Elsa had referred to Ward, and in his reply Selwyn had said, "I should like to teach that cad a lesson, do not be surprised if I do." Which remark Elsa had looked upon as a fond extravagance.

Mr. Frederick Ward still nursed a bitter feeling of resent-

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ment against the unfortunate waiter, and during the past few days had concocted a plan by which he was to revenge himself.

The general hour for dining at the High Cliff Hotel was seven o'clock, and on the Wednesday evening the large saloon was fairly full of diners.

Enter Mr. Frederick Ward.

Mr. Wilberforce, the manager of the hotel, in evening dress, passed through the saloon soon afterwards, but his progress was arrested by Ward.

"By the way, Wilberforce," he exclaimed loudly. "During the last two nights a diamond pin and a pair of diamond cuff-links have disappeared from my room, and I have reason to believe that they have been stolen."

Had he accused the manager of stealing them himself, I doubt if the diners would have been more astonished. Certainly it was annoying to lose things, or have them stolen, but it was hardly the thing to announce it as Ward was doing.

"I am exceedingly sorry, but if you will come to my office I will look into the matter without delay."

"It does not require looking into, for I have means of knowing that the thief is there."

Ward pointed in a melodramatic way at the unfortunate waiter. Beyond a slight trembling of his hands, however, that individual took no notice of the accusation.

"Barton," cried the manager to the waiter, "come to my office. I should be glad, if you, too, Mr. Ward, would come when you have finished dining."

"Certainly," he replied. "You will, of course, keep a sharp watch on that man, though."

The manager and waiter withdrew to the office, and there a long conversation took place, the details of which I shall set down later.

Meanwhile Mr. Ward was giving his views in general on the subject.

"Have a detective down from London," he said. "Most abominable, have things stolen like this."

Although he was always speaking, Ward made a practice of using as few words as possible, with the idea that it would be a striking reality. At any rate it served to exercise the talents of mimicry possessed by various of the more junior males at the "High Cliff," much to the delight, I am afraid I must record it, of the opposite sex.

"When he had finished dinner Frederick departed to the manager's office.

"In an inquiry of this sort," began the manager, "it is always as well to form a kind of committee of the guests at the hotel."

"Quite so," agreed Frederick.

"With your permission, then," went on the manager, "I will leave Barton in charge of you and my clerk, whilst I ask a few gentlemen to favour us with their assistance."

"By all means," beamed Frederick. Events were falling in with his plan even better than he had bargained for. His plan, I said; but it is hardly fair to call the petty mean artifice which he had conceived a plan. At any rate this was his idea. He had made friends with a rather smart girl employed at the hotel who had been unsuccessful in her overtures to our friend the prisoner, and was, therefore, quite eager to fall in with Ward's scheme.

Just before dinner this estimable lady had piloted Ward to the servants' quarters which were quite deserted at that time, and placed the articles of jewellery at the bottom of Barton's box. His idea was to cause the box to be searched and thus disgrace Barton.

This was a man who would refer to himself as a gentleman, and yet a petty spite would allow him to lower himself to this extent. Such a creature is not worthy of the name of man.

Presently the manager returned, and with him several of the guests. Prior to their arrival at the office an animated conversation had taken place, which resulted in broad smiles on all their faces.

"Mr. Ward, you have made an accusation against this man, and we shall be pleased to hear your case."

"My case, gentlemen, is very simple," began Ward. "Last night, going along corridor, saw man leave my room hastily, that man was that waiter. Found my tie, pin, and my links were missing."

"I did not go in your room at all last night, neither have I been in it at all," said the waiter.

"I demand to have his box searched," cried Ward. "He is sure to have hidden the things."

"Is that justifiable, do you think, gentlemen?" asked the manager.

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Then let us go to his room," cried Ward triumphantly.

They started towards the servants' quarters, the manager starting forward to lead the way. Someone seized his arm and restrained him, at the same time pointing to Ward, who, in his eagerness, was acting as guide.

The manager chuckled quietly and followed.

Ward led them straight to the room and threw open the door.

"Now, gentlemen," he cried.

"You seem to know your way about, Mr. Ward," remarked the manager.

Confusion reigned with Frederick, and he mentally reviled his eagerness.

"Notice things, you know," he remarked with an attempt at coolness, but he was obviously ill at ease.

"Nice cigars you smoke, Barton," said the manager. "I thought I had forbidden smoking in the servant's bedrooms."

"I have not smoked any cigars in my bedroom," replied the waiter.

"H'm! curious," remarked Mr. Wilberforce, and then he suddenly stooped and picked up the coloured paper band from a cigar.

"Los Huelvos, better cigar than I can smoke. By the way, that's your favourite brand, isn't it, Mr. Ward?"

"Yes, I do smoke them," muttered Frederick, more ill at ease than ever. "But let us carry out our programme."

"Ah, yes, the box," cried the manager.

The box was opened and presently every article was out on the floor but not a vestige of the jewellery.

"They've been moved!" shrieked Ward, and then regretted it immediately.

"Exactly as you anticipated, Barton," said the manager; and then he produced from his pocket the links and pin.

Ward turned a pasty hue and glanced from one to the other in dismay.

"These articles were handed to me by Barton just before dinner," said Mr. Wilberforce. "It strikes me as a curious thing that Mr. Ward should know his way to Barton's room so well. It is also queer that the room smells of cigar smoke and that cigar of a similar brand to Mr. Ward's, who, I believe, is the only one in the hotel to smoke them.

"The pin and links were given to me by Barton, who stated that having found himself to be without a handkerchief, he had hurriedly rushed to his

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room to obtain one. There he found a distinct smell of smoke, and observed that the lid of his box was down, when he distinctly remembered having left it ajar. He immediately opened the box and saw that the contents had been disturbed; continuing his search he found the jewellery which he gave to me.

"I asked him if he had any clue, and whether there was anyone who had any grudge against him. The only man he could think of was Mr. Ward for the reasons which I have given you."

Here the manager referred to the incident of the French conversation at the tea table.

"Now, sir," he said, turning to Ward. "Have you anything to say to disprove this?"

Ward made no reply, but his abject look condemned him.

"We are waiting," said the manager.

Then Ward began to bluster, and spoke of his honour and other equally foreign things. But he made no impression.

"Gentlemen," went on the manager, "I think you will agree with me that Barton is quite innocent, and that, having no direct proof, the person who has done this thing is unknown apparently. But I must ask Mr. Ward to be good enough to vacate his rooms by to-morrow."

"And if I do not?" snarled Ward.

"Then I shall make the story public, and I think I know what the general verdict would be."

Thus Mr. Frederick Ward passes out of this history to be seen no more.

It transpired that the servant girl on observing the commotion had become frightened and confessed her share in the matter to the manager, but he had preferred to hear Ward convicted out of his own mouth.

"That's your nice young man," remarked Elsa. "What do you think of him now, Aunt Lou?"

"My dear, I am going to bed," replied that lady; which was hardly an answer to the question.

As soon as Mrs. Crabtree had gone out of the room, Elsa sat down and hastily commenced to write. She had decided to summon Jack Selwyn, and with that intent, was inditing a letter to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and the waiter entered with a letter on a tray. Elsa pounced on it, and saw to her joy that the handwriting was that of Jack Selwyn.

It was but a short note, and Elsa eagerly devoured the contents, quite unaware that the waiter was still in the room. The letter ran as follows:

"My Dearest Elsa,—*I cannot wait any longer, and am coming to take my answer verbally. I shall be with you this evening; please be merciful.*

"*Yours ever,*

"Jack."

In her excitement she laughed aloud, and cried "Dear old Jack," and then impetuously kissed the letter. The waiter coughed. With flaming cheeks Elsa turned on him:

"Why, Barton," she said, "are you still here?"

The waiter thought for a moment, and then admitted that he was.

"Oh, Barton, I wanted to say how pleased I was that Mr. Ward was found out please get me a Bradshaw." This all in a breath.

When he departed to fulfil his mission, a sudden thought struck Elsa.

"Why, Jack told me not to be surprised if Mr. Ward was taught a lesson, only he said he would do it. How quaint a coincidence!"

Here Barton entered with a Bradshaw.

"Can I find you the place, miss?"

"I want trains from London, Barton."

"There are no more trains to-night, miss. Last train gets in at half-past seven. It's nine o'clock now."

"Are you sure?" cried Elsa, with all the gaiety gone from her voice.

"Quite, miss."

"Thank you, Barton. That will do."

"Are you sure, Elsa?" came another voice.

With a glad little cry Elsa jumped up, but there was only Barton there.

"Why I thought——" she began, then she stared at Barton who actually smiled at her.

Suddenly she sprang forward, and placed her hands on the waiter's shoulders.

"Jack!" she almost screamed. "Jack, you?"

"Yes, Elsa, me," remarked that individual as he removed a heavy dark wig from his light brown hair, and a large black moustache from his upper lips. He gravely proceeded to dust the charcoal from his eyebrows, and to rub out a few painted wrinkles. Whilst all the time Elsa watched in happy wonderment.

"Oh, you dear, silly old boy," she cried. "And do you mean to say you have been here all the time?"

"Yes, dear, I could not bear to be parted from you altogether, so I got a friend of mine connected with the stage to make me up, and then I got a situation here. Of course, I had to disguise my walk and voice as well."

"I only intended to keep it up a little while, though, but friend Ward interested me so much that I resolved to see him out. I sent my letters to a chum in London to post down again. And now here I am. Are you glad to see me?"

"Glad," she echoed. "Oh, Jack, I am so happy, and I never want to let you go away from me again."

I will not chronicle the rest of the proceedings, which were purely of a private nature. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Selwyn may often be seen at Westport now, at least once a year, and they always stay at the same hotel.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Clever Animal.

JINKS: "Yes, she has brought her dog up in the most fashionable way." Binks: "Indeed." Jinks: "Yes, he barks at anyone who is worth under half a million."

No Doubt About It.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "My dear Mabel, I must say that this pudding doesn't taste very nice." Wife: "All imagination, dear, it says in the cookery-book that it tastes excellent!"

Suited Her Admirably.

MR. GOODENOUGH: "I have so much trouble with the pronunciation of my name; it is properly pronounced Good-no, you know." She (shyly): "Yes, but it is Good-enough for me."

Would Realise His Hopes.

MR. HIGHNOTE (at an amateur musicale): "What's he singing?" Miss Sweetvoice: "'Let me like a Soldier Die.'" Mr. Highnote: "If I had a gun with me he should be gratified."

Smith Knew Something.

JONES (leaving for the Continent): "When I'm in Rome I'll do as the Romans do." Smith: "Indeed, you won't. You'll do as the English do—pay twice as much for everything as anyone else would."

He Was Number One.

EXCITED LADY (at the telephone): "I want my husband, please, at once." Telephone Girl (from the Exchange): "Number, please?" Excited Lady (snappishly): "How many do you think I've got, you impudent thing?"

The Bonnet—or Death.

HUSBAND: "Wake up, wake up! The house is on fire, Maria." Wife (imploringly): "Oh, save my new bonnet, John!" Husband (determinedly): "I will. It cost more than anything else in the house."

And Then They Went to Press.

THEY were sitting side by side on the sofa, when the young author said: "Yes, I have a new volume in the press." "How I envy that volume," said the roguish girl; and when he saw the point, they were both very, very happy.

Tricks of the Trade.

MRS. RUSHYEW: "But are you not taking considerable risk in letting your young men owe for two or three weeks?" "Yes, there is some risk," said Mrs. Hashcroft. "But then, you see, they worry over it so that they lose their appetites. So I save money in the long run."

Quite Like the Real Thing.

MRS. JOCELYN: "Don't you miss your husband very much now that he is away?" Mrs. Golightly: "Oh, not at all. You see, he left me plenty of money, and at breakfast I just stand a newspaper up in front of his place and half the time forget that he really isn't there."

A Very Clever Cook.

"THEY have some wonderful chefs in Paris." "Indeed!" "Yes. One of them can boil water in seventeen different styles."

The Turnip is a Beau.

"DON'T talk to me," said the lettuce to the turnip; "I have a heart, and you haven't." "I don't see how that can be," replied the turnip. "You never get mashed, and I do."

The Worst of Cheap Cigars.

MR. EDWARDS: "There's a terrible smell of boiling cabbage throughout the house." Mrs. Edwards: "Yes; we're boiling the lace curtains, in the hope of getting the tobacco smell out of them."

You Don't Say So!

"WHAT is that old proverb about the moss and the rolling stone?" queried the country girl. "A revolving fragment of the paleozoic age collects no cryptogamous vegetation," replied her cousin from Girton.

Not the War Office This Time.

A HEALTH officer recently received the following note from one of the residents of his district: "Dear Sir,—I beg to tell you that my child, aged eight months, is suffering from measles as required by Act of Parliament."

Smart Youth.

SAMMY: "Going to move soon, Tommy?" Tommy: "Yes." Sammy: "How do you know?" Tommy: "Ah! how d' I know? Didn't me mother lemme break a winder tother day an' didn't say nothin?"

They Were Always Late.

ROBERTS: "Time is precious." Smith: "It is, indeed, and I've wasted lots of it." Roberts: "By indulging in foolish pleasures, I suppose?" Smith: "No, I lost it by being punctual in keeping my appointments with others."

Accounted For It.

"IT is strange what a time we have with cooks, dear," said Mrs. Inniscuos. "Dawson was telling me to-day that they've had theirs for ten years." "Yes, dear; and did he tell you who she was?" "No. Who?" "His wife."

A Terribly Tragic Poem.

HE blushed a fiery red; her heart went pit-a-pat; she gently hung her head, and looked down on the mat. He trembled in his speech; he rose from where he sat, and shouted with a screech: "You're sitting on my hat!"

Then the Division Bell Rang.

"PAPA," remarked the M.P.'s daughter, looking at the clock. "What is it, Lou?" asked papa, who had lingered in the drawing-room with the young people. "It is nine o'clock. At this time George and I usually go into committee." Then papa retired.

John Did His Duty.

"I HOPE you try to push business, John, even after office hours," said a coal dealer to his clerk, last January. "I do, sir," replied John. "I call upon a different girl every night, and never leave before twelve o'clock, and have a big fire going all the time."

He Wouldn't be Caught.

A MOTHER of four daughters, of whom one had recently married, asked a young man sitting beside her in the drawing-room whom she would like to have for a son-in-law, "And which of my girls do you most admire?" He (fighting shy): "The married one."

He Would Long for the End.

"I FEEL," said the young man to her father, "that existence without your daughter would be only a dreary task, whose completion could not come too soon." "Very well," said the old gentleman, "take her, and presently you'll feel the same way, only more so."

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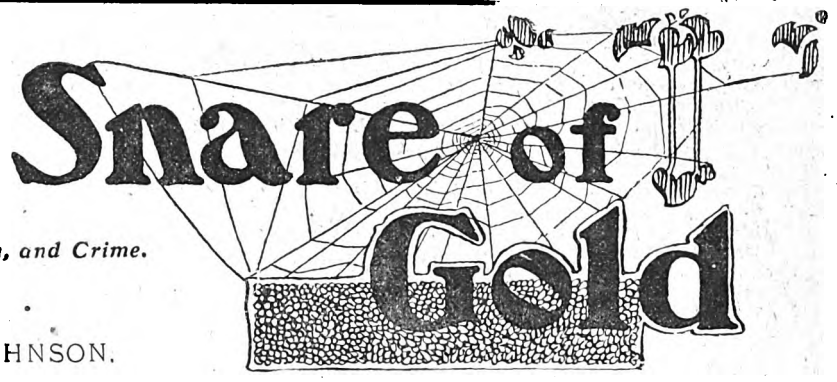
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

George Geldart, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

Eric Geldart, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He is elected as an M.P.

Ronald Geldart, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

Clare Armitage, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who is betrothed to Eric.

Boanerges Blagdon, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

Sampson Scrimshaw, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery."

Mr. Stanyer, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

Madeleine Lorraine, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric Geldart.

Phyllis Daventry, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

Jack Widdicombe, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who is engaged on the *Meteor*.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

"What a Nice Girl!"

The *Meteor* was living up to its name. Its racy articles, brief but sparkling, contributed materially to the gaiety of nations. Its reviews and criticisms were the most brilliant of the day, its interviews were interesting word pictures of notable people with every little point of character accentuated without being exaggerated out of focus.

Society ladies were as keen on getting their portraits in its pages as on securing the lion of the season at their dinner parties. Politicians, authors, actors, artists in general preferred a slating in the *Meteor* to its ignoring them. The *Meteor* was blazing brilliantly, and Cousin Jack, its managing director, was partaking of and reflecting its brilliance.

No longer shabby and seedy with all the shine that ought to have been on his hat and boots transferred to his knees and elbows, but spruce and dapper, with a flower in his buttonhole and a twinkle in his eye, he positively beamed with prosperity at first nights and other press functions, and men who, seeing him approach, set their features and eyes in a cold, vacant, ignoring stare, relaxed them when they observed that Jack was in company with an M.P. or perhaps shaking hands with a lord.

And whereas George Geldart, who had in earlier days given Cousin Jack a start now and then, with the result that Jack had merely added one more to his list of failures, and he, Geldart, had with a grim chuckle upbraided himself for his folly in putting his money on so unreliable a horse, Scrimshaw metaphorically patted himself on the back for having made Jack Widdicombe business manager of the *Meteor*, besides having so found him work in other directions.

"That's the secret of success, Old Mystery," he said one night as they sat chatting after hours and enjoying a quiet dinner sent into the office on the second floor, "putting the right man in the right place; that was Napoleon's gift.

"Now lots of people shrugged their shoulders when I told them whom I was going to send to Bilbao, over the manganese job, and to Berlin to approach the Chancellor regarding the East African concessions. When I made the same man business manager of the *Meteor* they laughed outright, but I knew what was in the man and I knew how to get it out of him."

"Who is he?" asked Old Mystery, more out of politeness than curiosity.

"A capital fellow, good as gold, only a square peg in a round hole till I took him up. He knew my old dad and he was very good to me as a nipper, besides I could see a lot in him that other people couldn't. He came out of a very good stable, too; his name is Jack Widdicombe."

"What! Jack Widdicombe!" Old Mystery burst out involuntarily.

"You know him?" said the other with a keen glance.

"I used to slightly," said Geldart, with a forced air of indifference. "Of course you lost your money?"

"Just what I didn't do. Whatever the man put his hand at positively hummed along; he's been a regular mascot to me."

"It can't be the man I know," said Geldart, unable to realise the possibility of Cousin Jack being a success in anything, and not realising that when he himself had given Jack a chance, he had had it in a half-hearted way with a sort of settled conviction that it would be of no use, and that failure was a foregone conclusion, whereas Scrimshaw had set his man afloat wholly and heartily, and with the confidence in him that begat confidence in the man in himself.

But they were too intent upon the various ramifications of the System to devote further time or thought to Jack Widdicombe's failure or success.

They had, on a small scale, been giving the System a trial, and in the main the result had, to Scrimshaw's surprise, justified Old Mystery's faith in it, and they were now at work on figures and other matters with a view to remedying trifling defects or miscalculations that had come out in the working, prior to giving it another experimental trial.

They had started their experiments with a thousand pounds, a month's working had turned that into five thousand.

Now five thousand pounds was not a sum to take Scrimshaw's breath away; he frequently gave cheques to public subscriptions for much larger amounts; not necessarily in good faith, but as a guarantee for publication

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As he frankly said, if you judiciously selected your objects you could easily get out of ten thousand pounds in donations twenty thousand pounds' worth of common or garden advertisement, and he looked on public charity as a splendid field for booming.

But a profit of four thousand on a month's working with a thousand pounds was not a matter to be lightly estimated or appreciated, even by a Rothschild.

Four times one's principal on a month's working, or four thousand eight hundred per cent, upon the year—it was terrific! And on accumulated principal it opened up possibilities that staggered one.

Why, one man could corner all the gold and silver and copper—aye, all the wealth in all the world within a given, and not a lengthy period, only, as Old Mystery had pointed out at the beginning, you couldn't bring the principle of accumulated working into his System—it wouldn't do; it was against the principle of the System.

But he had demonstrated to Scrimshaw the pet scheme of his life—the scheme he had never yet found a man strong enough, keen enough, bold enough to venture on, and the scheme, that of its inherent nature could not be worked single-handed, but could be carried out as completely by two persons as by a dozen.

And so through the long summer evenings after dinner, dining at Crosby Hall or perhaps having dinner sent in, Scrimshaw, when not in requisition at the House, sat with Old Mystery over their cigars and their coffee elaborating, perfecting, and expending the wonderful wealth-gathering System.

But one evening between the lights, when the City was almost deserted, Old Mystery, gliding close to the wall, as was his habit, under the archway leading down the steps into, Crosby Square, almost brushed against—Cousin Jack, who, having jumped alertly out of a hansom, was scudding along to keep an appointment with the *Meteor's* proprietor.

Just for a moment or two the two men's eyes met, and Cousin Jack pulled himself up with a jerk like one who had received the shock of an electric current, then looked round. But It was gone. And when a few minutes later Jack Widdicombe sat in Scrimshaw's private office preparatory to going into certain matters of account, the Napoleon of finance scanning him curiously, said:

"I say, you're looking a bit off colour. Aren't you fit? Can I get you anything?"

"Well," said Cousin Jack, "if you happen to have any brandy, I'd like a nip."

"Certainly, I'll get you some," said Scrimshaw, suiting the action to the word. "By George, old fellow, you look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"Thanks," said the other, gulping down the brandy almost neat; "by George, I think I have!"

Clickitty-click-click-click came the clatter and chatter of a typewriter from a distant room.

Then they went into the matters of the *Meteor*, and the proprietor remarked, "I say, that man Harvey Bligh was a good find of ours."

"Yes," said Widdicombe delightedly, "he was *my* find."

"Well, yes," replied Scrimshaw, "but in a way ours, for I discovered you and you discovered him. Have a cigar? By-the-way, what's his real name?"

"I'll have a cigar with pleasure," answered Widdicombe, "but I can't tell you his name."

"Why not?"

"Because I've promised."

Clickitty-clickitty-clackitty-clickitty—ting! Somehow Cousin Jack was reminded of a grasshopper.

"I never asked a man to break a promise yet," said Scrimshaw, "and I wouldn't give a pinch of salt for one who would."

"I know you wouldn't, Scrimshaw," said Cousin Jack. "I understand you better than most people."

"I think there's only one man understands me as well as you, Widdicombe."

"And he?"

Clackitty-clackitty-clack—rrrrrr! laughed the grasshopper-

"Well, I mustn't tell you who he is. Everybody has some secret to keep; you have yours, and if you blabbed to me the identity of Harvey Bligh I could never be sure that you weren't blabbing the identity of the proprietor of the *Meteor*. But now to business.

"I want a slashing article in next week's issue, it must be headed "Concerning Eric Geldart and his Little Party." Geldart's ratting, and he wants to take us of his party with him, bound hand and foot, into the Ministerial camp. I know his game; they've been promising old Lynton, whose daughter he's after, something in the Household and the reversion of the Lord Lieutenancy, and possibly an Under-Secretary's portfolio for Geldart himself. But he'll find the Little Party a mutinous and rampaging party if he tries to sell us, to deliver us, bound hand and foot, to the Philistines.

"Hammer it well in that the *Meteor* sees its game and that the *Meteor* means the public to see its game, and the *Meteor* means to baulk the paltry job. And now here comes my motor, I can give you a lift along the Embankment, but I've had a four-lined whip; I must get to the House in half an hour.

The door opened and in its frame there stood the prettiest picture Cousin Jack thought he had ever looked upon. What a shame for such a girl to be kept slaving at such an hour, and yet somehow he felt quite glad that on this occasion she had not left early.

"Ah, Miss Daventry, finished at last?" said Scrimshaw.

"Yes, Mr. Scrimshaw," said Phyllis pleasantly, but not quite able to repress a sigh of relief as she handed him a neatly-arranged and docketed set of papers.

"That's a good girl, sorry to keep you so late, only this was important and confidential."

Oh, then, this was an exceptional case. Cousin Jack wasn't quite so angry. And then the latter went on:

"Of course you've had some tea sent in?"

"Oh, no, sir, I knew that you were waiting and was afraid there wouldn't be time and I hardly liked to risk it."

"Then you're a silly, obstinate, brick of a little girl, and now be off with you."

With a laugh Phyllis nodded good night to her employer, also to Cousin Jack, who had risen to hold the door open.

"What a nice girl!" he said. He said so again to himself later in the evening strolling out of the theatre and musing that after all a fellow wasn't quite a fossil at forty-five.

And that night, strolling out of his club back to his flat, his comfortable, but rather lonely flat, he said again, quite to himself in confidence:

"What a nice girl!"

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Brothers Meet.

THEN came the time when Ronald Geldart upbraided himself that he had renounced the name that was his own and that he had not been more strenuous in clearing that name from the stain of unjust accusation.

His faith in his own work had been justified, but by his own action in dropping out of the circle he had lived in and in adopting another name, he had justified that circle's want of faith in his innocence.

He felt himself in a position of a man who has fairly run for and who has bravely won a race, for which he had entered with a false description.

And most of all he reproached himself after his second meeting with Madeleine Lorraine, for that second had been quickly followed by a third, a fourth, a dozen others.

It would be hardly accurate to say that their acquaintance, had, with time and opportunity, ripened into affection, because, as a matter of fact, they had fallen in love with each other almost spontaneously at their first meeting; all that happened was they had ceased all attempt to conceal this fact, either to themselves or each other

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As for the air of mystery surrounding her lover, Madeleine, who was after all only a girl, with a girl's natural predisposition to be romantic, delighted in it; it was an additional charm to her love affair to think that she was heart-in-heart with one of whom the world was saying, "Who can he be? What manner of man is this, whose work wins fame, a celebrity that thousands strive after in vain, yet who never mingles with the social world to taste the sweets that are his own?"

At times she yearned to tell her father, feeling that she was acting undutifully towards him, but she was restrained by the thought of his anger at discovering an obstacle to her marriage with Eric Geldart. For, as time went on, Lord Lynton became more frequently and urgently insistent in the matter of her acceptance of Eric Geldart's suit.

Geldart was making giant strides in politics, and the Earl's political interests were bound up with his own and those of his guerilla party; besides which, though she was not aware of it, her father was associated with Eric Geldart in certain financial ventures whereby Lynton sought to retrieve his shattered fortunes and Eric to multiply his own tenfold.

Again, all her life her father and she had somehow been far apart. Politics, fat stock breeding, and other pursuits had monopolised so much of Lynton's attention that there was not much to spare for the little motherless girl who had lived mostly, when away from school, with her aunt, Lady Harwardine, or with friends.

"Child and parent scarce regret,
When they part as strangers yet."

It was perhaps this feeling of isolation, despite her position, that drew Madeleine towards her clandestine lover. He loved her for herself.

At last she had met one to whom she would be and who would be to her all in all, and so for a brief space there were blissful stolen hours of sunshine, hours of drifting in the twilight down the river, watching the westering glory bathed in its bosom, she reaching out her shapely arms with punt pole, sculls, or paddle, while her lazy lover, in the seventh heaven of delight, leant back on the boat cushions, plunkitty-plunking the banjo beloved of both, and watching the love-light in the face and eyes he deemed the fairest and the dearest in the world.

And on autumn mornings, while the mists were gliding upwards from the river like fairies in their robes of gossamer, sprinkled here and there by a munificent sun with diamonds, they would rest their cycles after an early morning spin against the lever beam of the lock gates, watching alert anglers, anxious that the early fish should catch the worm, and ardent boating men in shorts and sweaters, snatching a breather before donning the black coat and silk hat of civilisation, and taking morning trains to town.

And Eric Geldart took occasion to remark to Lord Lynton how strangely averse Madeleine of late had grown to town, and how remarkably devoted she had recently become to her aunt.

"Yes, egad!" said Lord Lynton, "she seems to think a lot more of Amelia than she does of me, but then you see she's off my hands; only there was a time when she used to find it frightfully dull at Amelia's with no other young people there."

This set Eric wondering. Was Lord Lynton's supposition as to the absence of young people well founded? Suppose—suppose. And all at once it dawned upon him that he was feeling fagged; an autumn sitting was in progress, there was no getting away, at all events for the grouse, and possibly not until late for the partridges; he'd have a week-end on the river.

Madeleine and her lover were leaning side by side on the rail of a foot-bridge crossing the river creek just between the lights, when the elms were looming black against the golden sky and the summer evening breeze was whispering

(*Continued overleaf.*)

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS
THE FAMOUS HOUSEHOLD REMEDIES.

THE PILLS

have gained their wonderful reputation by sheer force of merit, because every person who uses them recommends them to others. They have positively no equal for thoroughly cleansing the system and putting the liver and kidneys in functional order, without pain or griping. They are the best known remedy for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dizziness, and the common condition of ill-health, known as "run-down" or "out of sorts." Females of every age find Holloway's Pills an invaluable remedy and aid.

THE OINTMENT

is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

AND OINTMENT

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to the rushes below, and the boughs above, that they twain were lovers, and the leaves were laughing at what the breeze had said the lovers said.

"Good-bye, Harvey, dear," said Madeleine.

"Until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow, I hardly know," she answered. "Harvey, I sometimes think that it would be better if—if we didn't see each other, at all events for a while."

"Madeleine, why?"

"My father begins to ask questions about my frequent absence from town. Auntie, too, wonders what inducement I can have for such long and lonely rambles."

They laughed, and she went on: "And sometimes it seems to me it would be better for us not to meet for a while, until——" She paused.

He knew the meaning. Until he could stand out in the light of day before his fellow-men who only knew him by his work, throwing off the mysterious cloak of reserve and self-exclusion, the reason for wearing which he never yet had told her.

Swiftly he formed his resolve; he would tell her now, there should be no secret between them, she would believe him, aye! against the world, and in the ardour of his newly-formed resolve he bitterly reproached himself. Why had he not formed and carried out that plan before.

"Ah! Why?"

For it was now too late.

"Very charming and restful," a well-known voice drawled.

Turning, she and her lover stood face to face with—Eric Geldart. The two men faced each other defiantly, and Madeleine, with a strange foreboding tremor in her heart, noted the angry light in their eyes, but with perfect self-command she said:

"How do you do, Mr. Geldart. I didn't know that you were up the river."

"Or perhaps you would have been elsewhere," and she, blazing up at the impertinence, answered:

"I should have consulted my own inclination."

"And of course your friend's—which is equally of course the same thing."

"At all events," said Ronald, "that is no concern of yours."

"How dare you address me!" said Eric Geldart. "You know that I do not desire—more than that, I will not tolerate any communication with you."

"You, you Judas! it is not you who cut me off, it is I who abjure you."

So angrily they faced each other; somehow the same fierce light in the eyes of both, the same tightening of the lips and the setting of the jaws, that Madeleine, filled with a strange alarm, cried:

"Gentlemen—gentlemen! Mr. Geldart—Eric—what right have you to address such words to Mr. Harvey Bligh?"

"What!" Eric, crouching like a panther, with clenched hands and set face, hissed between his teeth, "Mr.—Harvey—Bligh—why, then, at last the veil is torn aside, now I understand it all! So having disgraced one name, having under one name robbed our dead father of his gold, under another you seek to steal from me that which I prize above all treasure in the world!"

"Coward! Liar!" And in their mad passion they would have flown at each other's throats, but that with clasped, uplifted hands she sprang between them:

"Eric! Harvey! Oh, no, not Harvey!"

There was an agonising quiver in her lips, her voice, her heart, as she uttered these last words. He had deceived her. Whether the cruel accusation she had heard concerning Ronald Geldart, the alleged black sheep, had truth or falsehood at its back, he had lied to her, had wooed her in disguise. What right had he to woo her love even as he wooed the public favour, under a false name; how could she be sure that Harvey Bligh was even his own *nom de plume*, if all that was said of him was true? Oh, horrible! perhaps he had stolen that! And yet—she loved him, loved him so dearly that turning to him she said:

"Tell this man he lies."

"He lies!" said Ronald, "with a half lie that is the worst lie of all. I never robbed my father. It is true that poor dead dad was brought to believe that cruel lie, and on account of it disinherited me."

"Then it is true that you are Ronald Geldart, his brother?"

"It is true," he said. "I am his brother, even as Abel was the brother of the man who slew him."

"I shall not leave you two men here to quarrel. Harvey Bligh—oh, no! there is no real Harvey Bligh, it's only a name—a label things are sold under. Good night—good night! Eric, you will take me back to the Oaklands. I know not which of you is Cain and which is Abel, but I will not leave you together with Cain in both your hearts!"

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Eric Resorts to Strategy.

"ERIC," said Boanerges Blagdon one morning as M.P. strolled into his partner's room. "Look here!" His fat hand trembled as he handed a letter in the handwriting of Clare Armitage.

Eric, recognising that hand at a glance, bent his brows thunderously.

"So!" he said more to himself than the other, "she's going to be troublesome, the she-cat. What's her little game?" He glanced at the missive which, omitting formal parts, ran:

"*You know what I have done and risked for Eric, you know the bargain and the bond between us. He has broken that bond, repudiated that bargain, defies, dares, spurns me. Now I warn you unless he keeps his word, lets Lynton's girl go, and makes me his wedded wife, I will speak out. You were in the swim with us and you too must suffer, people are already whispering about you, wondering what agony of remorse led to that strange exhibition of yours at your meeting, and I have one more trump card left. If Eric Geldart spurns me I go to Ronald Geldart. I am told he is still in England; he has been seen in London, if Eric Geldart will not repair the wrong he has done me I will repair the wrong that he has done his brother, and that will mean his ruin and your own.*"

"Well!" said Eric, tossing the letter on to the table. But the other was in a far more worried mood.

"What's to be done? You know what a wilful, wayward creature she is, and, besides, that was the bargain between you; you told her you'd marry her when you were a mere nobody, a woman doesn't release a man lightly from that promise, especially when he becomes a somebody. I told you too not so long ago that Ronnie was still in England."

"I know he is," said the other.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"Murder would have happened, only someone else was there."

"Well, Eric, what are you going to do? You're not going to risk that woman speaking out."

"Certainly not."

"But there's only one way of silencing her."

"Really. What's your way?"

"You'll have to marry her."

"I'll see her somewhere else first."

"I expect it will be pretty much the same thing for her."

"I never suspected you of so much humour, Boney, but that's not my way."

"What is your way?'"

"If you weren't such a coward I'd tell you, only for the present we must have her watched."

"Who's to watch her?"

"People who's trade is watching. I can't commission them, you can't commission them, we must get somebody

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to employ a private detective agency to shadow her every movement and report weekly, daily, and hourly, if need be."

"Yes, but who's your man?"

"He isn't a man, he's a shred. I've got him at my finger's ends, a fellow Scrimshaw employs to copy letters, swear at, and run errands. I've been civil to the fellow because I know what a wisp he is, but shred of a man that he is, he's in the opposition stable. I can get, through him, at Scrimshaw's waste-paper basket, now and then at his correspondence; the man's a bounder.

"Because I'm M.P. and a bit of a personage nowadays he fawns on and kow-tows to me, a nod and I won his confidence, a handshake, and 'How do you do, old fellow?' and he's my slave. I'll ask him to my club to dinner, and he'll sell his soul to me to be able to brag about it."

"What's his name?"

"I almost forget—what the dickens is it?"

"What's he like?"

"A flabby, underdone face, straw hair, no chin, a lot of collar. Oh! I know the name, Spring—Sprinkle—Springle!"

"And then," said Boanerges, "supposing we find Clare communicating with your brother?"

"Why, then," replied Eric, "Boanerges, we must, as the Frenchmen say, take our courage in both hands." He added to the words a significant nod, and there was an angry shimmer in his eyes that made his partner's flesh creep.

"Eric," he whispered, "we mustn't do anything very—very—desperate."

"Look here," said the other, leaning across the table, in an undertone, that smote Blagdon's ears and Blagdon's heart more than any other man's shout would have done. "Consider what I stand to win, consider what I stand to lose. Do you think I'm the man to take a licking lying down?"

"No! No! I know you too well."

"You know the game I'm playing, you know the stakes I'm playing for. Men who play my game have use for neither sentiment nor scruple. If Clare Armitage resolves to be my stumbling-block I shall resolve on her removal, the consequences will be on her head."

Mr. Springle, occupied ostensibly with the uncongenial task of indexing the current letter-book of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, was actually engrossed in mind with the recollection of the triumph achieved on the previous evening by the inimitable Blarer in his song, "The Missus has Slumped my Togs," and the reflected honour that had radiated round himself when later in the evening Blarer himself, gorgeous in his fur-coat, his diamond rings and stud, condescended to accept Mr. Springle's invitation to have a drink with him.

The recollection was marred to some extent by the fact that Blarer had called for, instead of the expected Scotch-and-soda, a bottle of fizz, but after all the greater the cost the greater the glory. Blarer had drunk with him, had said "Cheer-oh, old man" to him in the presence of the world, as represented by the *habitués* of the lounge at The Eldorado.

He was aroused from this reverie by the catch-bell of the plate-glass door, and hopped off his stool, exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Geldart, it's you, sir. Here, Triggs, confound you! Set a chair for Mr. Geldart. What do you mean, sir, by letting a distinguished visitor wait there?"

This to the office boy, who a few minutes earlier he had threatened with divers pains and penalties if he discontinued the paging of a number of documents he handed him, and then suavely stroking his hands, he remarked to Geldart:

"I am extremely sorry, sir, Mr. Scrimshaw has gone early this afternoon to the House on a committee, sir."

"Ah, well, never mind about that, it's really you I want to see, Mr. Springle, if we can have ten minutes chat."

"By all means, sir," replied Springle, "please step into

(*Continued overleaf.*)

SEIGEL'S SYRUP

Food, well digested, is the origin of strength. Imperfectly digested or **not** digested, as in dyspepsia, it is the fruitful source of illness. Every act, every thought, every movement of muscle or mind uses up some of the substance of our bodies. Food repairs this loss, but **only** when it is digested. Undigested food is worse than useless—it is dangerous. It ferments in the stomach, poisons the blood, starves the body, and lowers vitality.

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SEIGEL'S SYRUP

"For many years," writes Mr. A. Pike, of 1 Mary Street, Point, Cowes, Isles of Wight, "I suffered from indigestion. At night the pain across my chest was so severe that I used to get up and pace the room in agony. When the pain had subsided somewhat, I would return to bed and fall asleep through sheer exhaustion; but the morning found me fagged out, quite unfit for the day's work before me. A few doses of Mother Seigel's Syrup enabled me to eat a hearty meal without suffering any pain after. As I continued taking that remedy, I felt stronger, could do a hard day's work, sleep well, and wake in the morning refreshed and ready for my work.

CURES INDIGESTION.

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the governor's room," and in a few minutes Eric was seated in Scrimshaw's sanctum along with Mr. Springle.

"Now," he said, "before I mention my business you are quite sure I am not taking you from your important duties. I know what a deal you have to do, and how important your work and your time are, especially with Scrimshaw away."

"Oh, pray don't mention it, sir," said the junior clerk, wishing that Mrs. Skimper and all her paying guests were there to hear. "Of course, when the governor's away a great deal devolves on me, but in your case, Mr. Geldart, we make an exception."

"Very well, then, we'll begin talking business, but perhaps you wouldn't mind asking your subordinates not to disturb us," and Springle strode to the door of the general office and informed the office boy, the only person subordinate to him in the establishment, and in his most imposing manner impressed upon that youth that he and Mr. Eric Geldart, M.P., were not to be disturbed on any account."

Meantime, Eric Geldart, left alone in Scrimshaw's room, took an opportunity of peering in the pigeon-holes and over masses of correspondence, generally availing himself to the utmost of Springle's absence to pick up various crumbs of information.

"Now," said Eric, on his return, "I have a little matter of a rather delicate nature, and I came to you, knowing that you are not only cute but discreet as well, that you are as discreet as you are cute."

It's doubtful whether, had Mr. Springle known the sense in which the words were spoken, he would have beamed quite so effusively. As it was, he inquired eagerly the nature of the commission, expressing his willingness to accomplish it if he had to jump over a house, or if it snowed.

"Of course," said Eric, "I'll take care to make it worth your while."

Springle beamed again.

"It's really very simple. I want you to go to Varney's, the private inquiry people, and commission them to shadow a young lady."

"A young lady! Oh, I say, Mr. Geldart, what a lot of trouble the fairies do give us!"

"They are to report to you, and I'll get you to wire me from time to time, making an appointment at my house or my club, when over a bit of lunch or supper you can transmit their report to me."

"Why, certainly," said Mr. Springle, elated at the social distinction as well as the emolument in store for him, and reflecting what a telling item of conversation it would beat Mrs. Skimper's table, the casual remark that he had been lunching with or supping with "My friend Geldart, the member for Little Claverton." Why, Grimmage would turn positively green!

"I'm on it like a shot," he said. "I'll see Varney's this afternoon. What's the lady's name?"

"She is Miss Clare Armitage, and lives in Belsize Gardens. Of course, Springle, old chap, you won't breathe a word of this to Scrimshaw."

The "old chap" completed the capture. Springle was bound hand and foot.

"Not a word, Mr. Geldart," he said. "You know I don't in the least look on Scrimshaw as I do on you. We ain't pals in any sense of the word. I give him my time and my work here for a consideration, there's an end of it—between you and me, he's not much class."

"By-the-bye, he's been a bit mysterious lately, your boss, what's he got on?"

"I don't quite know," answered Springle, "there's something on the board; he puts in a lot of time here after hours and he's bustling about like an electric whirligig, which is his way when he's bringing off anything new or big, but, to tell the truth, I can't quite stand him, and I don't invite his confidence much, except when I want to know anything it pays me to find out. I can do a bit of ferreting."

"Yes, yes, Springle," said the other, "you're very, very clever at ferreting, ver—y, and I want you to do a little ferreting for me—on a consideration, of course."

"What, in the office, Mr. Geldart? I don't mind, sir, so long as it ain't risky, because you know if Scrimshaw did find me prying into affairs he didn't want me to, he'd not only fire me from here, but there's no knowing quite what he wouldn't do, and he's a scorcher when he's riled."

"You're quite right, Springle," replied Eric sententiously, "and I should think that a man of your intellect finds it very often a bit of a trial to tolerate him."

"You've just hit it. Do you know I've frequently felt that I must dismiss——I mean leave him, but then he's useful in a way."

"Yes?" said the other, "and there's no knowing what may turn up. For instance, I may later on be changing my secretary, he's rather an elderly man, and in politics of course one occasionally has opportunities of helping one's friends, you understand? And, by-the-bye, meantime you will, as heretofore, kindly let me know anything that transpires, particularly affecting my interests inside this establishment."

"Certainly, Mr. Geldart, and if at any time you do happen to know of anything that will suit me, I'd chuck Scrimshaw at a moment's notice," said Mr. Springle, eagerly and volubly knowing how imminent the chance of dismissal had hovered over him ever since he had entered the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited.

"By-the-bye, is there anything you want particular attention paid to with regard to this young lady's movements, Any other chap you suspect her of meeting, eh? You see I'm pretty wide, I am!" and Springle sniggered sapiently.

"Oh, as to that," answered Eric, "I want to know her movements generally. And yet, by the bye," he added quickly on second thoughts, "yes, there is one man with regard to whom I want her movements particularly closely watched, that is a certain"—his brother's real name was on the tip of his tongue, then he reflected that possibly he would be more generally known by his assumed one, so he said, "Mr. Harvey Bligh."

"Harvey Bligh! What, the chap who writes, that people have been making such a fuss about?"

"Yes. Have you heard of him?" asked Eric, somewhat surprised to find Springle acquainted with even a modern novelist.

"Heard of him? Should think I have! Why, I know him!" Eric started. "What, you know Harvey Bligh, the author?"

"Yes, the chap that writes the verses and the short stories for *The Meteor*. Why, he stays sometimes at the boarding-house where I am a paying guest; used to live there regularly before he made his mark. Ah! and he was on pretty hard pan, too, till all of a sudden he went up like a rocket. Nowadays he's rambling all over the country, making a good thing out of his work, and I fancy he doesn't care for town much; in fact, I've always thought there's a little bit of a story about Mr. Bligh independent of those he writes, and this seems to confirm it."

"By Jove!" said Eric, "do you like Bligh?"

"I hate him," said Springle, "the bumptious, over-bearing bounder!" For it was Springle's way to attribute his own peculiar characteristics to such as excited his disapproval, and he added viciously: "I've got a little score against him; if ever I get a chance to pay it off, I'm there!"

"Why, Springle," said Eric, "it seems to me your chance may some day come. Keep your eye on him; let me know whom he meets, where he goes; if possible, Springle, what letters he receives; and, look here, his letters might be worth a few pounds to me, *and* to you; keep this in earnest of what I shall give you later.

"But, by the bye, don't mention my name or indicate that you are at all in touch with me in his presence." He pushed a couple of five pound notes across the table to Springle, and leaving the office, returned to his cab muttering to himself: "By Jove! that's killing two birds with one stone!"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Between Two Stools.

"ABOUT a month ago," writes "DAUNTLESS" "I made the acquaintance of two girls. One of them was in the habit of going out with a young man, but since I got to know her, she has broken it off. I have now grown very fond of her. How should I act? I have on several occasions been out with the other girl, who says she is very fond of me?"

* * * * *

You are rather fickle, "DAUNTLESS," in thus trifling with two girls, especially as you say you are very fond of the one, and that she has made a sacrifice on your behalf. Stick to the one you are most fond of, and avoid getting too intimate with the other. When a girl sees that a man is fonder of her friend than herself, she will, in most cases, withdraw from the contest, out of friendship.

❦❦❦

A Stab in the Dark.

"W. E. R." has been the victim of a spiteful anonymous letter writer. He is engaged to be married, but the other day his *fiancée* received an anonymous letter which stated that "W. E. R." had led a very wild life, and was not a suitable husband for the girl. "W. E. R." believes the letter to come from a girl he once knew, but whom he has never in any way injured. How should he act?

* * * * *

Anonymous letters are best ignored. Your sweetheart should be made to understand the facts of your past career, and how far the letter was written out of spite. If you have good reason to know who wrote it, put the letter in the hands of a solicitor, and warn the writer against sending any more letters of the same kind.

❦❦❦

The Father Again.

"I AM deeply in love with a girl," writes "MAX," "and my feeling is returned. We have decided that we are thoroughly suited to be man and wife. However, my means are limited, and the girl's father has told me that he cannot allow his daughter to marry me until I can point to a larger income. Her mother, however, is strongly in favour of our becoming engaged. What is the best thing for me to do?"

* * * * *

I think you should respect her father's wishes inasmuch as you should do your utmost to prove to him that, if you are not at present well off, you will be in future. Meanwhile, just continue paying attentions, and with the help of her mother—generally a powerful ally—the sterner parent may sooner or later relent. When young people show themselves determined in love affairs, the hardest of fathers has been known to give way. At all events, do not incur his displeasure.

Deserted by a Lover.

"MAY" has been engaged to "FRED" for six months. Both were very happy until a few weeks ago, when "FRED" met another girl, of whom he seems very fond, and neglects "MAY'S" society to be with her. When spoken to on the subject, he refuses to have an understanding. "MAY" does not know what to do. Should she break off the engagement, or try to win back his love?

* * * * *

It seems by far the nicer alternative to try to win back his love, if "MAY" has that in her power. At the same time, she should give the young man to understand that so long as he continues to pay attention to another girl, "MAY" will hold herself free to act as she likes. If another young man appeared on the scene, perhaps "MAY'S" neglectful *fiancé* would suddenly return to his old love. "MAY" might try the experiment.

❦❦❦

A Soldier's Difficulty.

"JACK" is a soldier, quartered in India. He is married, and when he was transferred to his present regiment, went to India for twelve months. At the end of that time he wrote and asked his wife to go out to him, but she refused, saying that "India was not a fit country for a decent woman." She had gained this impression from a few discontented soldiers, but "JACK" does not agree at all. He has another five years to spend out there, and has stopped sending his wife money unless she agrees to go to India. As a result of this, she has written to his commanding officer to get some of his pay stopped, a course likely to injure him.

* * * * *

Your wife is doing wrong in refusing to go out to you. When a woman marries a soldier she should be prepared to accompany him anywhere where his regiment is stationed. If she refuses, then she lays herself open to action such as you have taken. Why not lay the matter before your commanding officer? There must be very many cases such as your own, and his advice would be your best reply to your wife, as she has written to him.

❦❦❦

A Boy's Love Affair.

"I KNOW a girl of twenty-two," writes "LOUVAIN," "who is engaged to an officer abroad. We have always been a great deal together and nobody has ever said anything. The only thing is that I am quite young—sixteen, in fact—and though it seems conceited, I may say I am very good-looking. The other day, on returning from a party and saying 'Good-night,' she kissed me, and I returned it. I now know that she is passionately fond of me, and I am devoted to her. What is now the honourable course to pursue?"

* * * * *

To leave the young lady alone, "LOUVAIN"—or rather, to see that she leaves you alone, for she is very much older than you, and is really acting very wrongly in putting temptation in your way. You are very young and cannot even think of marriage for six years or more. By that time the girl will be twenty-eight—very much your senior, and you will probably have entirely altered your mind about many matters. I daresay the girl is passionately fond of you, but probably regards you more in the light of a pet or a toy than as a serious lover. As she is engaged, it is your duty to avoid becoming too intimate with her, as trouble can only result for both of you in the future. I think this is a case in which a girl is trifling with a boy's affections, as she can scarcely be really in love with one so much younger than herself.

Cynthia

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A QUESTION OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

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No. 770.
Week ending
October 3rd,
1903.

SHORT STORIES

PRICE
1D.

THE MAN SLIPPED AND FELL. THE GIRL HE LOVED POUNCED UPON HIM WITH A SHRIEK OF TRIUMPH, AND COILED THE THICK TRESSES OF HER HAIR ROUND HIS THROAT. See story inside.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 770.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending October 3rd, 1903.

The Girl in the Next House.

The Thrilling Story of a Misplaced Love.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

I SUPPOSE I ought to have been delighted when Uncle Gregory offered to have me as an inmate, giving me my board and lodging for nothing, and, as he told my mother, "See to the young cub's manners and morals."

My parent was charmed with the plan, it had so much in her eyes to recommend it; economy, companionship of the proper kind for me, and a certain scarce-to-be-breathed hope that Uncle's wealth would, in the due course of things, be mine.

As a clerk in an insurance office, with shadowy prospects, I did not feel justified in declining so handsome (Uncle Gregory's word, not mine) an offer, therefore with a sigh I bade farewell to the boarding-house at Brixton, where we had musical evenings, and where I had been instructed in the mysteries of ping-pong by a skittish young thing of a governess, and betook myself to Uncle Gregory's large and gloomy abode that was situated on the Hackney Downs.

My relative greeted me in a chilly fashion, and expressed a hope that I should apply myself to my work and not be out late at night.

"I don't know many people in London," I observed meekly, "so I don't go out much."

"Excellent thing for you that you don't," he retorted sharply. "Now listen to me, Paul. I give you a home here because I am anxious to save your mother's pocket, and also because a young man of your age (you're three-and-twenty, aren't you?) is exposed to temptations when he lives alone or in a boarding-house. I should have suggested this plan of mine when you first came to town four months ago, but I have been ill; I am only just recovering my usual health, so you will kindly remember not to go shouting and whistling about the house; it would drive me mad. The housekeeper, Mrs. Burgess, will look after your things, and you are not to give her or the maids any trouble. I know what young men are, and I hope to train you to be something different."

I felt inclined to suggest that he had far better leave me alone, that the task of transforming me into an elderly lady, for instance, was surely beyond even his talents; but I was wisely silent, and he dismissed me with the observation that we dined at half-past seven and that it would strike that hour almost immediately.

My uncle's house was large, gloomy, and of most unattractive appearance, but it rejoiced in a beautiful garden, and thither I was thankful to escape after a solemn meal, in which the great feature was the enormous quantity of china and plate and the small amount of food.

The moon was silvering the pear-tree tops and there was a high wall separating my uncle's domain from his next-door neighbour's, but though everything combined to make me feel like Romeo there was no Juliet in the case. I sucked at my pipe, and felt very sentimental; I tried to sigh over the recollection of that arch little governess at Brixton, who must have been almost old enough to be my mother, but the sigh was but an artificial one. I gazed at the solemn moon and wondered vaguely whether—supposing I fell in love—Uncle Gregory would let me promenade in his garden with the lady of my heart? I doubted it. My uncle had sustained in his youth what is known as a "disappointment," and it had had the effect upon him of making him object to all female society, except that of his phenomenally ugly housekeeper and two equally unattractive maids.

The air was wonderfully still, a faint and faraway roar of traffic sounded like the distant thunder of the ocean; it seemed incredible that London lay so near. Certainly this garden with the serene hush that brooded over it, was an improvement on my Brixton boarding-house. I was just congratulating myself upon the change, when a strange sound reached my ears. I stood motionless, listening. It seemed to come from the other side of the wall, my neighbour's garden. Again and again it was repeated; there could be no doubt about it, someone, man, woman, or child, was sobbing in heartbroken fashion within a few yards of me.

Sympathy, combined with that desire for investigation that our enemies call idle curiosity, drove me to attempt to discover who was there, bewailing their lot, and I safely scrambled to the summit of the wall, which I was devoutly thankful was not garnished with protecting broken glass bottles. Seated firmly thereon—a conspicuous object I felt in the brilliant moonlight—I looked eagerly into the adjoining garden and beheld a vision that I at first took to be a ghost. If all spooks resembled the one upon which my gaze was now fixed, I marvelled that everyone was not a member of the Psychical Research Society.

The ghost was a girl, all in white, with the most beautiful golden hair imaginable, flowing past her knees; she was standing just below me, looking up with eyes dark and

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beseeching, and glorious as the eyes of a stag. It was as clear as though it had been midday; I saw every feature in that perfect face. How long we gazed at one another I could not say. I sat there feeling as stupid as an owl. I longed to say something, but I could think of no fitting phrase with which to open the conversation. I was in every sense of the word in an awkward position. My lovely companion spoke first.

"Have you come to help me?" she asked in a voice that was scarce above a whisper; "oh, say you have."

"Help you?" I echoed, hardly able to get the words out, so excited was I. "How, when, now? What can I do for you? Only tell me?"

She pressed her little hands together, and I saw tears in the great eyes gazing up at me, a sight that so moved me that I nearly overbalanced in my distress.

"It is asking too much of you," she whispered, "but I am in great, in deadly peril, and—unless I am rescued—promise me"—she broke off suddenly—"that you will tell no one about me—that you will not mention to a living soul that you have seen me or spoken to me—promise—or I shall suffer cruelly, if it be known that I have dared to complain of my miserable lot, that I have tried to find a friend."

"Of course, I promise," I protested eagerly, "not a word concerning you shall pass my lips. I swear it."

"Thank you"—she smiled as she spoke, and shook back the heavy waves of her wonderful hair—"I see you are to be trusted, then take me away—take me away—before—before he kills me!"

She was close beneath me now, and by leaning over I could have grasped the hands she raised imploringly to me, but as I feared to topple over I dared not risk such a proceeding.

"Who will kill you?" I asked in alarm, "no one surely would hurt you, how could they?" I grew warm as I looked into her exquisite face. "Why, they must be perfect brutes if they don't worship you."

"You don't understand—I am in the way," she answered sadly. "I am a prisoner; oh, if you will only help me—I will never, never forget it. I shall be your debtor for ever. Help me to escape—to get away into safety; you don't know what it is to live in constant fear of your life—never to be sure from one hour to another what is going to happen to you. I have contrived to escape to-night, but what is the use? I can't get over this wall—every gate is locked."

"Why don't you call for help?" I asked; "shriek as loud as you can, you'd attract someone's attention."

She shuddered and cowered down. "You don't understand," she answered hoarsely, "he would—oh, my God—listen!"

A deep, bell-like sound rang through the night air; it was the musical discord, the sweet thunder that can never be mistaken for anything else—it was the bay of a bloodhound. The girl crouched for an instant, listening to it, then gathered herself up with a cry, and fled across the lawn to the house. The beautiful notes came nearer. I started—in so doing, I overbalanced myself, and fell backward into the soft garden mould, snapping in my swift descent several branches off the espalier pear-tree.

For a few minutes I lay upon the ground, half-stunned; all was silent again, and as I sprawled foolishly amongst the sweet-scented tobacco flowers, it occurred to me that it had been a distinctly fortunate thing for me that I had fallen into my uncle's garden and not into his neighbour's, whose dog by this time might be making a meal of me.

I picked myself up, and after having ascertained that no bones were broken, I again with much caution clambered up the pear-tree and peeped over the wall. The moonlight was here, and the soft black shadows cast athwart it by the house, but of living being there was no sign. I slid abruptly down again, convinced in my mind of several things. Firstly, that I had fallen madly in love at first sight; secondly, that the "he" to whom the mysterious fair one had alluded must be a fiend incarnate if he kept a bloodhound to terrify her; and thirdly, that I would make as good a show as I could in endeavouring to rescue her.

And all that night my dreams were disturbed by visions of glorious red-haired angels, pursued by bloodhounds from out whose mighty jaws there belched forth fire and smoke, urged on by hideous giants to annihilate beauty in distress.

It was the following evening, when my uncle and I were discussing our modest dessert of shrivelled walnuts and strawberries of dubious freshness, when I put the above question; "Uncle Gregory, who lives next door?"

My relative looked at me with eyes that glowed angrily beneath his rugged brows.

"Why do you wish to know?" he asked coldly; "my neighbour and I are not on terms of intimacy."

"I thought perhaps you might know the name of the man who has the bloodhound," I said boldly, though I confess I quaked somewhat as I noted his expression; his face grew dark, and he drew in his breath suddenly with a strange sound.

"I can tell you one thing about that man," he said slowly, and his old wrinkled hand lying on the tablecloth doubled itself suddenly, "he is a villain, a scoundrel, and, if ever I find you attempting to scrape acquaintance with him, out of this house you go, and—out of my will. So remember that, young man. I shall never again allude to this subject—nor will you. You know my wishes on this subject and I expect you to obey them. Have I spoken with sufficient plainness?"

"Quite, thank you, Uncle," I said humbly, but as I called to mind the face of the girl in the next house who intreated me to help her, I thought that the loss of Uncle Gregory's money would be as dust in the balance weighed against the delight of being of service to her.

That night I again strolled out, listening with strained attention for some sound from the adjoining garden, but all was silent. I climbed up to my post of vantage on the top of the wall, but the place was deserted, the house dark. I slid down again in a very depressed state of mind. Was I never to see my mysterious divinity again? Surely the Fates would be kind.

I could not sleep that night, and sick of tossing restlessly from side to side, I got up and looked out upon the quiet beauty of the night. Not a sound disturbed the silence; even the nightingales my uncle vowed inhabited his garden, must have been asleep; but as I stood there a very disagreeable interruption to the perfect peace came in the shape of the long-drawn howl of a dog.

It evidently was the bloodhound, and as I listened, the animal suddenly passed from his expression of canine woe into a horrible snarl, more like that of a wild beast than a dog—a hideous noise with a suggestion of ferocity that was really terrifying. I listened for some time, and then, thoroughly chilled both in body and spirit, I crept back to bed.

For five nights did I repeat this programme; the brute of a bloodhound always began his concert at the same hour, and I always awoke at that hour or was awake when he gave vent to his first blood-curdling howls.

"What a nuisance that dog next door is," I ventured to say to my uncle; "it howls every night, making the most awful row. I wonder you don't complain."

My uncle gave an odd smile, not a pleasant one, and rubbed his hands slowly together.

"I don't mind hearing it," he said composedly, "in fact, I rather like it. One day that beast will be too much for Harvey Payne, and it will kill him."

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He laughed as he spoke, and there was something malicious, unpleasant in his mirth; I could not help wondering what Mr. Harvey Payne, if that were his name, had done to my uncle to make the old gentleman so vicious against him.

That evening as I dutifully accompanied my uncle on his constitutional, we saw coming down the steps of the next house a very unprepossessing, haggard individual, with shifty eyes that were swiftly raised to glance at us, and then as swiftly dropped as their owner hurried past us. Uncle Gregory, who was leaning on my arm, suddenly gripped it fiercely.

"That was the man," he whispered hoarsely, "that was Harvey Payne. How—how I hate that man!"

"Why?" I asked in astonishment. My uncle gave me a dark look.

"What is that to you?" he said sternly; "suffice it that I do hate him, and remember I forbid you to have anything to do with him. He is a man without proper pride—he might try to force his acquaintance on you."

"Has—has he a daughter?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes," answered my relative curtly, "now you are to ask me no more. Henceforth the people in the next house are not to be mentioned."

I subsided, but that night I made another attempt to see my mysterious divinity. Since I had seen her father I did not wonder that she feared him, and from my uncle I had heard what a scoundrel he was. So I persuaded myself I was doing quite the right thing in attempting to save her, and I made my way across the lawn, keeping in the shadow, and over the wall that separated the two gardens. As I crept cautiously up to the house, I perceived that a window on the ground floor was open, but it was protected by thick iron bars. At the same moment the horrible snarling howl of the bloodhound sounded so close beside me that I involuntarily exclaimed; the noise ceased, there was a low cry, something white flashed at the window, and the next instant across the shrubs that kept me from her, I saw the woman I had come to save.

"You have kept your word," she said in a hysterical whisper, "but it is hopeless. *He* will be here directly, his visits are constant, now—since that night when I escaped him. Slot—the bloodhound—found—me—"

"And hurt you?" I asked furiously, "the brute——"

"Oh, no, no, only betrayed me," she answered hurriedly, "to my father. But go—go now, my father will be here directly; in three days he is going away—there will be only Slot and old Martin—the servant—if you come then—you will save me—it will not be too soon, for I know he means my death."

"He daren't," I answered hotly. "I'll lay an information with the police. I'll——"

"You promised," she breathed quickly, "recollect that, and—and he is my father—I will not have it known what he is. Only help me to get away from him—only that—oh, then—then when I am free what does anything matter? I don't want him punished; come and take me away—before I die."

I could just see her beautiful face, white as marble in the darkness, her voice was the sweetest, the most fascinating I ever heard, and I—I was a hot-headed young man.

"I'll come," I said recklessly; "though I don't even know your name I love you, and I'll do anything for you."

She held out her hand across the bushes; I was about to crash through them to seize and kiss it, when she disappeared; there was the sound of an opening door, and rightly imagining that someone had entered the room I hurried away, negotiated the wall safely, and entered the house without anyone having known of my expedition.

Though it is a good many years ago now, and I look back upon my mad youth from the sober superiority of middle age, I can still recall the thrill of excitement and exultant anticipation with which I set out on my adventure. It was a dark night. I had provided myself with a file to saw through those iron bars that divided me from the Girl in the Next House. I had mapped out quite clearly what I was to do with my prize when I should have secured it. I would at once take the poor child down to my mother's, where she could remain until Mr. Harvey Payne's wrath had somewhat subsided, and till I had a rise in my salary sufficient to justify me in thinking of matrimony. My poor dear mother! she had always spoilt me, and I was not in the least doubtful as to how she would receive me and my companion, but I was a little afraid that she would be dismayed when she should learn that by my doughty deed I had in all probability lost Uncle Gregory's favour.

I saw that my heroine was not at the window as I cautiously made my way to it; the bushes crackled horribly as I struggled through them. The window was wide open, and the room apparently empty and in total darkness. As I produced my file there floated out towards me the sound of the bloodhound's howl. It seemed close to me, as though the brute were in the room into which I intended to break. I do not think I am a greater coward than the generality of human beings, but I confess as I heard that dog the relish for my task died out of me. I crouched motionless whilst the howl changed into a snarl that had something hideous, bestial in it. I thought I heard the soft thud of an animal as he pattered about the room, then silence, then the swish of a gown, and the voice I loved calling softly: "Is—is anyone there?"

I was on my feet at the window instantly; my beloved was behind the bars. As she saw me she gave a little sob of joy.

"Quick, quick," she said, "there is not much time."

"I—I thought I heard the bloodhound in your room," I stammered, ashamed of my fears; "I began to fear that you were not there."

"Indeed I am," she answered petulantly, "take away these bars—let me out—or I shall die!"

I obeyed her command. As I filed away at the bars she retreated from me into the farthest corner of the big room, so that all I saw was an indistinct black mass. Now and again when I required encouragement, I glanced in her direction, but she never moved or spoke.

At last—my perseverance was rewarded; the bars yielded, I wrenched them apart, and leaped into the room. I was hot, dusty, exhausted, but—I had triumphed. I went up to the captive and held out my hand to her.

"Come," I said gently, "we must be going, there is no time to be lost."

She rose—I could see her pale face gleaming white in the darkness—she took my hand after a faint hesitation, the next instant she had hurled herself upon me, her arms gripping me like steel bands, and fastened her teeth in my throat.

The horror of this hideous and totally unexpected attack for an instant took me at a disadvantage, and I staggered back, the awful thing clinging to me as some vampire to its prey. I could feel the warm blood trickling down from the wound she had inflicted on me. I tried to free myself from her, but she seemed endowed with the strength of twenty men; strong, young fellow as I was, I was helpless. Once she released me—panting for breath, and I shouted for help, but she flew at me with renewed fury, striking at me with her fists as I beat her off, whilst she gave vent to the most awful cries. Even in the extremity of fear and horror, it flashed across me that these were the diabolical noises I had attributed to Slot the bloodhound, as I had lain and listened to them night after night.

I cannot describe the awfulness of that fight in the dark with that she-fiend: Her hair swept across my face over and again, almost blinding me; sometimes she tried to strangle

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me with it, twisting it into a thick coil to wind about my neck, but in this she failed. In vain I tried to stun her by a well-directed blow, for I was now desperate. My calls for assistance were evidently not heard, and I knew it was a question now whether I was to kill or to be killed. But she had the swiftness of a snake with the strength of an enraged lioness, and if I succeeded in throwing her off, and rushing to the window, she was upon me again before I could reach it, and her deadly grip fastened on me once more.

I had hitherto succeeded in keeping my footing, for I felt instinctively that if I fell, all would be over with me; it would not take her long to strangle me as she desired, but I was growing exhausted whilst she seemed to gain fresh vigour with every onslaught. I slipped—half fell—recovered myself with a desperate effort, only to stumble once more, and this time I crashed heavily on to the floor, whilst my destroyer sent forth a hideous yell of triumph. I was conscious of something being twisted about my throat, of an agonisign sensation of suffocation. The girl was throttling me with her long, golden tresses. Then upon the darkness there burst a light, the she-fiend sprang to her feet, and ran howling from me, someone bent over me and caught me up in their arms. I was conscious of being borne away, whilst the cries still rang in my ears. I hear them sometimes even now, after all those years, they constitute my worst nightmare, from which I awake with the cold sweat pouring down me, and the scent of the red hair with which she tried to strangle me in my nostrils.

* * * * *

I was young and possessed a good constitution, therefore I recovered from the illness that supervened on my terrible adventure. I shrank at first from learning the mystery that surrounded the Girl in the Next House, but one day when my uncle and I were alone, he told me the whole story. He had been most devoted to me whilst I lay ill, and I took this opportunity of telling him how I regretted that I had disobeyed his injunctions, forbidding me to have anything to do with our next door neighbours.

He looked at me very strangely, and then he told me the truth. The girl in the next house was a raving lunatic, but her wretched father, Harvey Payne, was devoted to her; his one idea was to conceal her terrible condition, for he feared he might be forced to send her to an asylum, and though she hated him, he loved her. She was subject to homicidal mania, but for days would be tranquil and apparently sane. It was during one of the intervals that Mr. Payne left home on business. Her one idea was to escape. As is the case with lunatics, she displayed a diabolical cunning in attempting to gain her ends.

Often for weeks she would be perfectly rational, then an outbreak would occur, and she was more like a wild beast than a human being. Her hideous, bestial cries had induced Mr. Payne to keep a dog to account for them, and this animal was trained to guard the wretched girl and track her if, as was sometimes the case, she escaped into the grounds; but Slot never touched her, and proved a most effective keeper. Had it not been for the sudden return of Mr. Payne I should have been killed. He had come only just in time, for she had twisted her hair like a rope about my neck, and was deliberately strangling me.

"The servant had fallen asleep," said my uncle; "he was worn out with watching her, and he thought she was tranquil. It is all over with Harvey Payne's keeping it dark that she is mad. She is in an asylum now and there she will remain. I've hated him all these years, and even hoped that that red-haired fiend would kill him, that was why I never reported him for keeping a dangerous lunatic, but—I've seen him and it's a pitiable sight—my hatred died when I saw it."

"Uncle Gregory," I said timidly, "why did you hate him so?"

My uncle did not answer me at once, then with averted face he spoke.

"Because," he said, "Harvey Payne was the man who stole from me the woman I loved, the woman who was my promised wife became his, and she was the mother—she died when the child was but a few days old—of the Girl in the Next House."

Sybil Campbell Lethbridge.

IN THE SHADOW OF CRIME.

Telling How a Girl Saved Her Lover from Death.

A small cottage, plain and unpretending, neatly painted, with roses and honeysuckle clambering over the windows and almost hiding them from view. It was set back a little way from the road, and was separated from it by a wooden fence.

Everything about had the appearance of being well cared for. The lawn in front was close-shaven, and the large garden in the rear was in the best of order.

If things outside the cottage looked trim, the inside of that pleasant abode was precision itself, and well it might be, for, as a housekeeper, Dora Martin, John Martin's daughter, was second to none in the county.

She was a motherless girl, had been so for years, and lived in this lonely spot with her father and an old aunt; their nearest neighbours on the town side being six miles away while those in the opposite direction (with the exception of a man named Dixey who lived about a mile from the farm), were twice that distance.

Old Martin had always been passionately fond of his only child, and, not caring to lose her, made it a point to discourage suitors. Still, following Dora's footsteps for some time, there had been two very devoted lovers.

One was Joe Gorham, rather a handsome young fellow, with the reputation of being somewhat dissolute and reckless. His father was at one time a wealthy farmer, but, on dying, left his property in such a mortgaged condition, that when the affairs of the estate were finally settled, there remained from the wreck just sufficient to yield the heir a small income, which was generally spent before it came to hand.

Everybody knew that John Martin had a snug bank account, and that when he died Dora would come in for both money and farm. People said this was more of an attraction to Joe Gorham than Dora herself.

Be that as it may, the girl cared little for him, and when asked why, gave as a reason that she had heard he was idle and dissipated. The truth was, she loved somebody else, that somebody being Paul Ellis, a young physician from the neighbouring town of Answell, who had come there about a year previous.

He was not handsome, but had a quiet, pleasant face, and he worked hard to build up a practice.

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Paul Ellis became acquainted with Dora in this wise. John Martin, with his sister and daughter, drove into Answell every Sunday morning to attend service in the one little chapel which the town boasted. Paul was also an attendant, and regularly once a week he sat in the same seat, from which he commanded a good view of Dora.

Gradually he grew to divide his attention between her pale, beautiful face, and the words of the white-haired old minister in the pulpit. The girl never glanced his way, but it was a pleasure for him to mingle with the little flow after service, when they were leaving the church, and as Dora came by, to feel her dress brush his hand as she passed him in the aisle.

Farmer Martin's family used to drive to worship in an old-fashioned wagonette. One Sunday when they had arrived at the chapel, Dora attempted to alight unaided, while her father was securing the horse. In so doing she fell, and Paul, who was passing slowly along, watching her intently, ran to the rescue, getting for reward a pleasant "Thank you, sir."

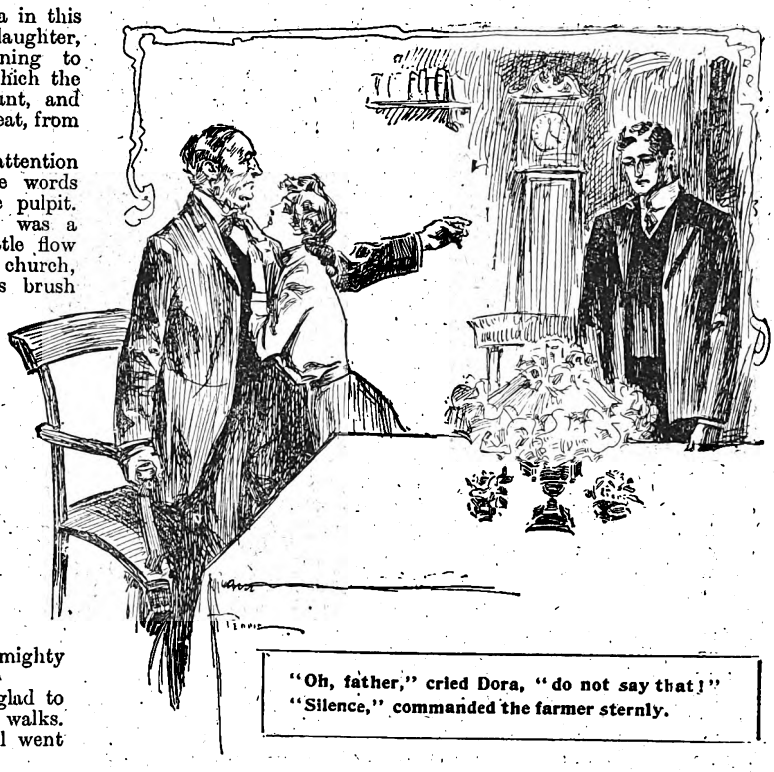
Farmer Martin cried, in his bluff way:

"Why, Dora, how awkward you are."

Then turning to Paul, he continued:

"You are the new doctor, if I don't mistake? Come in and see us when you are passing. Who knows but what we may give you a job some day, though I think it's not probable, as we are a mighty healthy lot.

Paul answered something about being glad to go in any case, as he was fond of long walks. There were a few more words and they all went into service.



"Oh, father," cried Dora, "do not say that!"
"Silence," commanded the farmer sternly.

The weeks slipped by, and then, somehow, almost before he knew it, Paul was calling often at Farmer Martin's quiet home, and Dora had grown to look for his coming as eagerly as he watched for the days on which he could visit her.

This had not escaped Joe Gorham, and he was bitter thereat, for poor as were his chances before of winning Dora's hand, he now saw that success was impossible. Affairs stood in this way for about six months previous to the evening on which my story commences.

This particular day Paul had spent at the farm, where he remained to tea. His visits had been so regular for some time that Farmer Martin looked upon his presence as quite a matter of course. The young man's conversation was interesting, and he liked him.

When he saw that things were "going too far," as he phrased it, then he would speak out. As usual in such cases matters had progressed very rapidly, and Dora marvelled at the pleasant way in which her lover was treated.

Everything looked very bright. Paul had already told his love, had gained Dora's promise, and on this evening he was to ask her father's consent to their marriage.

Tea was over, Aunt Margaret, Mr. Martin's sister, was dozing in her easy-chair. Dora leant against the window-sill, looking out into the falling shadows, and the two men still remained in their places on opposite sides of the table.

Paul had been trying vainly for some moments to say what was in his mind. At last, mustering up courage, he began in an off-hand, manly way, although a little nervous, and told the old farmer his secret.

A change swept over the face of Dora's father. His jovial smile disappeared, and in its stead came a stern, hard expression. The girl at the window, her heart beating rapidly with hope, waited eagerly for his words. They came slowly and decidedly.

"Mr. Ellis," he began, "I might have known how your visiting would end, if I had not been a fool and placed too much confidence in you. Couldn't you come here without making love to my daughter? If I had suspected anything of the kind, you should never have darkened my doors. What, take my girl from me? Never, sir, until I am dead. And now, Mr. Ellis, you will please not come here again."

"Oh, father!" cried Dora, rushing forward, "do not say that!"

"Silence!" cried the farmer angrily. "The man has bewitched you with his sweet talk. I say again that no one shall have my child and my money until I am dead."

Paul's face reddened, but knowing that words were useless at such a moment, he arose, and passing quietly out, said:

"Good night, all."

Dora, through her tears, saw him going down the road, not towards Answell, but in the opposite direction. She threw herself into a chair and wept piteously, but her father was inexorable. After a few minutes, he said:

"I'll have no more of those fellows about. The next time I come home and find Gorham here, I will serve him the same way that I served Ellis. And now, girl, tell William to saddle the horse. I'm going to Rockford to-night to settle for that piece of land which I bought last week. I drew the money to-day, and want to get it off my hands."

Dora passed out to do as she was ordered, while the old man sat down, and drawing forth a huge leather purse, counted his money—two hundred pounds in bank-notes. He wrapped them up again and settled himself for a smoke before starting on his journey.

Presently Dora returned. As she entered the door, her aunt suddenly started up, and pointing towards the window opposite to where she was sitting, cried excitedly:

"What's that?"

"What's what?" growled the farmer.

"I thought I saw a man's face at the window."

"You must have been dreaming," said her brother, emptying his pipe.

Dora wondered if the face could have been Paul's, or if her aunt had only imagined she saw somebody. Her musings were cut short by the appearance of the horse. The farmer went out and mounted him, saying to Dora and his sister:

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"I'm going to stop for an hour or more at Dixey's on my way to Rockford, so that it will be late before I get home. Don't wait up for me. Go to bed early. Good night." He turned his horse's head then, as if a thought had come to him called to Dora: "See here, girl. Kiss your crusty old father good-night. Keep up your spirits. It will be time enough for you to go to someone else when I am dead."

His daughter kissed him and watched him out of sight. Turning wearily back into the cottage, she fell at her aunt's feet, laid her head in the old woman's lap and seemed heart-broken. Neither spoke a word.

When the clock struck nine they retired to the room which they shared in common. Aunt Margaret was soon enjoying a tranquil sleep, but Dora lay awake until late in the night, planning how she would win her father's consent to her marriage with Paul.

The following morning, at the early hour of five o'clock, both women were awakened by a loud knocking at the front door.

Rising hastily, Dora went to the window, and opening it cautiously, looked out. Standing below on the doorstep was Dixey, the man at whose house Farmer Martin was to have called the night before. The opening of the window caused him to glance up. His face was ashy pale.

"Miss Martin," he said, "will you tell your aunt to come down quickly. I want to see her."

Dora, marvelling at the man's early visit, his scared face, and excited manner, grew alarmed, and, having delivered his message, ran to her father's room to acquaint him with the strange occurrence.

Throwing open the door, she gave a start of surprise. The room was untenanted, and the bed had not been slept in.

Filled with a singular misgiving, she rushed to the side-door by which her father always let himself in when he came home late at night. It was just as she had arranged it for him. The bolt was still drawn, showing that he had not returned.

Running to her room, she hastily threw on a wrapper, and, in another instant, accompanied by her aunt, was descending the stairs. Opening the door they found Dixey, his hat in his hand, a frightened look on his face. Before he could speak Dora had clutched him by the arm, and was saying in a husky voice:

"Mr. Dixey, what is the matter? Don't keep me in suspense. There is something wrong with father. In Heaven's name, tell me what it is! Did he fall from his horse?"

"Yes, miss," the man said confusedly, "I think he did."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Yes, miss," was the reply.

Dora loooked straight into the messenger's face, saying in a slow, measured way:

"My father is dead."

"Yes, that's it. He's dead—*murdered!*"

Aunt Margaret screamed, and Dora fell to the floor, insensible. The former, although well-nigh stunned, did not lose her presence of mind.

"Mr. Dixey," she said, "go into the kitchen and get me some water."

He started for it, while she, half-dragging and half-carrying the girl, managed to place her on a sofa in the parlour.

The water having arrived, she proceeded to bathe the face of her charge, listening meanwhile to Dixey's story.

"Mr. Martin," he began, "called at my house early last night. We talked for over an hour. Then he started off, saying that he was going to Rockford. This morning, about three o'clock, some country people who were coming to Answell, woke me up and said they had found the dead body of a man on the bridge about five miles back. There was a knife sticking in the breast. Down below on the rocks was a horse with his legs broken. When they had finished the account we started back. As soon as I had seen and recognised the body, I felt fit to die of fright."

"Where is it now," asked the old lady.

"At my house," replied Dixey. "We brought it along in the cart"

"Return at once," said Aunt Margaret, "and drive here with it."

The man left.

Dora had now opened her eyes, and was moaning and muttering in an incoherent way.

After some trouble she was placed in bed, where she lay completely dazed. The hours dragged on.

At length a cart appeared, bearing all that was mortal of John Martin. With it were a dozen or more people who had joined the mournful proccession as it came along the road.

At sight of her brother's lifeless body, Aunt Margaret was overcome with grief. Dora remained in bed, where she was experiencing the first symptoms of a fever. Dixey, having in his possession the knife which had remained sticking in the farmer's breast, went on to Answell to notify the authorities of what had occurred. They were soon on the ground trying to solve the mystery.

A couple of days passed and the inquest was held, the verdict being "murder at the hands of some person or persons unknown." Then came the funeral, followed by the startling report that the murderer had been apprehended and that he was none other than Paul Ellis.

Everybody scouted the idea of his guilt until the existing suspicions were revealed. Paul protested his innocence in vain. All the circumstances surrounding the murder pointed towards him as the assassin, and he was imprisoned to await trial.

Weeks passed on, and for a time Dora hovered between life and death. The trial had been postponed until her recovery. The first use she made of her returning strength was to visit her lover. To no purpose did she speak to him with words of comfort and consolation. His only reply was: "I am innocent, but everything is against me, and I foresee the result."

Still the girl was hopeful, and each day found her a visitor at the jail.

The morning of the date fixed for the trial dawned at last. First called to the witness-box was Aunt Margaret. She told of what occurred at the cottage on the night when the crime was perpetrated—of Paul's demand for Dora's hand, and the stormy refusal of Farmer Martin's saying: "No one shall have my child and my money until I am dead."

Then she spoke of Paul leaving the house, and going, not towards his home in Answell, but in the direction of Rockford. Whether he was aware that her brother had a large sum of money in his possession she could not say.

Damaging as was this testimony, Dora was obliged to corroborate it, and did so, feeling almost crazed at the thought that she was helping to convict the man who was dearer to her than life.

Now came the evidence of Dixey and the men who had discovered the body. They recognised a weapon shown as the one which had been found sticking in the body. Nothing further could be elicited from them. Joe Gorham was next in the box and proved a valuable witness for the prosecution. He carefully examined the knife, and swore that he had often seen it in the prisoner's possession.

It was a peculiar surgical instrument which he well remembered. His testimony was succeeded by that of the woman at whose house Paul lived. It was to the effect that her lodger had been away from home nearly all of the night on which the crime was committed, and that he had returned about three o'clock in the morning, looking pale and haggard, his shoes thick with dust, and his clothing travel-stained.

On being questioned respecting his absence, he replied that he had been out taking a walk. Some further testimony ensued, all of which tended to blacken Paul's case.

However, no trace could be found of the money which Farmer Martin had with him when he met his death, and, as it had been proved conclusively that the murder took place on the way to Rockford, if was pretty clear that the assassin had secured the purse.

Paul testified in his own behalf that, after leaving the cottage on the eventful night, he had walked about half way to Rockford, and turning into the woods, seated himself

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on a fallen tree, thinking over his disappointment. While there, he dropped asleep.

Waking later in the night, he sauntered back to Answell. The knife found in the body was undoubtedly his, but he could not explain its presence there, as he had not even missed it.

This was his whole story. Witnesses he had none. His lawyer made the best defence possible, and the case was given to the jury.

In half-an-hour they returned with a verdict of "Guilty." Sentence of death was pronounced.

The doomed man was thoroughly crushed. He had fallen into a deep melancholy from which nothing could rouse him, and in this state was returned to his cell.

The days sped by like lightning. Dora saw her lover and told him that she still believed him innocent, but she began to despair. Turn which way she might there was no help to be had. She could do nothing. Her face had grown thin and white, as day succeeded day and brought only its own weight of woe.

The time lying between Paul and death was almost over. Only three days more. Surely, she thinks, God will send some help to them. She prays and hopes on. Nothing comes.

It is the eve of Paul's last day on earth. His life is spanned by hours only. To-morrow he will be dead. Dora is with him, still strong in her belief of his innocence, still as true and trusting as in the old, happy days when first she learnt to love him. They are standing together, each peering into the other's face, the sunlight of the dying day pouring in a rich flood through the barred prison window. Paul is speaking. He says, like one in a dream:

"Dora, darling, this is the last time I shall see you."

"No," she replies brokenly; "to-morrow, Paul—to-morrow I will come in the morning and remain with you till—the end. God may yet send something. Why is he so hard on us?"

"It is fate," Paul answers.

Then, seeing that the jailor had left them for a moment, he continued rapidly:

"Dora, when they call me to-morrow I shall be dead. Do you understand? Don't betray me. I have a knife in my pocket. If no help comes by daylight, I shall be my own executioner."

"Oh, Paul, Paul," she sobs, "do not be guilty of that! If we have no hope in this world, let us at least hope for a hereafter."

A step sounded near the door.

"Don't betray me," he whispers hurriedly. "Do you want me to submit to the disgrace of the gallows? Be brave."

Dora is weeping on his breast as the turnkey cries: "Time is up!"

She found the weapon with which her father had been murdered.

Paul gently loosens her arms, kisses her repeatedly, and, with his white face grown whiter, says, in a low tone: "Good-bye, my love, until eternity."

They take her away. She acts like one demented, and is repeating, half-aloud: "Oh, Heaven, send us a sign—send us a sign."

She goes slowly home. Aunt Margaret expects to see her weeping bitterly, but she comes in pallid and stony, saying still: "Oh, for a sign—a sign."

The old lady asks what she means, and gets no reply. Dora, her hands clasped on her knees, sits rocking to and fro until bedtime. The clock tells the hour of nine, and together the two women ascend the stairs.

Aunt Margaret goes quickly to bed, having given up the useless task of persuading her niece to do likewise. The latter, habited in a loose white wrapper, lies stretched on a sofa, still repeating in a sort of wail:

"Oh, Heaven, give us a sign—give us a sign."

Aunt Margaret has been sleeping soundly for some time. A noise disturbs her and she starts up. The pale rays of the moon shining through the window, light up the part of the room where Dora was lying.

She is no longer there, but, instead, almost prone on the floor, her arms stretched under the sofa, as if groping for something, her eyes staring wide, and her whole appearance that of a maniac. Just then she rises, her right hand closed tightly, and says, in a tone of triumph: "I have it! I have it! Thank Heaven!"

The old woman tenderly folds her arms about the white figure. Dora wakes with a bitter cry of disappointment, moaning, "It was only a dream."

Weepingly she tells how she dreamt that she visited the spot where her father had been murdered. On the rocks below she saw his missing purse. The thought struck her that it would clear Paul, and she had placed her hand on it, when she awoke.

Her aunt says soothingly: "My poor child!"

Dora once more throws herself on the sofa and closes her eyes, while Aunt Margaret goes back to bed and slumbers quietly. Not so with her niece. In a few moments the hands are busy again, and she is muttering incoherently.

Suddenly she is standing in the middle of the room, wide awake, every nerve quivering with intense excitement. Her hands are pressed against the sides of her head as if to keep it from bursting. The dream has been repeated.

She is trying to think what it means, or if it means anything. Heartbroken from thoughts of the morrow, and

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ready to grasp at any hope, however faint, she is still inclined to chide herself for placing the slightest faith in it.

Then she remembers all the stories about visions which she has heard from her childhood. She shakes her head mournfully and sits down. In a moment she is up again pacing the floor restlessly.

Her eyes light on the clock. It is a quarter of two. She almost swoons with horror when she reflects that at four it will be *daybreak*.

One moment she stands irresolute; the next she has passed out of the room and is stealing noiselessly down the stairs. Something seems to impel her onward.

She opens the door cautiously. Within and without there is a hush like death. Now she is skimming along the road towards Rockford.

On, on she goes, past Dixey's cottage, running as she never ran before, and every little while glancing over her shoulder—looking for the first faint streaks of dawn.

The bridge looms in sight; her brain reels as she sees it. Soon she is flying over the well-worn timbers, and descending the rocks on the other side. Now she hesitates and fears to put her dream to the test.

Slowly she goes downward step by step. She has reached the place indicated. Only to turn an angle of the bridge and she will be on the spot where the dream showed the purse. She glides round the corner.

The rock, white from waters pouring over it, shines clear in the moonlight. *There is nothing on it.* Dora falls with a cry of agony—what right had she to hope? Her last straw is snatched away.

The night breeze chills her, and she wearily rises to commence her homeward journey. As she does so the sound of horses' hoofs falls on her ear.

They grow nearer and nearer. It is probably a farmer on his way to Rockford. She waits for him to pass the bridge—this he does not do.

Instead, he fastens his horse in a clump of bushes away from the roadside, and cautiously descends the rocks. Dora, terrified though she is, creeps into the shadow and watches his every movement.

A slouch hat conceals his face, but his manner is strangely familiar. He appears to be searching for something, and turns stone after stone, peering carefully into the crevices. Finally, he gives up in despair. Dora sees him mount his horse and ride swiftly away. Who was he, and what did he want, are the thoughts which fill her brain.

So absorbed has she been that fear has almost driven Paul from her mind. She moves forward. Almost unknowingly she is doing what she saw another doing a few moments before—turning over the stones and peering into the crevices.

The fading moonbeams strike something lying on a little ledge. It gleams like silver. She reaches forth her hand and shudders as it touches something cold as steel. It *is* steel—it is a dagger.

Raising it close to her eyes, she sees a red, rusty stain halfway to the hilt, and on the hilt itself, gracefully carved, she discerns this letter—J.

The familiar manner of the man who was there but now comes back to her.

Link on link in a chain of evidence flashes through her mind. *She has found her father's murderer.*

Two words escape her lips—"Thank God!"

She struggles up the rocks, gains the road, and renewed strength fills her body. Once more she is flying along—this time back to Answell.

How far away the town appears. Will she ever reach it? Despair gnaws at her heart. Already her feet begin to burn, and a sharp pain has crept into her side, but she never wavers. Daylight is rapidly approaching. Oh, for an hour of respite—a half-hour.

"Paul, Paul!" she cries. "Wait for me—wait for me!"

Dixey's cottage is near. For a moment she thinks of rousing the man and giving him the knife—but the time he will lose in getting ready may cost Paul's life.

No, she alone must do what is to be done. As she passes her own home the light in the east glows brighter. Streaks of dawn are creeping above the hilltops. She has still three miles to go. If she could rest but for one minute.

With a failing heart she hears the birds commencing to twitter in the trees. Will she be too late, after all?"

At last the town is in sight. It is just below her. She reaches it and totters along to the jail.

Scarce strength enough is left her to beat upon the heavy entrance. In a short time the turnkey is at the door, and starts back at the sight which meets his gaze. Dora, scarcely able to speak, mutters:

"Here is the knife which killed my father. *Joe Gorham did it.* I have proofs. For Heaven's sake, tell Paul at once!"

"But——" begins the man.

"Go, go!" cried the girl. "Every second is precious. It is a matter of life and death. Paul must know it this very instant." The jailer goes towards the prisoner's cell, Dora following. He throws open the door.

Paul is lying as if asleep, his face to the wall. In vain the turnkey tries to awaken him. Dora rushes forward. The condemned man's face shows ghastly in the early light. She catches his arm. The blood is dripping from a severed artery. Throwing up her hands, she falls to the floor, crying:

"Too late—too late!"

In another instant all is commotion. A physician is called. He arrives barely in time, for the prisoner has bled almost to death. News of the attempted suicide spreads through the town.

Following fast in its wake is another rumour that the real murderer has been arrested, and that he is Joe Gorham. This creates the wildest excitement, and when Dora's story becomes known she is the heroine of the hour.

When a month has flitted by, the second trial is over, and another prisoner occupies the cell where Paul had seen so many bitter days.

Joe Gorham made a full confession. On that fatal night he was on his way to visit Dora. In the road he found a knife dropped accidentally by Paul. He put it in his pocket intending to return it.

As he passed the cottage-window (where Aunt Margaret saw the face), he overheard Farmer Martin speak of going to Rockford with a sum of money. Starting off, he waylaid him at the bridge.

After the crime had been committed he threw away the weapon, and, remembering the knife that belonged to Paul, pressed it into the body, knowing that by so doing he would fasten suspicion upon his rival.

Not feeling secure so long as his own knife lay hidden among the rocks beneath the bridge, he went to search for it on the very night of Dora's dream. The coincidence was a fortunate one for Paul.

In Farmer Martin's house there has for years been a happy family, presided over by Paul and Dora. Often in the summer twilight and again before a blazing fire in winter, when the little ones are snug in bed, they recall an eventful past. To Paul the dream still seems wonderful. Dora, however, with her woman's faith, always looks upon it as one of God's great favours, and tells Paul that it was a sign. Then he says: "But the age of miracles has passed."

Dora answers:

"Whatever it was, we cannot help being grateful for it."

And they *are* grateful.

Ramsay Morris.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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DR. HARLEY'S MISTAKE.

A Tale of Love, Wealth, Strychnine, and a Strong Will.

EVERYBODY wondered why Robert Harley, the young M.D., had not fallen in love with his cousin, Kitty Marriott, but had chosen to devote himself to Miss Bertha Wilson. The former was a sweet, amiable girl, according to the gossips, whereas the latter was proud and haughty in her bearing, attractive—almost beautiful—yet not the sort of girl that most men would care for.

Love, however, is a strange thing, and it often happens that a man selects the very woman least in the minds of those who are speculating on the choice he will make. That is exactly how it was with Dr. Robert Harley.

When he looked about for a practice that might be going cheap, one that might be worked up into something good, he considered himself fortunate in acquiring the connection of the recently deceased Dr. Marriott. The practice had suffered considerably through Marriott's illness and enforced neglect of his professional duties, and this condition of things had been taken advantage of by a rival practitioner, so that it was not worth a great deal; but Harley was confident that he would wake it up. He was not a man of means; nearly all the money left by his father had been spent in his training, and the sum required for the purchase of the connection was just within his power. One reason for regarding himself as fortunate was that he had the goodwill of the widow and her daughter; they lived in very straitened circumstances, but their influence still counted for something.

Dr. Harley was the kind of young man who would soon win the favour of most persons with whom he came in contact; this was a good backing for his professional skill and the combination quickly began to tell. He had passed his exams brilliantly and had done some good hospital work; most people believed that he was a clever fellow, and not the man to vegetate in the town; yet there was a feeling among others that he had just a trifle too much confidence in himself.

"It's a fine thing to have such confidence in one's abilities," observed a modest tradesman on whose daughter the doctor had attended, "and I don't say that you can get on without it, because you can't. But there is a danger of allowing it to go too far. Conceit? No, I can't say he puts on side, because he's most unassuming in his ways. It's difficult to explain, but it strikes me that there's not enough ballast. Yet he is quite unconscious of it."

Only a minority shared the opinion of the worthy tradesman and Robert Harley increased in favour until it dawned upon the majority that he had fallen in love with Bertha Wilson instead of Kitty Marriott. Then he went down a little in popularity. The only proper and natural thing for him to do was to marry Kitty Marriott, they imagined, and they resented his contrary action; but they got over it and, although they did not approve, they admitted that he had a right to please himself.

There was not the shadow of a doubt that he was madly in love with Bertha, and there was equally as little doubt that Kitty received a terrible blow when she discovered the fact. If Robert Harley had been less blinded by his passion, he would have noticed the wan appearance of the usually blooming Kitty, and he could not have failed to observe that her gaiety had almost disappeared. He did not notice these things, partly because his visits to Mrs. Marriott became less frequent—in fact, they practically ceased, for his time was always occupied with Bertha.

It was confidently expected that the engagement would be announced, there was no secret on the part of Harley concerning his feelings towards her. The announcement that did come at length was not anticipated and staggered the circle in which Dr. Robert Harley moved. The announcement was preceded by an interview between Harley and Bertha. He called on her, as usual, but was checked in his customary outburst by the manner of greeting; he felt chilled.

"What's wrong, Bertha? What have I done that I am denied the lover's kiss?" he asked, his voice quivering with emotion.

"My dear Robert, you have done nothing, except that you are poor!" she replied coolly, seating herself in a comfortable chair and looking at him without flinching.

Robert stepped back in amazement.

"I know I am poor, Bertha, but I shall succeed! You have told me so yourself! And what does it matter if we love each other? I love you, and you return that love. You cannot deny it!" he added passionately, as she shook her head.

"I have no intention of denying that I have some affection for you, Robert, but it is not proof against the prospect of poverty. You may succeed, but I do not think I can wait for that. I have had a very advantageous offer of marriage, which it is my intention to accept!"

It was all said in so cool and business-like a fashion that Robert Harley went nearly mad. He raved and strode about the room; then he knelt by her side and pleaded; but she was immovable.

"I want riches, and I mean to have them!" she assured him. "But need we be bad friends on that account?"

She smiled at him bewitchingly, pleadingly. His head was in a whirl; he knew not what she said or how he answered, but she twisted him round her finger and he left her just as much her slave as he had ever been. She was slipping away from him, yet—what? He only knew that she loved him and that he did not blame her for leaving him for one who could give her riches. They could still be friends.

So the announcement was made, not of the engagement of Dr. Robert Harley, with Miss Bertha Wilson, but of the approaching marriage of that young lady with Mr. James Yates, an elderly man with a banking account of considerable importance. Questions levelled at Harley elicited no satisfactory reply and in the end people gave up the task of fathoming the mystery.

Two years passed away, and those two years wrought a change in the opinions of Dr. Robert Harley. Slowly the effects of his infatuation had worn off and he wondered how he could have been so blindly in love with the woman who was now Bertha Yates. He noticed the change in Kitty, whose mother he visited more often, and he became conscious that the alteration from a merry girl to a charming, but quiet

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woman had been caused by his own love affair with Bertha. He asked himself if he loved Kitty—really loved her—and if she could forgive him for the past and return his affections, but to those questions he was unable to find a satisfactory answer. He drifted on without daring to probe the subject more deeply, content to be regarded as the friend of Kitty and her mother.

The Yates's were not happy; so much soon became the current rumour, and rumour deepened into certainty. There were frequent quarrels because he would not allow her more money and they spent much of their time apart. Mr. Yates suffered from chronic dyspepsia, which did not tend to make the household any the happier, for it made him irritable and complaining.

It was about a year after Yates' marriage with Bertha that Dr. Robert Harley was called to see him and prescribe. This was rather a trial for Harley; at the beginning of their married life he had been a guest, with others, at the Yates's on several occasions, but he had discontinued these visits as his better self had returned, and it was necessary to summon all his self-possession to respond to the professional call. Yates, although Harley was not aware of it, had called him in because he had gained a reputation and because he had divined something of what had gone before. "If I swear that he could do me no good, it will damage him," thought the elderly husband, "and it will torment her to see him here!"

Yates could never discover, much to his chagrin, whether the second object was attained or not, but it is certain that he failed in the first. He was bound to admit that, although Harley did not effect much, he did accomplish a little more than his predecessors in the office of medical attendant, and for that reason he was always called in to see Yates when the dyspepsia was bad.

About five o'clock one cold morning he was aroused by a violent ring at his night bell and, on placing his ear to the tube, learnt that Yates was very ill, and that he, Harley, was wanted at once. Muttering something rather uncomplimentary to persons who had pet ailments, Harley dressed, not too quickly, and went out. He was admitted to the Yates's dwelling by Bertha herself, whose face was white but calm.

"I am glad you have come, doctor," she said quietly, "but I fear that you are too late."

"What do you mean?" queried Harley in surprise, as he followed her to the bedroom.

She made no answer, but pointed to the bed and then covered her face with her handkerchief and wept. One glance at the motionless figure on the bed was sufficient for Harley, but he made an examination.

"Dead!" he exclaimed, as he turned to the widow. "Mrs. Yates, I am very, very sorry. How did it happen? I fear that there must be an inquest."

She shuddered.

"Inquests always seem so dreadful. I thought that an inquiry would not be necessary, as you have attended him regularly. But if it must be——I will tell you how it occurred."

She turned her face and hid it once more in her handkerchief, raising it again after a minute's weeping.

"I cannot say that we were happy, but this is terribly sudden. He awoke and complained of pain, so I suggested that he should have a cup of hot water, which he thought was good for his complaint. I boiled some water myself, as I did not wish to disturb the servants, and gave him a cupful. It was very hot and I told him to wait a minute or so, but he was always very obstinate and would do as he liked." She stopped and heaved a sigh. "By long habits he could drink liquids hotter than most people. He drank the water pretty quickly, although it was so hot that I could scarcely bear to touch it with my lips. As he handed the cup back to me, he gave a cough and a groan, sank back on the pillow, and never moved again."

"Very sudden!" ejaculated Harley, in real sympathy.

"I thought he had fainted and tried to bring him round; but he didn't move, so I sent for you. Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing," replied Harley solemnly. "Try to bear up, Mrs. Yates. It is a sad trial. There must be an inquest, but it will be very formal."

He slipped off as soon as he decently could and sent a note to the coroner in due course. Harley was deputed to make the post-mortem examination, but found nothing more than a small quantity of fluid in the stomach.

At the inquest, all eyes were turned on Harley; it was a curious position, to be certifying to the cause of the death of the man who had supplanted him. There was but little to be said, and Harley gave his evidence clearly and easily. Death was due to syncope; the drinking of the water at something like boiling heat had been too much of a shock for a system already weakened to an abnormal degree and had caused failure of the heart's action. It was true that Mrs. Yates said that her husband had been in the habit of drinking fluids very hot, but the habit had availed nothing in this instance. He had done it once too often. He had no doubt as to the cause of death.

How vividly this evidence recurred to his fevered brain a week later. He was paying a visit to Mrs. Marriott, and the worthy lady had found an excuse for leaving him with Kitty.

"Can't you do something to stop the sale of rat-powders with free strychnine in, Dr. Harley?" she asked seriously. "Do you know, we have discovered that we have a rat here, and mother is dreadfully afraid. I went to a chemist for some rat killer, and he labelled it 'Poison.' He explained that he had made up his mind to do so for his own safety; he knew that there was free strychnine in it, but it had never occurred to him to label it until he heard of the death of Mr. Yates. I inquired why he should have been influenced by that, and he replied that Mrs. Yates"—there was a break here which Kitty tried vainly to cover—"had purchased some rat killer at his shop a day or two before, and the silly, nervous man took it into his head to imagine what would be said to him if somebody else's husband died suddenly after she had bought rat killer with strychnine in it and it was proved that she poisoned him! He declared that he was quite relieved on hearing that death was due to natural causes. But you ought to do something in this matter, really!"

Harley tried to tell her that there was a law on the subject, and that he would inquire into the particular rat killer in question, but he felt himself turning white as a horrible fear seized him. He took leave of Kitty and tried to shake off the sickening fear that weighed on him, but the more he tried, the tighter it seemed to grip him. By the time he reached his home he was reeling like a drunken man and his reputation for sobriety had been damaged in the eyes of the few who saw him.

Free strychnine! He uttered the words aloud, but they sounded hollow as they came from his parched throat. Had he made a mistake? He had performed his duty very perfunctorily; it had never occurred to him to go deeply into the matter. The more he thought it over, the more he became convinced that death was not due to the cause he had so airily assigned. The words of a certain tradesman, repeated to him by a "good-natured friend," came to his mind: "Self-confidence is a grand thing, if you haven't too much of it."

He determined to find out for certain whether his fear was founded or not; at any cost he would solve the doubt. The only way in which he could do this was to put a question to Bertha that would make her betray herself.

He sprang up and rushed to the door, but pulled himself up

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on the doorstep. It was absurd to suppose—Yet, they were not happy, and there might have been some hidden reason. He would go!

He was shown into the reception room and Bertha Yates entered, looking charming in her half-mourning, her face radiant with a bewitching smile.

"It is *so* good of you to come, Dr. Harley! It is like old times, and I was nearly guilty of calling you 'Robert.' Don't think me very dreadful! You know that I never loved him and that my life with him was unendurable. I cannot even pretend that I bore him any affection, and I am already in half-mourning. You understand, or you would not have come to me so soon after I had regained my freedom!"

The heartlessness of her words made him shiver. He nerved himself and looked her straight in the eyes as he spoke.

"Was that why you gave him strychnine in that cup of water?"

He noted the tell-tale look in her eyes; he saw the colour fade from her cheeks and lips. If it were true! He had been guilty of a blunder that would ruin his professional career and cast a stigma on medical testimony in general, if it were known. And if he remained silent, he would be guilty of abetting this woman, and he would allow to escape a woman who would not stop at murder to free herself and—and what? He guessed, and he trembled. Bertha herself told him, and the words seemed to stab him.

"What if I did?" she asked defiantly. "I learnt to hate him; I only wanted his money. He was too miserly, so I played my game. I cajoled him into making a will entirely in my favour. Last night he threatened to alter it." She was forgetting herself; she meant the night preceding the murder, but Harley understood. "So I gave him strychnine, you know where I got it from, I see! Now I am free—to come to you, the man I love!"

He turned from her in horror.

"It is my duty to make this matter public," he said with determination.

She recoiled as if from a blow.

"You would deliver me up to justice when I have freed myself from an intolerable existence and opened up the path to *our* mutual happiness! You dare not! You would ruin yourself and I would prove you to be my accomplice. Look at this letter!"

She took from the bosom of her dress a letter which she held up to him. He recognised it well; it was written when he was mad, mad in his infatuation, and in it he told her that he would do anything to win her, that nothing and nobody should stand between them for long! She laughed hysterically as he placed his hand to his forehead.

"Go and tell, and stand by me in the dock!" she cried. Then she added more gently. "Go now, and come back to me when you are calmer."

He went from her presence like one in a dream. His blunder would not be taken as a blunder in the face of that letter and supported by what she would say in her baffled rage. He felt unable to act for himself; he yielded to a sudden impulse and sought Kitty, in whom he confided, as a child might confide in a sister. He told her all, too full of his own misery to see hers.

"Mother is out this evening," she said in tremulous accents. "Wait here, dear, till I come back."

Neither observed the term of endearment. Harley remained in the chair with his face buried in his hands, and he heard her pass out without lifting his head.

"She loves him," murmured Kitty. "If she loves as I do, she will be ready to sacrifice herself for his happiness."

Kitty expected to find herself confronted by a woman fierce and obdurate, whom she hoped to melt by her appeal, but she found Bertha broken and weeping. She looked up at Kitty with a weary gesture.

"Why do you worry me?" she asked. Then she fired up, and demanded: "Did he send you?"

"No!" replied Kitty bravely, although she was trembling at the thought of the danger that threatened her beloved. "I have come because I love you, to ask you to do as I would do for his sake. I ask you to show that you love him, to prove the sincerity of your words."

"What do you want?" demanded Bertha more gently.

"I want you to save him. You have threatened him, but a woman who loves would never drag the man down with her in her crime by means of trickery, such as that letter and false-swearing. *That* is not love!"

Bertha gazed at her curiously.

"Would you sacrifice yourself for him? Yes, I believe you would! See!" Bertha walked to the fire, drew forth the fatal letter from her bosom and threw it into the flames. "There!"

She turned again to Kitty and stood motionless. The two women looked at each other for fully two minutes without speaking, each wondering what was passing in the mind of the other. "So that baby girl would sacrifice herself for Robert Harley!" thought Bertha. And Kitty was wondering what this strange woman would do to save Robert.

"Go back to him and tell him that he need fear nothing, nothing!" cried Bertha suddenly, making Kitty start. "I will show him that I, too, can do something for the man I love! Leave me now!"

There was a gleam of hope in the hearts of Dr. Robert Harley and Kitty Marriott as they separated after Kitty's return from her interview with Bertha, although neither could see how the ruin of the young doctor or the punishment of Bertha was to be avoided. Harley was determined to tell the story on the following day; he could point to the absence of any outward signs of the cause of death, due to the quick action of the poison, as proof of his innocence, but there was no excuse for his bungling of the post-mortem.

He was late in obtaining rest and as a consequence his troubled sleep lasted well into the morning. He had barely finished his toilette when Kitty Marriott was announced.

"Have you heard?" she gasped with a white face. "She has been found dead in the canal. It is supposed that she walked into it by accident in the thick mist last night. Did she? Or——"

"The criminal is punished, Kitty, and—there is no need to expose her crime," said Robert Harley brokenly. "The crime and the mistake will alike remain unknown to men. I understand now what she meant by saying that I need fear *nothing!*"

"It proves that she did love you, and that love will do much!" murmured Kitty. "Poor misguided woman!"

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EPISODE TWENTY.

Mr. Taskot in a Difficulty.

"Well, Olive Beresford, if anybody had ever told me that you would marry a man like that I wouldn't have believed them! Fancy fretting after a creature that can't look at you without sticking a piece of glass in his eye!"

It was Mrs. Windsor who thus voiced her disapproval of the engagement about which all the village folks were now wagging their tongues, and I hadn't the heart to be vexed at her candour. But I had no mind to let her think that my recent depression had been caused by fear lest Mr. Taskot should fail to put in an appearance, and I exclaimed vehemently:

"I didn't fret about him! How could I? He's not so charming as all that."

My friend looked at me with astonishment, which speedily gave place to concern as she noted my pale face and the dark rings which a night's weeping had brought round my eyes.

"Look here, dearie," she said, "there's something wrong about this business. I believe you've just let your vanity run away with you, and accepted the man without taking enough time to think about it. But it isn't too late to alter your mind, and you had better face the anger of a rejected lover than make a miserable marriage."

"I cannot help myself," I moaned. "He has my promise, and I dare not break it."

"You *dare* not? And I always thought you had any amount of courage! There must be something very queer behind this."

"Mr. Taskot!" announced our one maidservant, and Mrs. Windsor, looking very much upset, hurried out of the little drawing-room just in time to avoid meeting the individual who posed as my *fiancé*.

A curt nod was my only reply to his fulsome greeting. But he was not in the least embarrassed by my coldness. On the contrary, he smiled in evident enjoyment of conscious power, and plunged at once into the errand upon which he had come.

"I have been to see the vicar," he observed, sitting down opposite me. "There is no reason why we should not be married as soon as possible, so the banns will be read for the first time next Sunday."

"Next Sunday! How dare you make such an arrangement without first consulting me?"

"Because it would have been useless to consult you. You would have declined to permit the banns to be published so soon, and you would have urged all sorts of arguments against an early marriage."

"I shall still urge them. And I absolutely refuse to be married within six months."

"As I have said, I have seen the vicar, and the date is settled. I didn't want Maurice Ray to get it into his head that you hankered after him, and by being married first you can always deprive him of that boast."

"What do you mean?"

"Read this. Then you will know."

With trembling fingers I took from Mr. Taskot the *Morning Post* which he produced for my inspection, and read an announcement to the effect that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between Miss Isola Lewis, only daughter and heiress of the wealthy manufacturer, Mr. Harrison Lewis, and Mr. Maurice Ray, the famous miniature painter.

I suppose Mr. Taskot had anticipated the effect this news would have upon me, for my pride really was instantly in arms, and I was furiously angry at having deluded myself into the belief that Maurice Ray had felt a warmer feeling towards me than the facts warranted. He had been very kind and helpful. And his manner had certainly not been that of a man who took merely a passing interest in me. But if he had cared much for me, I thought, he could not have so soon engaged himself to somebody else.

And yet, was there not ample excuse for forgetfulness on his part in the scene which he witnessed between Mr. Taskot and me? And was it not quite possible that it was the actual means of parting us for ever? The very thought diverted my anger from myself to my obnoxious suitor, and I turned to him with withering contempt both in my manner and my voice.

"Do you think," I asked, "that I am nothing more than a musical instrument, out of which you can evoke any tune you like? If so, you shall find yourself mistaken. You have been anxious from the first to make me think ill of Mr. Ray. Why, I do not know, for he and I hardly know each other. But I have come to the conclusion that you will say anything to further your own plans, and I think it very probable that you inserted that social item yourself. Otherwise, why be so eager to show it to me?"

A dark flush mounted to Mr. Taskot's flabby cheeks, and I was so sure that my shot had hit the mark that some of my lost courage returned to me. So also did a little wisdom, and though I resolved to fight for my future happiness, I had the sense not to put my companion on his guard yet by open rebellion when he answered:

"You are excited and out of sorts, my dear. In a few days, when you have fully realised how different your position will be as the wife of a rich man you will give me credit for desiring nothing so much as your happiness."

"You speak of yourself as a rich man," I rejoined, forcing myself to talk dispassionately. "Do you mind telling me what you call rich?"

A voluble flow of words answered me, and I was assured that the five thousand a year which Mr. Taskot enjoyed now would soon be supplemented by ten thousand per annum more.

"I am the destined heir of my uncle, Walter Taskot, Esq., of Malvern Dale, and as he is already old and feeble I am not likely to be kept long out of my inheritance."

This last was said with an air of triumph which made me shudder with dislike of the man who was evidently longing for the death of his nearest relative. But it gave me the cue for checkmating him, and my voice was quite firm as I asked:

"Has Walter Taskot, Esq., of Malvern Dale, any other nephew who expects to inherit from him?"

"Yes, I have a cousin. But his chances are too remote for consideration. He has never had the sense to cultivate the old man, or to keep his own little extravagances from his knowledge."

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"I'm not so sure that your cousin's star is not in the ascendant, after all."

"Indeed! How can that be?"

"Because the sight of the duplicate set of snapshots which I rescued from the clutches of the Vernons may induce your uncle to reconsider his will."

Ah! Here was a masterstroke at last! Mr. Taskot's face became visibly paler, and he with difficulty suppressed the oath which rose to his lips. But he quickly recovered himself and smiled confidently.

"If he were like most people's uncles," he said "he would probably kick me out of his will for more than one thing I have done. But he admires nothing so much as ingenuity, and will laugh heartily when I tell him about that signal code business. He will also welcome you as a congenial addition to the family circle, for he only needs to see the snapshots to know that you are not of the insipid schoolgirl type he detests."

This sounded fairly plausible, for one family may easily produce more than one rogue. But I did not ignore the momentary confusion my chance shot had caused, and I refused to regard Mr. Taskot's ascendency as irrevocable any longer.

"Your uncle would consider me a very insipid schoolgirl," I retorted, "if I allowed myself to be coerced into marrying you without making an attempt to get out of my difficulties without your aid. Anyhow, you can consider the engagement 'off' until I have interviewed Walter Taskot, Esq., myself."

And from this position, neither threats nor persuasions were able to move me. My set of snapshots were a strong enough weapon wherewith to fight my antagonist, and, when he left me, there was this difference between us—his show of confidence was fictitious, mine was real.

EPISODE TWENTY-ONE.

The Value of Local Esteem.

While recently visiting at Vernon Towers, at the invitation of a former school friend who had forgotten the reputation Olive Beresford acquired at school, your parishioner, by pretending to know nothing about cards, induced other guests to play with her for money, of which she won a large sum, both by fair means and by foul. The foul means consisted in inventing a code of signals which was exchanged between Miss. Beresford and another equally unscrupulous visitor named Taskot. Suspecting something of the sort, the host, Mr. Vernon, in order to protect his other guests from being swindled, took several snapshots which show the two conspirators in the act of giving the signals by which they were enabled to make phenomenal winnings, the result being that both of them were expelled from Vernon Towers, after being compelled to disgorge the greater part of the money they had won. Mr. Taskot departed there and then, but Miss Beresford, not content with the mischief she had already done, stole various things out of Mr. Vernon's private room. These were fortunately found in her dress-basket, packed ready for removal. But Mrs. Grainger, another lady guest of the Vernons, was induced to believe Miss Beresford the victim of a foul conspiracy to ruin her, and actually offered her hospitality to both the card-sharpers. This hospitality was accepted. But Mrs. Grainger was soon disillusioned, for she overheard Miss Beresford laughing about the way in which she had robbed the Vernons, and she instantly cleared her house of the treacherous visitors, and went to apologise to Mr. and Mrs. Vernon. The writer has only to add that Miss Beresford and Mr. Taskot went off together, and it is quite on the cards that two such congenial companions will marry each other, on the principle that they can pursue their career of fraud more easily as man and wife."

But my rising spirits were soon destined to be effectually damped. For, not long after Mr. Taskot had gone, with the unwelcome promise of returning on the morrow, Mr. Snaith, our vicar, came to see me, and his first words prepared me for something unpleasant.

"Good evening, ladies," he said, as both Mrs. Windsor and I rose to receive him. "I—I—I came to see Miss Beresford on a matter of some importance. Can I see her alone for a few minutes?"

Of course Mrs. Windsor immediately left us to ourselves, and I waited with some anxiety to hear what the vicar had come about.

"Miss Beresford," he began, the stiff manner in which he sat down showing that he was very ill at ease. "I hope you will exonerate me from any desire to cause you pain. But I have had a most extraordinary letter, conveying still more extraordinary charges against you, and I think it only right that you should be given an opportunity to refute them."

"Certainly," I agreed, my voice coming gaspingly, for I guessed at once that the letter which Mr. Snaith handed to me had something to do with the recent events at Vernon Towers and the neighbourhood. "Of course it was best to come to me at once, if anyone has said anything against me. Will you allow me to read the letter?"

Without a word, Mr. Snaith handed me the missive, and the while my blood seemed to turn cold within me, I read the following:

"*To the Vicar of Essondon.*

"*Dear Sir,—You may not be aware that Olive Beresford, a resident in your parish, who no doubt poses as an eminently respectable person, is a gambler, a swindler, and a thief.*

Did ever a girl have to read a more frightfully humiliating letter about herself than the shameful effusion which stamped me as a disreputable ingrate? I was frozen dumb with horror, and Mr. Snaith's look of grave sympathy changed gradually into one of contemptuous disgust.

"Your answer, Miss Beresford?" he demanded. "For Heaven's sake, tell me that this anonymous letter is as devoid of truth as most anonymous letters! What foundation is there for such a scandalous accusation as is here brought against you?"

"I shall go mad!" I murmured convulsively. "I allowed myself to be persuaded to do one foolish thing, and all the others were built upon that. It was the Vernons who cheated, and whatever Mr. Taskot and I did was only done in self-defence. It is Annabel who has thus tried to ruin me."

"Did you visit Mrs. Grainger? And did she overhear you admitting your guilt to Mr. Taskot?"

"She misconstrued something she overheard me telling him."

"You and he left her house together?"

"Yes."

"And you journeyed by train together?"

"Yes, but——"

"Pardon me, Miss Beresford, but I do not wish to hear any more subterfuges, for the matter looks fairly clear. Mr. Taskot, I take it, is the same person whose banns are to be read next Sunday, in conjunction with yours, a fact which at once verifies my correspondent's statements, although it may not justify their anonymous nature."

"So you believe all that has been said of me, Mr. Snaith?"

"I see no other course open for me."

"Very well, sir. Go your way, and I will go mine. But, remember, those banns were put in without my consent, by the man whose schemes have brought this disgrace upon me, and I forbid them to be read either next Sunday or any other Sunday."

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"Miss Beresford, is it possible, after all, that——"

"No, sir, nothing in the way of explanation is now possible between you and me. I have lived nearly all my life in your parish, and you can never have heard a breath of evil against me before. Yet you outrage me by believing a vile, anonymous letter! I have been the victim of circumstances, and I have almost allowed myself to be made unhappy for life, rather than risk losing the esteem of the people amongst whom I have hitherto lived. I now see how foolish I have been to give their consideration or sympathy a moment's belief, and I wash my hands of you and your parish for ever! Go, sir, and learn to practise a little of the Christian charity you are so fond of preaching from your pulpit!"

EPISODE TWENTY-TWO.

A Cowardly Attack.

All indecision was now at an end with me. I had put a fictitious value upon the esteem of my daily associates, and I had found it worthless. The vicar was the barometer upon which parish opinion would measure itself, and if he proved himself so susceptible to the stabs of slander, of what use would it be for me to rely upon anybody else here?

The letter was a cruel one, and I guessed that it was the outcome of Annabel's desire to avenge her defeat. But it proved of great value to me, for it opened my eyes to the folly of allowing myself to be subjugated by dread of exposure. Things could not very well be more unpleasant for me than they already were, and I resolved to at once leave a neighbourhood which no longer had any attractions for me.

Wherever I lived, my income would remain the same, so that did not need to enter into my calculations. But I had no money wherewith to take a journey which must necessarily be slightly expensive, for I had many belongings with which I did not intend to part.

To do her justice, Mrs. Windsor was very indignant with the vicar, who was never a great favourite of hers at any time. She, at any rate, believed in me, although I did not think it desirable to take her fully into my confidence. It was enough for her that I had fallen into the hands of rogues, and that there was a conspiracy to ruin me. She pitied me.

"I'll tell you what it is, dearie," she said, on the morning after the vicar's visit. "You go to my sister's, and stay there for awhile. If you like, I'll leave Essondon, too, for I'm not much in love with it myself. At least, I sha'n't be after you've left it."

"But I can do nothing without money."

"No, that you can't. But I can lend you some to leave with now, and you can pay me back at the quarter. After this Mr. Taskot has gone away, which he is sure to do when you are no longer here, we can arrange about what things you want to sell."

"Mrs. Windsor, you are a good woman, and a true friend, and I hope you and I will never be parted for long. I'll do exactly as you advise me. If I go away this afternoon, I shall escape any further unwelcome attentions, and, of course, you will not tell anybody where I have gone."

A few hours later, everything was in readiness. Mrs. Windsor had sent some luggage to the station, and as I wanted to go away without my departure being noticed, and without the risk of meeting any of the village folks, I bade good-bye to my friend in the house, and went alone towards the station by a roundabout road which would keep me clear of all the houses.

I could not help shedding many tears at having to go away under such a terrible cloud. But I saw no means of dispelling it just now, and my departure was the only way to get rid of Mr. Taskot, so I was trying to make the best of the situation when I was startled by hearing footfalls on the other side of the hedge which bordered the country lane I was traversing.

A hasty glance round convinced me that I had been mistaken, and I thought no more of the stealthy footfall until somebody sprang towards me from a gap in the hedge. So sudden was the surprise that I had no time to cry out ere a heavy cloak was thrown over my head, and in a few minutes I was in a state of absolute helplessness, being blindfolded, gagged, and securely bound by a man at whose identity I could only guess!

(To be concluded next week.)

THE GAME OF LOVE.

How an Uncertain Lover Won His Wife.

They sat in the conservatory, which place since time immemorial has been the one sought after by lovers. They were not lovers avowedly. He thought he was, but it seemed that he had made a mistake. And as for her—well, he had begun to think his case was hopeless in that direction.

Her name was Helen Travers, and he was Herbert Langdon. As they sat there, looking towards the ballroom, a fine-looking, military man passed before their view.

"What a handsome man he is," said Helen.

He, jealous at once, was not of that opinion, but he thought it politic to agree with her.

"Is he your ideal type?" he could not help inquiring bitterly.

"Not exactly," she said hesitatingly. "But I admire his looks."

"He certainly admires yours," he said significantly.

She blushed and suggested that the subject be changed.

"Not on my account," he said, taking his revenge and noting how her colour deepened. "I find the subject you have selected extremely interesting. I should like to know exactly what your ideal man is."

"Do you mean that I shall describe him as he exists in my imagination?" she asked. "I don't believe you could give a sketch of the woman you love in imagination."

"Yes, I could," he said boldly, "if *you* would sit for the portrait."

He had shown his hand now, and, according to the rules of the game, he should have received a blush at least in return for this speech. But she cheated him out of his due.

"I haven't time," she said in answer to his remark.

"It's not the time that's wanting, but the inclination," he replied.

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"Perhaps," she acquiesced.

"Well, describe him—your ideal," in his eagerness playing into her hand.

"Of course, to begin with, he must be tall."

"How tall?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. What is a good height?"

"My height," he offered as a suggestion. Then he asked what colour he should be.

"Dark," she responded.

"I think you'd better make him fair," he responded. He was fair, and thought he was losing a point. "Opposites always fall in love, you know."

"Not always," she said, laughing. "Besides, I can't give him curly hair."

"Why not?"

"I can't bear curly hair. It means bad temper. And you are violent, you know."

There she threw away a trick.

"But you are sweet-tempered, you know. And your hair curls."

"Does it?" she asked. "Yes, I suppose it does. But that's different. Besides, I like it in a girl, don't you?"

"I think it's lovely!" he said. "Let's see now how far have we got? He is of medium height, is fair, and has straight hair. And is he to have a beard?"

"No, certainly not," she said. "How can I tell if he has a good firm chin unless he is clean shaven?"

This was true, and he felt his jawbone furtively. It carried a blond beard, but he thought that this could be shaved off, and he believed a good square chin would be left. He also resolved to have his curly hair clipped short so it would appear straight.

"What about his other features?" he asked.

She gave an affected yawn.

"I'm tired," she said. "I can't imagine any more. I think he may have a mouth and nose like yours."

"And moustache?" he asked.

"I am not quite sure how you would look without a moustache," she replied, in an unguarded moment. "It depends on what sort of a mouth you have."

"This sort!" he said, playing trumps as he kissed her.

"Don't," she exclaimed, "or we can't be friends."

"Do you refuse my love?" he asked.

"How can I refuse something which never has been offered me?" she replied indignantly.

"Has it never been offered?" he inquired wonderingly.

"Not to my knowledge," she replied, as if the matter were one of no particular concern.

"I was not aware of that," he continued. "If it should happen to be so it can be easily remedied."

And it was remedied.

Mabel Trangmar.

"Did she make you feel at home?" "No; but she made me wish I were."

Nellie (aged twelve): "Our family is awfully exclusive. Is yours?" Bessie (aged eleven): "No, indeed! We haven't anything to be ashamed of."

Barber: "How do you prefer to be shaved?" Customer: "On the outside, please." Barber: "Eh?" Customer: "Don't you understand? I don't want you to go beneath the skin."

Mamma: "Yes, the elopers have been discovered in Scotland. They are going to telegraph home for forgiveness." Papa: "Thank goodness! I thought they were going to telegraph home for funds."

Young Mistress: "I don't see why you should leave me so suddenly. I'm sure I've done all I could to help you with the housework, and I've done all the cooking." Maid: "Yes'm; that's what's the matter." "What?" "I can't stand y'r cooking."

Your Editor Chats.

Nobody, I think, will deny that the cover illustration of this week's number is an exceptionally strong one, and neither ought anybody to be disappointed with the story of which it is the subject. I believe my readers fully appreciate the efforts I am making to keep this paper first and foremost, as it always has been since its birth, in the ranks of light literature, but I am always delighted to read criticisms from any of the thousands who regularly peruse these pages, because it is very helpful for me to know your opinions. So when you have a moment to spare, do me a favour, will you? Just take a postcard and on it express in a few words exactly what you feel about the new development of our striking covers, or the general style of the paper, or about any of its contents. Perhaps there is a new feature you would like to see started? If so, name your idea, and I will give my very best attention to see what can be done in the matter.

Next week the concluding episodes of "The 'Bridge' of Ruin" will appear, and I am positive that my readers, both male and female, will deem them to be a fitting climax to an exceptionally interesting series of confessions. If, as possibly they may, they have influenced anyone to steer clear of the vice of gambling, especially as regards that one from which is fascinating Society so much at present, the game of Bridge, I shall consider myself doubly satisfied, insomuch that I have provided my readers with entertaining matter, and have also perhaps staved them off from the whirlpool surrounding the green card-table.

Now, in the issue dated October 17th, commences a series after your own heart, a series over which, I believe, you will go into raptures. I am sure that my policy of discovering young ladies and of inducing them to write about their own romantic experiences is a very much appreciated one, because then my readers know that the details are both true and realistic. In my next chat I will tell you the heroine's name, and also about a coming grand new serial from the pen of your favourite author, Mr. George Griffith.

I wish everyone who reads this page would do me a favour. It is but a small matter, though it would give me great satisfaction. All I want you to do is to tell as many people as you can about the coming grand, new stories. By doing so you will oblige me, and you will earn the thanks of your friends. If you give them a copy of the paper, the bright reading matter will do the rest.

The result of the "Juggled Letters" Competition I hope to announce next week.

Your Editor.

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DELISLE'S REVENGE.

Telling of a Faithless Friend and a Doubting Love.

I FINISHED my letter to my old friend, Clarence Bell, whom I had not seen for two years, with the following paragraph:

I wish you could see Gladys. Beautiful is not an adequate word for such a face as hers. I cannot describe her to you, for I should utterly fail to convey to you her sweetness and purity.

One morning, a few days later, the door of my office opened and Clarence entered, cool, careless, handsome as of old—the same Clarence who had ruled me by the charm of his presence, laughed at me, and borrowed my money during our college days.

"You did not expect me?" he said, after I had warmly welcomed him. "The fact is, Delisle, your letter aroused my curiosity. In the first place, I don't believe half of it, mind; but, allowing even for a lover's exaggeration, you have apparently found a jewel, eh? What is her name?"

"Gladys Lorimer."

"Her age?"

"Twenty, with soft, dark eyes and rich, red-brown hair."

"Perfection!" he exclaimed, laughing in his half-mocking way. "I perceive that I shall envy you."

"It will do credit to your taste," I replied. "However, you shall judge for yourself. She expects me this evening. Come with me and prepare to admire." He came.

I was proud of my friend, with his handsome face and winning manner.

And how beautiful she was, in her white summer dress, with her favourite scarlet flowers in her bosom, and a delicate flush in her cheeks as she rose to welcome us!

I saw Clarence start as he beheld her, and a look of undisguised wonder and admiration displace his ordinary careless expression. Contrary to his usual habit, he talked but little, keeping his eyes fastened upon Gladys, as if fascinated.

When we left her, he walked beside me in silence for some time. Suddenly he drew a deep breath, and said, as if to himself:

"She is a revelation!"

"Is she not!" I exclaimed triumphantly. "Am I not a fortunate fellow to have won her love?"

"Her love!" he repeated absently. "She loves *you?* True," he added, bursting into a laugh, "I had forgotten. I congratulate you, Delisle; you are indeed the most fortunate of men. You wanted me to envy you, and I do with all my heart. A man might give his right arm, his life even, to be in your place. There; am I sufficiently enthusiastic?"

He relapsed into silence, and during the rest of the evening remained moody and abstracted.

If love is blind, friendship is certainly near-sighted. During the three weeks that followed, if anyone had told me that my dearest friend was revolving in his mind the basest injury one man can do another, or that the woman I loved in the deepest fibre of my heart was being slowly but irresistibly drawn away from her plighted faith, I should have laughed the story to scorn.

There was no leaven of doubt in my love for them both, nor any shadow upon my happiness.

I had indeed observed a change in Clarence Bell. He was no longer the careless, idle friend of former times. He had become restless, gloomy and irritable. From visiting Gladys with me almost daily, he refused to see her at all.

"Let me alone," he said almost savagely, when I had repeated my customary invitation one evening. "Why do you persist in tempting me to contaminate that pure girl with my presence? I am a villain, the worst of villains, I tell you; I hate myself and everybody else; and if I were anything but a mean-spirited coward I would go and drown myself."

And, uttering an incoherent imprecation, he rushed out of the room, leaving me in the fear that he had lost his senses.

I was destined to receive a second surprise the same evening. Gladys was in the habit of waiting for me in the garden, but to-night she was nowhere to be seen. I went through the grounds, looking for her in our accustomed haunts, until I reached a rustic pavilion at the further side. Parting the leaves before the door, I peered cautiously within. She was there, but her attitude startled me. She was sitting with her head resting on the table before her, her face buried in her handkerchief, sobbing convulsively.

She rose hastily as I entered and looked at me confusedly.

"Is it you?" she said, in a tone almost of alarm.

"Whom did you expect?" I responded, in astonishment; "and why are you weeping?"

She sank down again, and put her hand to her side, as if to still the throbbing of her heart.

"Yes, I expected you," she murmured; "I don't know what is the matter with me. I am nervous and ill."

But I was not satisfied; an indefinable uneasiness disturbed me. I passed my arm around her, and putting aside the fallen tresses of her hair, looked at her earnestly and said:

"You are suffering, darling, will you not tell me what it is?"

"Nothing, nothing," she replied, averting her face. "I am only unhappy, that is all."

"Shall I leave you?" I asked, hurt at her manner. "I will come another time."

"No, no," she cried hysterically, clasping me tightly; "do not leave me. I dare not stay alone. I feel as if I were being drawn away from you by a power over which I have no control, as if I were under an evil spell."

"Everybody seems unhappy to-day," I replied. "I left poor Clarence in a desperate mood. I would have brought him with me, but he was nowhere to be found."

She started to her feet and pushed me from her with a shudder.

"Do not bring him here again," she exclaimed passionately. "Do not speak his name to me again."

"What has the poor fellow been doing now?" I asked in surprise. "He has not been here lately, at least."

"You do not know," she gasped, as if making a violent effort. "He comes when you are not here. He is a traitor, and your enemy. Avoid him! drive him away! As you value your peace of mind and mine, protect me from him."

Before I could reply, she lifted her skirts, and fled across the lawn, leaving me stunned and amazed with what I had heard.

There was a dreadful significance in her incoherent words. Was my friend indeed untrue to me? Had he secretly endeavoured to undermine me in the affections of my betrothed? Was *that* the secret of his strange conduct of late? My soul revolted at the idea! I could not believe that the friend to whom I had been so loyal and true would seek to do me so terrible an injury. There must be some mistake, some misapprehension. I would have an explanation from Clarence and give him an opportunity of clearing himself.

I returned to my house, and went to his room, but he was not there. I sat down to wait for him; but as the moments

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passed a nameless anxiety, almost terror, crept upon me, until at the end of the hour I could bear it no longer.

I rose, resolving to go back to Gladys, and to postpone my interview with Clarence until the following morning.

Passing up the main avenue of the grounds surrounding the home, I caught the glimmer of her white dress in the adjacent shrubbery, and turned aside to meet her. As I drew near I discovered that she was not alone; another step, and I recognised her companion. It was Clarence Bell!

My first sensation was mere wonder; the next, a cold chill of terrible doubt—doubt of both of them. I instinctively concealed myself behind a hedge, and waited for them to approach.

As they came nearer I saw—and I seemed to be in the midst of some mad nightmare as I saw it—that his arm was about her waist and her hand lying in his.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Yes, it was indeed so. I was deceived by my friend and betrayed by my betrothed wife!

I caught at the slender twigs of the hazels to support myself, for the sky seemed to be reeling above me and the earth to be sinking beneath my feet. Before that moment I did not know that a man could endure such suffering and still live.

Presently the convulsion passed, and there was nothing left in my heart but a consuming hatred.

As they came towards me, I watched them with eyes starting from my head. I heard his low, tender tones and her smothered replies. False lover and faithless friend!

I saw his arm around the waist of my betrothed, and they were talking in low, tender tones.

"It is too late to repent," he was saying, "I loved you from the moment I saw you. It was useless to combat it. I have as much right to be happy as he."

"*I* shall never be happy again," she replied, in a broken voice. "He was so good and true, and he loved me so tenderly. "It will break his heart. I wish I were dead—I wish I were dead!"

"He was my friend, too," he responded; "but love is stronger than friendship."

"And stronger than manhood, honour, and truth, too," I interrupted in a loud, stern voice, stepping from my concealment and confronting them. "Look at me, both of you—the man whose heart you have broken, whose life you have crushed!—and may the memory of me stand between you and accuse you, day and night, to the end of your lives!"

Then, without heeding her wild, supplicating cry, or his hoarse exclamation of shame and terror, I sprang over the hedge and rushed away like a madman.

I have but an indistinct idea of what I did or where I went all that long, terrible night, until at daylight I found myself, torn, haggard, drenched with rain and tottering with fatigue, before my own door.

But out of all my mental chaos I had evolved one clear, relentless resolve—revenge!

I made my way mechanically to my room, and there, upon my dressing-case, found two notes awaiting me.

One was from Clarence, brief, shameless, desperate.

It ran:

"I have deceived you. I have robbed you of your betrothed wife. I have played the scoundrel. Well, I have no excuse to offer. I love her, and have inspired her with a fancy, if no more, for me. It suffices, however. We have taken the morning boat to Castletown, where we shall be married."

The other from Gladys, a blotted, tear-stained sheet, was so confused and rambling that I could only decipher a few sentences.

"Oh! forgive me, if you can," she said, "for I am as wretched as you could wish me to be. I am all that is wicked and false; for I love you yet, and do not love him. But I am drawn on by an irresistible impulse, I do not understand myself. I——"

And here the letter broke off suddenly. I threw the notes down scornfully, and, opening a drawer, drew forth a revolver and loaded it carefully.

I examined the time-table, and made my preparations for the terrible task I had set myself with the cool deliberation of a maniac. I knew that the boat would touch at Rockampton, at the harbour's mouth, four hours later, and that by taking the train I should be able to intercept it.

My plan was terribly simple. I would destroy them both, and then myself. As I could not die alone and leave them to be happy in their treachery, so I could not live after I had meted out to them their fitting punishment. When I had once arrived at this determination my agitation left me. My nerves seemed made of ice and my muscles of steel.

No one aboard the train could have guessed that the quiet passenger who sat by himself in a corner was bent upon a mission of death.

When I reached Rockampton the steamer was already at the wharf. A storm had been raging all the morning, and

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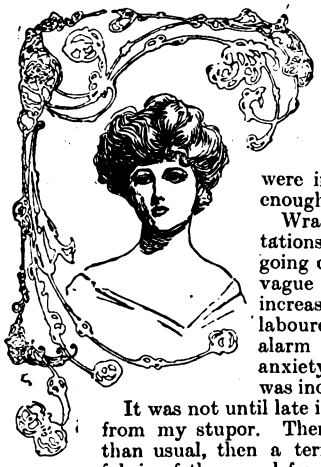

now a terrific gale was blowing across the waste of turbulent water. Muffled in my overcoat, with my hat drawn over my eyes, I made my way aboard. I did not look for those I was pursuing. I knew that they were in my hand, and that was enough until my time should come.

Wrapped in my own stern meditations, I paid no heed to what was going on about me. I knew, in a vague way, that the gale was increasing; that the steamer laboured heavily; that there was alarm among the passengers and anxiety among the officers. But I was indifferent to it all.

It was not until late in the day that I was aroused from my stupor. There had been a heavier lurch than usual, then a terrific crash that shook the fabric of the vessel from end to end.

I rose and went forward, the one calm being among the panic-stricken crowd. I found that in the heavy fog the ship had lost her course, and, striking upon a shoal, was fast going to pieces.

Amid the running to and fro, the shouts, cries and agonies of terror, I saw and thought of nothing but the two figures standing side by side near the bow—Gladys and Clarence.

I watched them awhile, with a smile of scorn upon my lips and a cold, deadly calm at my heart. My hand would not be raised in punishment; my revenge would be consummated by a power greater than mine. Moment after moment passed by, and the water was already creeping about my feet; in less than half an hour all would be over.

Suddenly, as if my fixed gaze had fascinated her, Gladys raised her head and saw me. Even in the wild uproar I heard her cry of mingled shame, terror and love. Instinctively she stretched out her hands towards me, with a piteous gesture of appeal. In an instant all my hatred was swept out my heart, and all my love, betrayed as it had been, returned.

I pushed my way through the crowd and stood before them. I took her cold hand in mine; I turned and looked him calmly in the face.

"I followed you," I said, "to destroy you both for the wrong you have done me, and to die myself. In this hour, which may indeed be our last, I forgive you freely. If we escape, go your way together in peace, and I will go mine."

"No, no," she cried, clinging to me, "take me with you. Despise me, kill me if you wish, but do not believe I love anyone but you. I was mad, deluded, sinful, but in my heart true to you always."

"Say no more," I replied gently; "we have no time to think of that now. Clarence Bell, if you are a man, help me to save this woman."

"I cannot swim a stroke," he answered sullenly.

"Then I must save you both," I said. "The shore is not far distant, and I am a strong swimmer. Gladys, come with me. Clarence, remain where you are; I will return for you."

My preparations were soon made. I threw off my superfluous clothing, drew off her shoes and wraps, and bound a handkerchief over her mouth. Then, taking her in my arms, I sprang overboard, and began the terrible journey shoreward.

The sea was running mountains high and the wind was full in my face. The shore was less than half a mile distant, but in that short space I was more than once on the point of giving up my efforts.

But I was labouring for a life far more dear than my own, and I struggled on. At length, faint and gasping, I was drawn, with my precious burden, out of the seething billows upon the land. Waiting only long enough to regain my breath, I plunged into the water again and swam back to the wreck.

When I reached it again only a small portion of it was left. Clinging to a broken timber, in stolid despair, I found Clarence Bell.

"I did not believe you would return," he said, looking at me in haggard amazement. "Are you more than a man that you should risk your life for one who has injured you as I have?"

"This is my revenge," I replied. "Good for evil; life for worse than death."

He uttered a groan, and covered his face with his hands.

The renewed struggle was indeed a hopeless one. Wearied by my previous efforts, with a heavier and quite as helpless a burden to support, I believed from the start that we were doomed.

For more than half an hour I laboured desperately on, till I could scarcely move my cramped limbs. My eyes were blinded with spray, and my breath came in groans. Finally, I felt my senses leaving me.

"I can do no more," I gasped; "I am sinking!"

My arms relaxed, and I floated helpless at the mercy of the waves.

"You are dying for me," he moaned; "and I—oh, God! Claud, forgive——"

A swell passed over his head and he disappeared. The next instant I became unconscious.

* * * ** *

An age seemed to have elapsed, when I became vaguely aware of a sense of great pain, and the sound of a woman's voice in prayer.

"Oh, Father in Heaven! spare him to me" it said—"spare him that he may at length forgive me for my sin, and take me back to that noble heart which I betrayed!"

"Gladys!" I murmured, stretching out my hand feebly towards her.

"He lives!" she cried, falling upon her knees beside the bed, and covering my hand with kisses. "Oh, it is more than I deserve!"

"Hush!" I said gently; "don't speak of that now. Tell me of Clarence."

"He still lives," she answered, averting her face; "but it is said that he was mortally injured by a piece of wreck and will die. He has asked to see you."

He was lying in the next room, conscious of his approaching fate, desiring only to see me before he died.

On the following morning I was able to get to his bedside. Battered, dying, with the last vestige of his once wonderful beauty gone, he was indeed a sorrowful sight.

"They tell me that my time is up," he said feebly, trying to smile; "and I am heartily glad of it. You can forgive me now, can you not, old friend?"

"Fully and freely, before Heaven," I replied solemnly.

"You used to say no woman could resist me," he continued, with a momentary flash of his old, mocking manner. "I tempted, deluded, fascinated her; but under it all she was true to you. During our journey on the steamer she came to her senses. She loathed me, and did not disguise it. She would never have married me, and what would have been the sequel I cannot guess, but for the providential storm that killed me and restored her to you unharmed. Forgive her, Claud. She loves you, and has never ceased to love you."

"I have forgiven her," I said, "as I have forgiven you."

With a faint smile, in which there lingered something of the gay, careless friend I had known and loved so long, he closed his eyes, and so I left him.

His death drew the last bitter sting from my heart, but it was months before the memory of that sad time faded to a plaintive dream. Even then, with my love strengthened and my faith renewed, it was long before the prospect of happiness was again opened to me.

The folly I had pardoned, Gladys could not forgive in herself. She was not worthy of such love as mine, she said. It was fitting she should pass the rest of her life in the hard penance of self-denial and regret.

But we were both young, and love conquered with her as it had with me, as in all true hearts, though tears and fire, sorrow and shame, intervene, it reaches that union which is a foretaste of Heaven.

Charles Hildreth.

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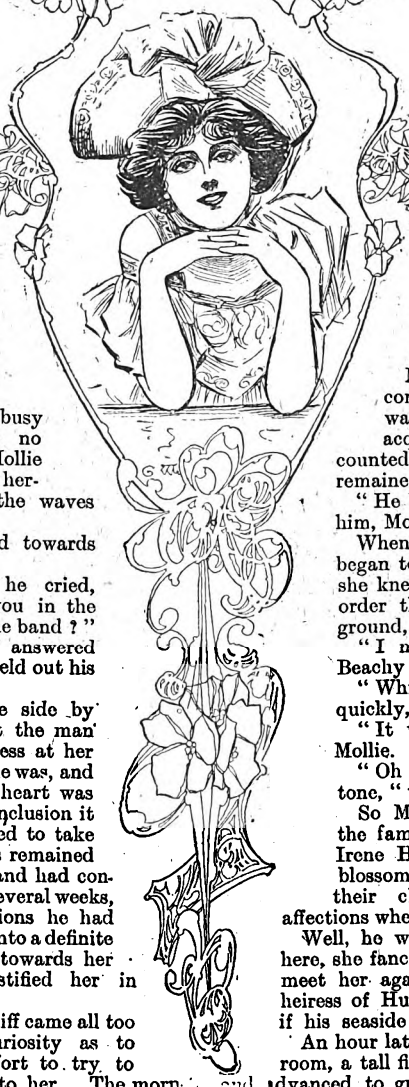
A Seaside Flirtation.



A Tale of Envy and Love.

It was late in the summer, nearing the end of September, and Mollie Armstrong was thinking regretfully that in another week she would have left the gay little seaside resort where she and her father had come for a change and be back once more in the quiet rectory at home.

This morning, having left her father busy over his correspondence and having no definite plans to put into execution, Mollie strolled down to the beach, and, seating herself on a breakwater, idly watched the waves coming in.

Presently a tall young man sauntered towards her.

"Good-morning, Miss Armstrong," he cried, raising his hat. "I've been looking for you in the gardens. Won't you come in and hear the band?"

"Yes, I should like to, very much," answered Mollie, as Charlie Maitland came up and held out his hand to help her to rise.

As they walked down the promenade side by side, Mollie smiled quietly to herself, but the man with her did not see the smile nor guess at her thoughts. She was thinking what a flirt he was, and wondering how much or how little his heart was touched this time. She came to the conclusion it was just as well she had hitherto declined to take his attentions seriously. Only a few days remained now before her departure and Mr. Maitland had constituted himself her devoted cavalier for several weeks, but in spite of compliments and attentions he had spoken no word that could be construed into a definite declaration. And yet his whole bearing towards her was such as might easily have justified her in anticipating one.

The last day of her visit to Beachy-at-Cliff came all too soon, and Mollie felt some little curiosity as to whether Maitland would make any effort to try to see her in the future or at least to write to her. The morning drew on to afternoon and he arrived at the station to see her and the Rector off, with a bunch of flowers in his hand, which he offered to her as a parting greeting.

"I hope we shall meet again before long," Charlie Maitland said, pressing her hand, while Mollie reflected that under the circumstances it would be the merest chance if they did.

The train steamed out of the station as he stood on the platform a moment, waving his hat to her, but he had turned away long ere she was borne out of sight.

Mollie watched his fast-diminishing figure. "A flirt!" she said to herself, bending over the flowers. "Well, I am glad I had the sense to recognise it." And she asked herself whether on her part she had been altogether guiltless of flirtation?

* * * * *

Summer had gone and autumn was being merged in winter. It was November; a drear month truly, but Mollie Armstrong, in the stately old Yorkshire mansion of her friends the Hursts, felt both gay and cheerful. She had just arrived on a long-promised visit, and she and Irene Hurst were now busy chatting in the latter's boudoir, previous to descending to dinner.

"Mr. Maitland is coming to-night," said Irene. "I do want you to see him, he is quite an intimate friend of ours, you know."

Mr. Maitland! Mollie preserved her composure and gave no sign that the name was familiar to her. A summer holiday's acquaintance formed at a boarding-house counted for nothing, she decided, so she remained silent while Irene went on:

"He brings his brother sometimes; you'd like him, Mollie, he's quite your style."

When Irene mentioned a brother, Mollie began to wonder which of the two it was that she knew, and with a view of finding out in order that she might feel more sure of her ground, presently she remarked carelessly:

"I met a Mr. Maitland these holidays at Beachy; I wonder if it is the same?"

"Which did you meet?" asked Irene quickly, "Charlie or Guy?"

"It was a Mr. Charlie Maitland," answered Mollie.

"Oh!" said Irene, in a slightly disappointed tone, "that is the one we know best!"

So Mr. Charlie Maitland was the friend of the family at Hurst Dene! Mollie looked at Irene Hurst with her golden hair and peach-blossom complexion and wondered whether their charm had succeeded in riveting his affections where her own attractions had failed.

Well, he would be somewhat surprised to see her here, she fancied; no doubt he had never expected to meet her again and if he were paying court to the heiress of Hurst Dene, he might not be best pleased if his seaside flirtation became known.

An hour later as the two girls entered the drawing-room, a tall figure came out of a corner by the window and advanced to greet them. He shook hands with Irene and she presented him to Mollie: "Mr. Guy Maitland—Miss Armstrong."

Mollie looked up with interest, and if ever there was a case of love at first sight it flashed into his eyes as they met hers, and Mollie, without knowing why, suddenly felt a strange shyness come over her.

"So your brother has not come, Mr. Maitland," said Irene, and a close observer might have noticed a shade of disappointment in her voice.

"No, he was unfortunately prevented," answered Guy, "and deputed me to utter his keen regrets." Bending a look on Irene, he saw the blush he had half anticipated colour her cheeks at his concluding words.

The evening passed pleasantly. Mollie played and sang, and Guy Maitland lingered at her side as if he asked nothing better. When, some hours later, Mollie found herself in her own room she threw herself into a luxurious armchair, feeling her heart stirred as it had never been before. She had met her fate! At last he had become a reality! And oh! surely he

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loved her too, incredible as it might seem in the short space of time. He was cast in a different mould from his brother, she felt convinced, or did her love blind her? No, she must not give her love lightly. But how if it were already given beyond recall.

* * * * *

The next night Charlie and Guy Maitland both came to dinner at Hurst Dene.

Charlie seemed markedly pleased to meet Mollie again, and somewhat to her surprise there was no alteration in his manner to her of a few months back. Mollie was a little at a loss, for from one or two chance remarks Irene had let fall and a blush here and there, she had imagined there might be something in that quarter. But she certainly had no clue to the fact that Irene had refused Charlie just before he came to Beachy, nor did she guess that he might be trying to annoy her by bestowing his attentions on another.

But to-night Irene seemed quite preoccupied with Guy, and Mollie could not help feeling a slight twinge of the green-eyed monster as she looked across at them. Guy in his turn sent many a glance in her direction and felt irritated to note, judging from the talk and laughter, that she and Charlie were meeting on the ground of old acquaintances. It suddenly occurred to Guy, who well knew his brother's secret, that Mollie might take his attentions seriously. Lots of people preferred Charlie to himself, and if Mollie—heavens! how he loved her already!

All that evening Guy tried hard to get Mollie to himself if only for a minute, and invariably Charlie circumvented him. The two brothers hovered round Mollie's chair, talking to her, amusing her, and persistently glancing at one another. Mollie was amused at the comedy and was quite quick enough to see that while Charlie appeared to be whispering soft nothings into her ear, his eyes betrayed themselves by constantly sending messages of quite another sort in Irene's direction. That demure maiden would not encounter one of them, so engrossed did she appear to be in a game of chess with her father.

At last, when the whole party made a general move to break up, Mollie found herself momentarily deserted by Charlie. That was Guy's chance and he immediately possessed himself of it.

"Don't you think we have had an awfully slow evening compared with last night?" he said. "My brother is a little apt, you know, to force his attentions on people. Of course, Irene, being an old friend, forgives him a good deal of his nonsense, but you must not take him too literally."

"Now he is jealous," thought Mollie, with a thrill of conquest; but loud she said quietly: "I think you do your brother an injustice." Guy looked at her in silence.

"Is she in love with him already?" he asked himself.

* * * * *

Irene and Mollie were exchanging confidences, and the conversation had naturally turned on the Maitland brothers. Charlie's tactics were already producing the desired result. Irene, in spite of herself, was beginning to feel a little jealous of Mollie and to find the thought that she might perhaps plume herself on a double conquest rather trying. Still, she did not believe that Charlie had really so far faltered in his allegiance as to be in earnest, but Mollie, who knew nothing of what had gone before, might believe him to be, and Irene felt the time had come to say a word in season.

"Charlie and Guy are too funny, don't you think?" she observed. "Directly Guy admires anyone Charlie must come and interfere, and it's the same the other way round. Because Charlie met you at Beachy, Guy immediately jumps to the conclusion he is in love with you—ridiculous, isn't it?—and must try to cut him out. Guy is always playing that game. You never heard the story about Julia Roberts? But I must say that Guy was right there for she was ten years older than Charlie. But Charlie always declared he would pay Guy out for it."

As may be imagined this speech was a revelation to Mollie and opened her eyes very considerably. Like a flash it dawned on her. Charlie was pretending love to her to pique Irene, so much she had guessed herself. On her own part she knew that she was permitting his attentions to cover her preference for Guy. And Guy? Guy was making love to her to spite his brother or for private reasons of his own. Oh! it was cruel, cruel! But she quite grasped the situation now and would never let Irene or anyone guess how utterly she had been deluded!

And Irene chatted on, little dreaming of the havoc she had wrought, and went to bed to sleep the sleep of the just, satisfied that she had made it clear to Mollie that Charlie Maitland was her special property, to be resumed at will, when she so pleased.

* * * * *

An impromptu dance suggested by Irene and indulgently assented to by the Squire and Mrs. Hurst, was taking place at Hurst Dene. Mollie was sitting in a secluded corner with Charlie Maitland, while the band played that most seductive of waltzes, "The Blue Danube." Mollie moved impatiently as the young man bent his dark eyes upon her. She was feeling worried and unhappy, tired of his make-believe which she seemed powerless to evade, and longing for the next dance on her programme when Guy would be her partner. Charlie bent nearer to her, how near she did not know, for a dark shadow fell across the portière and she leant forward ever so slightly. The kiss that would have brushed her cheek fell on a little curl that was straying out from behind her ear, and before she had time to give her wrath utterance, Guy's deep voice was heard apologising for disturbing them.

"Awfully sorry to intrude," he said, with a fierce look at his brother, which belied his words. He offered his arm to Mollie. "Our dance, I think." She rose and accepted it, and together they moved away.

Charlie remained standing alone, hiding a smile as he pulled at his moustache.

"Guy is in deadly earnest at last! I wonder how he liked being cooped up behind the portière, obliged to listen to my pretty speeches, got up for his benefit. It's too bad of me, I declare, but then I owed him one over the Roberts affair—I was hard hit at the time. And he's no right to take me to task about Irene. I don't believe she cares two straws for me, less, in fact, than Miss Armstrong does, and anyone can see where her choice has fallen. But I'll ask Irene again!"

* * * * *

As they walked away together Guy's dark head was close to Mollie's, and he whispered:

"Don't let us dance. Do sit here a little while; I want to talk to you, Mollie! I must speak to you while I can. You must have guessed how I love you! And I cannot control my feelings any longer. Do give me one little word of hope."

Mollie drew herself coldly away, afraid to believe in his words. "I don't understand you, Mr. Maitland, you must be making a mistake." He looked quickly at her to read her meaning, drew a long breath, and remained silent.

Suddenly voices near by arrested their attention. Irene exclaimed: "Oh, Charlie, I am so happy. I was beginning to think that—that——"

And Charlie answered reproachfully:

"There's only one girl in the world for me, darling, and that's your sweet self."

Mollie made a movement to go but Guy for some inexplicable reason detained her—why he could not tell.

"You see," went on Irene, "it's really a matter of difficulty to tell when you and Guy are in earnest. You so often only pay attention to a girl to spite each other. And I told Mollie so!"

"But Guy is in deadly earnest," exclaimed Charlie. "Whatever did Miss Armstrong say? Perhaps after the way you libelled me to her, she is under the impression Guy is only trying to cut me out. Whew!"

At this point Mollie would have fled away in deepest confusion but Guy's hand clasped hers.

"Is that what you thought?"

Her eyes filled with tears as she struggled to escape. "Yes," she acknowledged, "I thought it."

"Mollie, Mollie," he cried, "believe that I love you!"

And as he was in a position to enforce his words she yielded to them.

Ellice Beere.

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Might Try the Same Game.

Miss Peart: "Do you think one is liable to catch anything from kissing?" Mrs. Placid: "That's the way I caught my husband."

She Wasn't the Only Pebble.

She: "If I refuse you, I suppose you'll do some foolish thing or other." He: "Oh, yes; no doubt I'll go and marry some other girl, most likely."

And Hubby Scored.

Wife: "You can't say I ran after you before we were married." Husband: "H'm: The trap doesn't run after the mouse, but it gets him in all the same!"

He'd Sooner Not Say.

She: "Oh, yes, I quite believe there's a fool in every family. Don't you?" He: "Well-er my opinion's rather biassed. You see, I'm the only member of our family."

Did He Do It?

She: "You say you would do anything for me, Charlie." He (fervently): "I would, darling." She: "Well, you know how frightfully red my hair is, I want you to dye yours red, just to keep me in countenance!"

George Would Pay No Parson's Fees.

Laura: "I don't know, George, it seems such a solemn thing to marry. Have you counted the cost?" George: "The cost, Laura? The cost? Bless me, I've got a clergyman cousin that'll marry us for nothing!"

A Clear Course Open for Him.

Old Richfellow (desperately): "If you refuse me what is there left for me to do?" Sweet Girl: "Well, I read the other day about a rich man who made his will in favour of the woman who refused him, and then went and hanged himself."

She Was Engaged at Last.

Mr. Beetleson: "Would you like the date put in our engagement ring, dear?" Miss Beryl: "By all means; and then if there's room, run in some little motto like 'Any port in a storm,' or 'A bird in the hand,' or something pretty like that, you know."

Suited Both Reasonings.

"I wish you would give me that gold ring on your finger," said the village dandy to a country girl, "for it resembles the duration of my love for you—it has no ending." "Excuse me, sir. I chose to keep it as emblematic of my love for you—it has no beginning."

She Had Made a Start.

He (accepted): "You say you were never engaged before?" She: "Yes." He: "How does that happen? I thought all women usually had three or four engagements?" She (guilelessly): "Well, I presume I shall, too. You see, this is the first chance I've had."

Was Her Reply Encouraging?

He: "Will you marry me if I ask your father?" She: "Yes, if you don't get disfigured too badly."

He Didn't Dispair.

Dasher: "Clara, dear, will you be my wife?" Clara: "Have you asked mamma?" Dasher: "Yes; but she won't have me."

Popping the Question Artfully.

Edgar: "You wear pink all the time; I should like to see you in a lace-like white frock." Ethel: "How awfully—awfully sudden."

A Successful Marriage.

Wise Father (to married son): "You are living very nicely, I see; but are you saving any money?" Wise Son (whispering): "Yes, but don't tell my wife."

Not Finally Rejected.

De Long: "Your daughter, sir, has declined me with thanks. She is literary, you know, and she says she is in need of shorter articles." Paterfamilias: "Um! Couldn't you get her to accept you as a serial?"

They Don't Speak Now.

Ella: "Pa says we can't marry for ten years. But don't look so sad, George; you are yet young." George: "Yes, I know I am, dearest. I wasn't thinking of myself, but of you, love." It was at once put off indefinitely.

A Great Shame.

Chappie: "I knelt befoah her, and asked her to be my wife." Chollie: "And she wejected you?" Chappie: "Yaas." Chollie: "That was wough." Chappie: "Yaas. I got my twousahs bagged at the knees for nothing, bah Jove!"

The Joys of Marriage.

"If I had known," sobbed young Mrs. Fits, "that you would be such a brute to poor Fido, I never, never would have married you." "My dear," replied Mr. Fits, "the anticipation of kicking that miserable little beast was one of my chief reasons for proposing to you."

Not Difficult to Believe.

"Your father is worth at least a million," said Hunter to his jealous sweetheart. "Yes, he is," she replied. "And you are his only child!" he impressively said. "I am;" she responded. "And yet you doubt my love," he cried, in tones of blended satire and sorrow.

She Rather Liked It.

Daughter: "What do you think, mamma! That strange gentleman who just got out when we were going through the tunnel kissed me!" Mother: "But, my child, why didn't you tell me at once, so that I could call him to account for it?" Daughter: "Why, you see, mamma, I thought—I thought—that we were coming to another tunnel!"

She Helped Him On.

Bashful Bachelor: "My dearest, I—I have long wished to tell you that I am full—I mean my heart is full—my palpitating heart—I—I mean your smiles—dearest, would shed—would shed——" Aspiring Maiden: "Perhaps, dear, we could live in a flat at first, and then we should not need a wood-shed." (The all important date was settled in five minutes.)

A Foregone Conclusion.

"Now, Algernon," said Miss Fussanfeather, as she was tightly held in the embrace of her *fiancé*, "they tell me that men get tired of squeezing after they are married. Will you promise me not to give it up after we are man and wife?" "Oh, I assure you it is not necessary to make any such promises," replied the young man. "I guarantee you'll have all the squeezing you want to get along on thirty shillings a week."

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A Forced Engagement.

The Story of a Lover's Stratagem.

THERE was some consternation in the village of Reynsham when it was known that Joe Warner, the gamekeeper, had not returned to his lonely cottage. He had gone out as usual, and no one had anticipated any scrimmage with a poacher, yet Warner had not returned at the ordinary hour in the morning.

An affray with poachers was such an out-of-the-way occurrence on Lord Mensem's estate, that the mere mention of such a thing provoked a smile; therefore the notion that Warner had been hurt in a scrimmage was dismissed at once as improbable.

Some accident had befallen him, the villagers agreed, and they made up a search party to scour the woods.

Annie Rawson looked up with a startled glance when a neighbour entered her mother's humble dwelling with the intelligence that a search in the woods was to be made in order to find Joe Warner, and her face grew pale as she listened to the scanty information.

"I'm sorry to be bringing you bad news, Annie," concluded the neighbour with assumed sympathy. In truth, she was proud of being the first to acquaint the girl with what was supposed to have happened. "Perhaps there's nothing in it, and Joe'll be coming home and laughing at us all for being so foolish! I thought I'd better come and tell you before someone else broke it to you rough-like!"

Annie laughed uneasily.

"Perhaps he has gone off somewhere before going home," she observed quietly. "There does not seem to be any cause for alarm."

"That's just as you may like to think," answered the old woman sharply. "If he had had a quarrel with anyone he might go off in a huff, but it takes a lot to make Joe Warner go out of his way. I'll be going now, Mrs. Rawson," she concluded, turning to Annie's mother, who had not said a word, and ignoring Annie.

She left the cottage, and Annie turned a troubled gaze towards her mother.

"Do you think that anything has happened?" she asked, with just a quiver in her voice.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Rawson slowly. "It isn't like Joe's style to act like that. Did you quarrel with him last night, Annie?"

"Yes, mother."

"You have agreed to marry him, yet——" began Mrs. Rawson, but her daughter interrupted her.

"I agreed to marry him and I will marry him!" she cried passionately. "But he must take me as I am. He must——" She broke off abruptly. "I don't wish to talk any more about it, mother. Let us go and join in the search."

Mrs. Rawson rose and went into the next room for her bonnet and shawl; the morning was somewhat chilly. Annie surveyed herself in the mirror, mechanically, as she set her hat on the wealth of brown hair.

The reflection was that of a maiden of twenty years, tall and graceful, with a sweetly attractive face, bright eyes that changed in expression with every mood, and rosy lips through which could be seen the faintest glimmer of white teeth.

There was an appearance of resolution in the girl's face that could not be mistaken, but this seemed to add to her beauty rather than detract from it, as is so often the case in woman.

Annie, although her eyes were fastened on the mirror, saw nothing of this, for her thoughts were far away. A curious struggle was going on within her, a struggle between the sentiments of attraction and repulsion.

Joe Warner had forced himself upon her, and had done his best, or worst, to oust his brother. Joe was a quiet, steady fellow, whom everybody regarded as a man of sterling worth and incapable of a mean action; he was six years older than Annie and three years older than his brother. A match between Joe and Annie was not the kind of union that people would anticipate.

Dick Warner was quite unlike his sedate brother; he lived in town and was better dressed, more alert in manner, and more of a ladies' man than Joe, whom he secretly despised. At least, that was the opinion generally held in the village of Reynsham.

It was not surprising that Dick Warner was smitten by the charms of Annie Rawson; indeed, it would have been wonderful if he had not been. And Annie, although not entirely unsophisticated, yielded to his tender glances and honeyed words. It was at this stage that Joe Warner stepped in and won the prize out of his brother's grasp. How?

Annie's face flushed as she remembered how Joe had forced her to become engaged to him, although she favoured the suit of the more stylish and fascinating Dick Warner.

Almost on the eve of an engagement with Dick, the elder brother had called upon her and threatened—yes, threatened—to expose a certain transaction of her dead father.

She did not understand the matter properly, for she was not versed in business, but she grasped enough of the subject to comprehend that it would be a disgrace to her mother and herself if it became known to the world. Joe, in response to her indignant vindication of her father, told her quietly that he could back it up by proof, and she gave in with a sob.

Yes, to save her father's memory and to keep disgrace from her mother, she would marry Joe, although she would hate him as long as she lived. Joe smiled, a quiet smile full of sadness and not at all indicative of triumph, and left her.

Dick Warner received his dismissal in anger; he asked for a reason, but Annie could give him none, save that it was for the best. Dick said afterwards, with perfect frankness, that if she preferred Joe he could not object, and he hoped she would be happy with his brother.

The engagement was only a month old. During that time Joe had been undemonstratively attentive, and Annie had recognised in him certain excellent qualities which did not accord with the part he had played; notwithstanding his cowardly action, he had commanded a certain amount of respect.

"Are you ready, Annie?" came her mother's voice. "I do hope that nothing has happened; but since Mrs. Booth brought the news I have had an uneasy feeling that I remember a shot while I was in a kind of doze last night. Perhaps it's only imagination, but a hazy recollection comes to me!"

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"Do you really think that Joe has had an affray with poachers, mother?" inquired Annie, hurrying to the door in advance of her mother, so that the latter might not see the agitation in her face.

If anything had happened to Joe Warner she was free, and her father's memory was safe. Was it just to permit even the trace of a sentiment of elation at the thought? She shuddered. "Oh, I hope not!" she concluded fervently, her better nature gaining the mastery.

It was strange that such a commotion had arisen because a gamekeeper had failed to return home in the morning; but it was an extraordinary thing in Joe's case, and all the villagers were filled with the same vague unrest. The people set off into the woods in twos and threes; Annie and her mother went by themselves to an especially secluded portion of the estate.

They wended their way here and there, Annie's anxiety increasing without apparent cause as the time passed. Suddenly Mrs. Rawson uttered a cry, and pointed to the foot of a tall oak.

Joe Warner sat at the foot of the tree, his back against the trunk. His head was thrown back against the tree; his hands clasped a gun half-way along the barrel; the butt end of the weapon rested on the ground between his feet, and a piece of twine ran from the trigger to his foot.

Joe Warner had shot himself! That was the first thought that crossed the minds of the two women. Mrs. Rawson hastened forward, and knelt by Joe's side. She placed her cheek close to his lips and remained motionless for a few seconds.

"He is alive!" she cried abruptly and with animation. "Run and tell them, Annie, and bring a doctor."

Annie gave another horrified glance at the motionless figure and was about to dart away for help when a curious, indefinable sentiment impelled her to go forward, kneel near her mother, and kiss the pallid face of the wounded man.

Mrs. Rawson untied the string and put it in her pocket. Then she threw the gun into the bushes.

"Oh, mother," she burst forth, "has he tried to kill himself because—because he forced me to take his ring, and——?"

"Run for help, quick!" cried Mrs. Rawson sharply. She did not understand her daughter's words. "And don't tell anyone that he had the gun like that! I don't believe in it! Don't forget!"

Annie ran off for assistance, while Mrs. Rawson, with set features, untied the string and hid it in her pocket. Then she took Joe's gun and threw it among the nearest trees. Having accomplished so much, she again knelt by his side, opened his waistcoat, and examined the wound.

"It did not bleed much," she muttered. "The soft shirt seems to have staunched the blood. This has not been done long. No suicide about this, but—an attempt to kill, in my opinion. It was a clever dodge, and the villain will expect to hear that Joe Warner was found in such-and-such a position. He will be amazed when he hears nothing of the kind, but he will not be able to say anything. I must keep my ears wide open. The rascal may let something slip in his surprise and annoyance that will afford a clue!"

It was not long before help arrived, including the village doctor. Joe's wound was pronounced to be less dangerous than it appeared to be, much to the relief of the inhabitants of Reynsham, and he was borne tenderly, but still unconscious, to his own home.

Annie went with the rough ambulance and assisted Joe's housekeeper to attend to him and make everything comfortable for him. The old woman would have resented it if Mrs. Rawson had done it, but Annie had a right to be by the side of her affianced husband. So she stayed.

The greatest excitement prevailed in Reynsham; there really had been an affray with poachers, then, however improbable it had seemed to the worthy people.

The police were informed, and everyone was waiting for poor Joe Warner to recover consciousness and give some clue to his assailants.

Annie heard of the expectations of the inhabitants and she dreaded the awakening of the man to whom she was engaged; her mother had destroyed the evidence of attempted suicide, but that was to prevent Joe from being punished if he should recover, she thought. Suppose he were to utter some incriminating words before he was fully conscious?

Why had he done it? Was it out of remorse for his conduct towards her? She felt a kind of pity, a sense of grateful clemency springing up within her; he would renounce his intention and allow her to choose freely, keeping to himself the dread secret.

At last he opened his eyes with a long-drawn sigh. Annie waited in a state of feverish anxiety; she longed to be able to give him some sign that should warn him, but the police were represented, and the doctor was there.

Joe gazed about him vacantly and Annie's heart contracted; he would betray himself.

"Am I much hurt?" were his first words.

"Oh!" responded the doctor with grave cheerfulness. "You will soon pull round. Of course you remember how it occurred?"

"Someone fired at me!" returned Joe, after a pause. "I fancied—that I recognised him, but—I can't describe him."

This was rather disappointing to the police, but it was a relief to Annie, although she was convinced that Joe was not telling the truth.

"We mustn't worry him any more," declared the doctor authoritatively. "He will get stronger and then he will be able to tell you."

He asked them to leave, and quitted the house himself shortly afterwards. Annie sat by his bedside; she expected a confession that would make her glad, she longed for Joe to gain strength so that she might know that she was free to marry Dick Warner.

"Annie!"

It was Joe's voice; the girl had fallen into a reverie from which she was aroused with a start.

"Annie, I'm sorry I spoke roughly to you last night," the wounded man proceeded. "It isn't my usual way, but

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youangered me when you told me that you thought twenty times as much of Dick as you did of me!"

His voice wavered; he stopped to regain breath, and the girl dare not trust herself to speak.

"It was hard on me, for I love you a thousand times more than he can, Annie." There was a ring of suppressed passion in the weak voice. "Do you hear that? It cut me to the heart, and I said angry words."

The girl remained silent.

"You hate me, Annie! You hate me, when I would give my life for you any day. Ah, you don't know how I have tried to save you. And now, if I die, I sha'n't be able to save you."

"What do you mean?" The girl's question was sharp and full of wondering surprise. "You tried to kill yourself to save me, yet you say that if you die—— Keep still, Joe, you are wandering in your mind."

"It's false. Who says I tried?"

"You were found propped against the trunk of a tree, holding your gun. Mother and I found you, but we have said nothing." And she told him the circumstance.

"The villain!" he gasped, raising himself on his elbow and falling back with a groan. "He tried to kill me; he thought he had killed me; and he endeavoured to make it appear suicide. Clever, but he *forgot the bullet!* My gun is still loaded, unless he discharged it purposely; and even then, it must be possible for these clever detectives to find the bullet or to prove by the wound that I was shot with a pistol."

He lay panting for a few moments, while Annie looked at him in bewilderment. The housekeeper was out, so she had Joe to herself.

"Who was it?" she asked, and the reply stunned her for the time.

"My brother!"

Annie sank back in her chair limp and inarticulate. Joe fixed his eyes on her; a great resolve settled in them. Speaking in a low tone in order to husband his strength, he told his story steadily.

"My brother was here yesterday. He met me in a quiet spot and said that he was sorry for all the trouble he had caused me. He was glad that I was to marry you, as he was not worthy of you. He was so different from his usual manner, so full of remorse for the past, that I was deceived. He told me that he intended to emigrate and to do better in another country. I believed he was sincere, and we parted like brothers.

"Then, when I saw you last night, I found that he had been to see you in spite of what he said to me; I found that he had been at work again in his underhand way and had tried to make you dislike me all the more. In my annoyance at his treachery, in my vexation at having been fooled, I spoke sharply to you and we quarrelled.

"Yes, we quarrelled because you believed him to be all that is good and you take me to be a mean, despicable rascal, who would force you into a marriage against your will. It surprises you to hear me speak of my brother and his *past*. I have always spoken considerately of him; that is because I would not betray my brother. He took advantage of it. But he has tried to kill me, and it is well that *you*, at least, should know the truth."

Annie Rawson remained in the recumbent position in the chair; her eyes were fixed straight in front of her, but she was listening to every word.

"I went on duty last night," continued Joe, "without fear of any mishap. It was getting light when, as I stood by that tree, I turned and saw a figure levelling a pistol at me. I know who it was. I had no time to make any attempt to save myself. There was a report and I fell. It was my brother who fired at me."

Annie shuddered. Joe noted her ashen face, and continued:

"It is time to tell you why I forced you to give him up. It was to save you from a villain. It was because I loved you so, that I could not endure the thought of your giving yourself to a man who would either desert you very soon or break your heart by his own heartlessness.

"I saw that he was exerting his usual fatal fascination and that you were falling a victim. I knew that you did not care for me; I knew that what I thought of doing would destroy for ever my hope of winning your love—for I had hoped to win it, Annie! But I sacrificed myself for your sake.

"Dick has already broken one woman's heart, and he is a forger. He did it cleverly and escaped his deserts, but I possess the information that would send him to prison. I have kept it secret to spare him the horrors of penal servitude, but if it were known I should be indicted with him and sent to prison as an accessory after the fact. Nevertheless, I ran the risk, because he was my brother.

"Then he came down here and tried to take you. That was more than I could bear. I threatened in my desperation that I would expose him and he laughed at me, saying that I should be punished with him. I would have risked that rather than see you fall a victim, but he artfully got into my room and destroyed the evidence!

"After that, my only course was to use the other method. I hated myself, but it was for your sake. Perhaps I acted foolishly; perhaps there might have been a better way; but I did what I thought was best in my ignorance!

"I tried first of all to persuade you to give up Dick, but you refused. I expected that and it did you credit; you are so true. So I brought pressure to bear on you by telling you something which Dick had told me about your father. I judged that it would have the desired effect.

"Out of regard for your father's memory you yielded, and you did not say a word to your mother. I was glad, for I do not believe a word of it. It was my intention to impose on you till I had got Dick away—away somewhere so that you could not marry him, or else to keep matters hanging on till he tired of you and went to some other woman, I thought I could wear out his patience. So——"

He ceased speaking and Annie turned her eyes, full of tears, towards him. She could not doubt the sincerity of his story; a man in that critical condition does not say what is false. She began to realise his sacrifice.

She recognised the sterling qualities which prompted him to shield his brother and to save her; and even his crude method of doing this service to her by temporarily blackening her father's memory was not inexcusable. He thought it was the only sure way of effecting the purpose, and it was only between themselves. No one else knew it.

It was a cruel blow to her pride that she had been deceived by Dick, and this made her more lenient towards Joe.

"I am sorry," she said simply. And he was satisfied.

They were so intent on their own immediate concerns that they did not hear a slight rustle near the door. It was Mrs. Rawson slipping away, with a hard expression on her lips. She had entered very softly in time to hear Joe's story.

"So he tried to blacken Will's character, eh?" she murmured. "Well, I know enough to send him to pri on for a long term. The piece of string attached to the trigger of the gun is the piece I saw him take from the stool in front of the house when he left Annie yesterday afternoon. I can swear to it, so can Annie when I point something out to her. And we both saw it attached to the gun. There's no escape for him, but shall I——? If he will give me a written denial of that lie, and clear out of the country, I'll let him go so as not to upset Joe and Annie."

Mrs. Rawson left Reynsham next day for London, and when she returned she looked radiant, and as soon as Joe was well enough, she told him in Annie's presence all about her interview with Dick Warner in London and showed him the statement written out by his rascally brother.

"He will leave the country within a week or I'll put the police on his track, and he knows that I mean what I say. Then I made him confess on paper," said Mrs. Rawson.

"I am glad," said Joe, in his grave, simple manner. "Perhaps Annie will learn to like me a little some day."

The girl blushed, and Joe took her in his arms.

G. Hubert.

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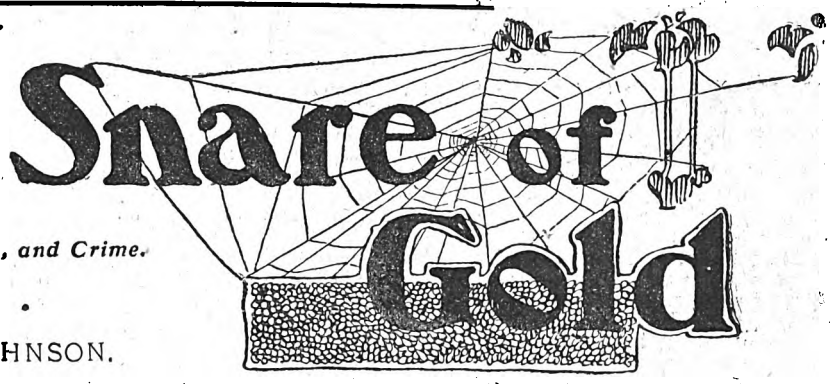
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who is betrothed to Eric.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Springle Does Some Detective Work.

"RONALD! Ronald! Heavens! is it you?"

It was Clare Armitage's voice, it was Clare's hand laid on his arm, and Ronald Geldart, just emerging from the offices of *The Meteor*, paused.

"Clare!" he exclaimed. An impulse possessed him to extend a friendly hand; then he remembered the hard, accusing look she had fixed upon him at their last meeting and their last parting, and the impulse was gone.

Still, rancour was gone from his heart too, for she had greeted him in the old familiar tone, the old smile was on her lips, and then again there were lines in her face and hollows, too, that touched his heart to pity.

"They told me that you were leaving England, that you were gone," she said.

"They told many things regarding me," he answered bitterly, "quite as untrue and infinitely more cruel."

"Yes, yes, I know!"

"You knew they were untrue? Then why did you not speak?"

"Oh, don't ask me; I—I can't tell you now. Only, Ronald, we must meet somewhere, you and I, for a quiet chat; I've a lot to tell you, not here, nor now, my heart is too full. Tell me where you can be found?"

Ronald for a moment hesitated then gave her the address in Bloomsbury Square.

He had that morning arrived in town for the purpose of calling on several publishers with reference to commissions, and also with the intent of booking his passage a few days hence for the States, whither he was bound on a trip partly of business, partly of pleasure, for his works were attracting considerable attention on the other side. He scribbled the address upon a card.

"Write to me there," he said, "and I will keep any appointment you may like to make. Only tell me, Clare, you don't believe me the thief that once you thought me?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said. "Ask me nothing now, I will tell you everything when next we meet. But, Ronald, you have given me somebody else's card. This says "Harvey Bligh." Why, that's the new man whose work has caught on so wonderfully. Do you know him, are you in his line? You always had a hankering that way!"

"I am Harvey Bligh," he said simply, without boasting, and yet not without a kind of simple, honest pride that he had made honoured and well known the name he had chosen—yes, even better known than that it was his right by blood to bear.

And so they went their ways. He wondering what strange message she had to tell, she exulting in her heart that the means of avenging herself upon the man who had wronged her and of righting the brother he had so cruelly betrayed were at last within her power.

As she hurried along, she looked up, her eyes encountered the gaze of the very man against whom she plotted that revenge. Yes! there he sat in an open carriage drawn by a pair of horses, and facing him, beside her father, sat the Hon. Madeleine Lorraine, radiant in the sunshine of her twenty summers.

Clare's heart writhed in the anguish of a woman's jealousy as she gazed upon the rival whose loveliness, whose wealth, and whose prospective coronet had won from her the heart to win which she had lost so much.

And the tempest in Clare Armitage's heart swelled and whirled into a cyclone. She felt she could have sprung there from the pavement across the open street and, pointing an accusing hand at Eric Geldart, charged him then and there with all his perfidy—perfidy to her, requiting with brutality all she had risked and dared for him, perfidy to his own blood brother, whom he would without a scruple have relegated to a prison cell, perfidy to his dead father. Yes! she felt she could have screamed all this into his ear there in the open street.

A moment and the carriage had rattled past, its wheels splashing Clare as though in token of the scorn of Eric Geldart for whom she had dared all, of Eric Geldart, slanderer of his brother, robber of his father, his dead father.

"Oh Heavens!" She clutched at her heart with her hands, for there for a moment in the busy crowd that came and went,

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her eyes rested for a moment upon the image of one she thought she recognised; but the face and the eyes seemed to her to be those of the dead!

* * *

Mr. Horace Springle that night returned to Bloomsbury Square with so portentous an air that Arethusa, taking up his hot water, was constrained to inquire if anything "'ad 'appened," the inquiry being met by a chilling recommendation to mind her own business and remember her position. Descending towards the dining-room he was met on the landing by Mrs. Skimper with palpably a bill in her hand and a deadly determination in her eyes.

"Mr. Springle, sir," the good lady observed with asperity. "I am sorry to be imperative, but there is a little matter which I must have an understanding about, once for all."

"Really, Mrs. Skimper," Horace replied airily. "Yes, and, by the bye, before we go into that, there's another matter, perhaps of less importance, that I should like to dispose of first, one of those matters I never like to keep hanging about."

"Indeed, Mr. Springle, and what may be the nature of the matter?"

"Oh, it's merely your little account. Perhaps you'll kindly have it made out and let me have it receipted with the change out of this"—and, with the air of a Midas, Mr. Springle handed his hostess one of his newly acquired five-pound notes.

Mrs. Skimper gasped, clutched at the bannisters to save herself from falling, then, gazing at Springle's five pound note with open eyes, she stammered, meanwhile surreptitiously thrusting the slip of paper in her other hand into her pocket.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Springle. What I was going to say was—dear me! I've almost forgotten what I was going to say. Oh, let me see. I remember. I was going to ask whether it would be convenient for you to have the ceiling of your room whitewashed, only, of course, your anxiety about your account quite drove it out of my head. I'll have it made out certainly this evening, it won't take long," which remark she made with perfect confidence in the knowledge that it was in her pocket.

Mr. Springle, entering the dining-room, nodded jauntily to Miss Amaranth, somewhat casually to Mr. Grimmage, glared at Mr. Dodgerson, who was glaring at him, and there directly opposite him sat the man of all others with whom he desired to come in contact—Harvey Bligh.

Ronald for his part was too much occupied with his own reflections to observe Springle's start of surprise. He had returned to Bloomsbury Square for the purpose of gathering together such of his traps as he would require during the projected sea trip and make arrangements for the storage of the rest, for which purpose he had arranged to pitch his tent in Bloomsbury Square for some few days.

That start, however, was not lost on Miss Amaranth nor on the rest of the company.

"We are honoured to-night," said that lady in her most gushing tones, "with the company of a celebrity."

"Quite right," said Springle. "Been away, Mr. Bligh? Seaside? No! Moors? No! Ah! it's nice to be you, pitching your tent and striking it at will, and no being late at the office because other people are late with your breakfast," and he winked at Grimmage and the rest, while Mrs. Skimper coloured to the hue of her cherry ribbons.

Ronald on this occasion experienced two surprises. Firstly, Mr. Springle was uncommonly polite; secondly, he was more than usually inquisitive.

Not that he plied the usual questions addressed to the successful man in any particular branch of art or literature, as to how he did it, what made him think of those sensational scenes, that sparkling dialogue, what suggested that magnificent picture, or such and such a haunting melody. Were the people in his book or play really taken from life?

On the contrary, Mr. Springle's apparently casual inquiries appertained to Mr. Harvey Bligh's personal movements, antecedents, and projects.

How long was he remaining at Mrs. Skimper's? What were his movements after leaving there? Where had he been during his absence? Indeed, the pertinacity of his questions might have struck Ronald as peculiar, but that his thoughts were far away, and the answers he returned were vague and absent-minded.

For his mind was full of Madeleine. Ever since they parted he had been wondering would they meet again, and where, and how, and would she be as cold to him as when they parted?

Then he thought of that strange haphazard meeting with Clare Armitage, and of her wild words. What did it all mean? Why had she so suddenly, albeit so late in the day, veered round to a belief in his innocence?

He remembered how she had been when first the appalling accusation was hurled at him by his father that he had robbed him, and he, Ronald, appalled by the very horror of the thing, had flown first to Clare, who had always been to him and Eric so like a sister, for solace, for sympathy, and for advice. Even now her words rang in his ear.

"You say this accusation wrings your very heart. Do you imagine it causes less anguish to your accuser? If, as you say, you are innocent, all you have to do is to disprove it."

Yes, that was all he had to do, disprove that base and baseless charge. But, groundless as that accusation was, that was just what he could not do—disprove it. And now that his accuser had died, believing that awful charge well founded, to Ronald it seemed almost as if it did not matter as to the rest.

"Be thou chaste as ice, pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

He knew himself that he was innocent. It was too late now to convince him, whose esteem he valued most, of the truth. As for the others, let them go! So that for the remainder of the evening the company at Mrs. Skimper's found Harvey Bligh peculiarly preoccupied, and with charming generosity attributed his taciturnity to superciliousness, self-consciousness, swelled head, and other kindred causes.

When after dinner he left the house, they expressed themselves accordingly with volubility, declaring that success had spoilt him and that the room of that conceited, overrated scribbler was preferable to his company. The one exception was Miss Amaranth at the piano, who pensively reflected that there was no one to turn over her music in the absence of the one real gentleman she had ever met at Mrs. Skimper's.

And just after he had left the postman brought, with others, a letter addressed in a feminine hand to Harvey Bligh, Esq. It happened no one else was in the hall and Springle, quietly slipping it into his pocket, took it with him to his room, then rang for hot water.

"And when I say hot, Arethusa," he said sharply, "I don't mean tepid, I don't mean lukewarm, I mean H-O-T—hot!"

"Like his own temper," murmured Arethusa, descending the stairs. "He's been and paid his bill, that's what he's done; he always gives hisself these airs. What's he want shaving water twice in one evening for?"

Nevertheless, she took him up the hot water and Mr. Springle, lifting the lid, placed Harvey Bligh's letter over the steam, and, assisted by its persuasive power, unfastened the envelope. This done he read as follows:

"My Dear Ronnie,—*Since seeing you this morning my brain has been in a whirl. It is late in the day for the wrong that has been done you to be repaired; still, it is never too late to mend. Give me an appointment at some quiet hour in some quiet place, and I will tell you that which will lift the shadow from your life.*—*Yours,* Clare Armitage."

Mr. Springle, having noted its contents, reclosed the letter, descended the stairs in his coat and hat, stealthily replaced that letter in the rack, and in a moment he was whistling for a cab at the hall door.

"Why, whatever's the matter with Springle?" growled Mr. Grimmage. "Has he come into money? He was as cool as a cucumber to old Mother Skimper at dinner, and just now when I asked if he would make one at a game of

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whist, said he'd got an important appointment—at the Mogul, I suppose, or the Oxford, or the Royal."

"I suppose so," replied Mr. Dodgerson, who at times had strange lapses out of his deafness, "there he is whistling for a hansom," and moving to the hall door, he gently opened it a trifle ajar, then a moment later he turned to Grimmage, asking: "Did you hear where he told him to drive to?"

"Well, if you didn't," growled Grimmage, "how can you expect I did?"

"But I did," answered Dodgerson, "he told the man to drive to the House of Commons, and to drive like blazes, and it's my belief that Springle's coming into money."

Meantime Mr. Springle, almost as inflated with importance as the frog who emulated the ox, whizzed along in a hansom towards the House of Commons, and, making his way to the outer lobby, asked loftily and sufficiently audibly for all bystanders to hear, for his card to be taken immediately to Mr. Eric Geldart.

A few minutes later Mr. Springle swelled more than ever with importance when the member for Little Claverton, hastening along the corridor, greeted him with an effusive handshake and a "Hallo, old chap, how do you do? What has brought you here?"

"News," whispered Springle, "important news."

"What! Already?"

"Yes, only, Mr. Geldart, do you think there's any chance of my running up against old Scrimshaw?"

"Not the slightest: he left the House after the last division. I heard him asking one of the Whips if he'd be wanted any more."

"Ah, gone to his flat to sit up all night over those mysterious calculations he's been grinding at lately, or perhaps gone back to the City to work at 'em with Old Mystery, who seems to live in that little office over ours."

"Very possibly, very possibly," said Eric impatiently, "but, Springle, your news—your news, what have you ascertained?"

"Well, I've seen him."

"Seen whom—not my—my—the man of whom we spoke?"

"Yes, yes, your friend, Mr. Harvey Bligh. He was at our place to-night."

They went into the library, seeking a quiet corner.

"By Jove, Springle," said Eric, "you're a smart man. I knew your calibre when I asked you to take up this little business. Have you anything else to report?"

"I should think I have," said Springle. "Are all these people M.P.'s? They don't look very imposing."

"Yes, yes, but what else have you to tell me?"

"He's received a letter this very evening."

"Do you know from whom?"

"Oh, yes. By the bye, before I go you might get me into the Strangers' Gallery."

"Certainly, certainly, only about the letter, a letter from whom?"

"Why, from the very party you told me to get Varney's to shadow."

"What, from Clare Armitage?"

"That's her, only I'm not quite certain she hasn't put the wrong letter in his envelope, because she commences it: 'My dear Ronnie,'" and then Mr. Springle went on to read his note of the contents of that letter. "Why, Mr. Geldart, ain't you well?" for over Eric's face had stolen a ghastly pallor. The man he had wronged and the woman he had wronged were approaching each other, might soon be joining hands and planning their revenge and his destruction.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing," he said, wiping the cold drops from his brow, "a little faintness, I've been rather overworked lately. Look here, Springle, you've done your work well, and I'll reward you well. There's one other item of information I want you to get me. Find out and let me know at once by telegram, telephone, anyway as quickly as possible, when and where those two are going to meet?"

Mr. Springle promised and was further honoured by being accompanied by the hon. member to the members' own buffet, and there being regaled by the hon. member with a Scotch-and-soda and a cigar, after which the hon. member, having obtained for him a seat in the Strangers' Gallery, Mr. Springle listened to a debate drearier than any at which he had ever assisted at any public-house discussion in the Metropolis.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The System Is Put into Force.

THE bond between Sampson Scrimshaw and Old Mystery grew closer and stronger, greatly to the mystification of the extensive clerical staff of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, who were puzzled to account for the continual telephonic and speaking-tube communication between their managing director's private room and the quiet, dreary little room upstairs, the sheaves of papers covered with armies of figures, the often continual clatter up and down the staircase of messengers with cablegrams for Old Mystery, and the intermittent and protracted visits of Scrimshaw to the office upstairs, followed by, on his return, periods of bustle in the first and ground floor offices, taxing the energies of the staff, and driving Mr. Springle to the verge of distraction.

For the system was booming. Scrimshaw's scepticism with regard to it was quite broken down, and, like most sceptics when converted, he had become a bigot. But it had stood the severest tests, had been proved and as its scope of operations had expanded, so also had the success of its result.

Scrimshaw, who had regarded himself a past master of finance, freely confessed that in Old Mystery, the weird, lonely old man in the little room upstairs, he had met one to whom he was but as a little child battling with rudiments.

But only to himself he confessed it, for he was loyal to his partner in the system and to the system itself, which could not have succeeded but for the observance of that first and last condition.

And as their operations expanded, so the Stock Markets began to experience strange unaccountable waves, which at times played havoc with the ordinary routine of business.

For it was part of the principle of this complex system to buy for certain rises, to sell for certain falls, and, strangely enough, to sell for certain other falls, and to buy for certain other rises; in fact, financial juggling entered largely into the scheme.

So that it happened that every now and then the market was mystified by unexpected, undreamt-of slumps, unaccountable for by the ordinary logic of business; or now and then a boom which, according to sound calculation, never ought to have happened, staggered Capel Court, and for hours kept Throgmorton Street in a whirl.

And meantime Scrimshaw was amassing a pile that he found absolutely ponderous, garnering wealth, the weight of which oppressed him. His donations staggered the world, Brixwell blessed the hour that it elected him, and wondered how it could even for a moment have hesitated.

Nearly every issue of a Society paper recorded some princely gift or purchase by him. His yachts, his horses, his motor-cars, were the theme of awe-stricken wonderment, and even American millionaires drew in their horns at Christie, Manson, and Wood's, Sotheby's, and Quaritch's, when his agent began to bid in earnest.

Duchesses in difficulties, impecunious peers, statesmen, artists, divines, besought his counsel as to their investments, but as a rule to these supplications he was deaf and adamant.

"I don't mind buying up your charity bazaar. I'll give you a peal of bells for your church tower, a new tower for your peal of bells, a new church for your new tower, if you like, but advice is a line I don't trade in. It's an article I've never been partial to taking, that's why I'm where I am. It's always seemed to me a sort of morphia, people who have used themselves to taking it get into a way of not being able to do without it, and are generally the worse for it."

Occasionally, however, he would relax this rule and tell some struggling, almost despairing man that such and such a stock would be good to buy and hold till such and such a time, or would give a friend a warning that unless he wanted to

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lose his capital he had best get out of certain securities without delay, or as when he said to Jack Widdicombe :

"Look here, I'm very pleased with the way you've engineered *The Meteor*. I'm going to show my appreciation in a tangible shape. Now, Widdicombe, if I were to give you a cheque for a thousand pounds by way of bonus what would you say ?"

"I should say," replied Cousin Jack, "that I'd been well paid for what I've done, and while I shouldn't be fool enough to refuse it ; I should consider it an unearned increment."

"Precisely," said Scrimshaw, "and unearned increments are not to be encouraged, so I sha'n't give you that thousand pounds, Jack. But I'm going to hand you scrip of the face value of two hundred and fifty pounds in Golden Slippers Ordinary," whereupon Scrimshaw handed his trusty lieutenant two hundred shares in a mine which two months later was paying a dividend of two hundred per cent. its shares being absolutely unpurchasable for love or money.

And in another instance, when sending Phyllis Daventry upon her annual holiday he handed her with her salary a share transfer with the remark : "Now, don't sell these, my dear, but lock them up for just about three months and then you will have a little by you to make a comfortable marriage portion," which, as Phyllis with indignant blushes said to Mr. Widdicombe afterwards, was absurd, as she never meant to marry, but to be a little old maid with a tortoise-shell cat singing on the hearth, a canary singing in the window, a bright brass kettle singing on the fire.

"And you'll let me call sometimes for a cup of tea ?" said Cousin Jack, who was thinking how delightful it would be if he, too, had a canary singing in the window, a tabby or a tortoiseshell cat singing on the hearth, a bright brass kettle singing on the grate, and a bright little body singing at the piano across the room, for Cousin Jack was getting dreamy.

It is not to be imagined that Mr. Scrimshaw's gains were made without entailing other people's losses ; that is not the Market's way.

The gigantic deals, the sudden coups, the swift unloading or hauling in of a stock at this price or that, these operations that meant fortunes to Scrimshaw and Old Mystery were fraught with disaster to others, since in the Share Market, as elsewhere, omelettes are not made without breaking eggs.

Many an unfortunate broker, misled by the temporary turn the wave had taken, had unloaded his stock just too late, and as a consequence been incontinently hammered.

Well in the swim of those to whom Scrimshaw's and Old Mystery's successful coups had meant disaster were Eric Geldart and his partner Blagdon, who, thinking the time was ripe to get rich in a hurry, had plunged well out of their depth.

And so well Scrimshaw and Old Mystery kept their secret and manipulated their financial operations that though the financial world was convinced that some deep laid and subtle movement was afloat, no one in the world could identify the movers.

All kinds of rumours were abroad, connecting all kinds of public people with the mysterious influence that one day bulled a stock apparently below par to a startling premium, and perhaps the next beared another till its holders, unloading in panic, threw it on the market at any price, on which occasions Old Mystery was exceptionally busy and Scrimshaw seemed to live with his ear and mouth glued to the telephone.

Russian princes, great financial houses, a certain South African potentate, an uncertain ex-Cabinet minister, a great lady in Society, a talented actress, whose face was not her only fortune and who had a genius for figures, an eminent boat-building bacon curer—these, and a hundred others were guessed at as prime movers in the movement.

But so closely was the secret kept, that Scrimshaw's own clients, hastening to him with the above and other rumours, intrusted him with various commissions, avowedly based upon anticipation of the next move of the unknown wizards.

Eric Geldart, hastening into the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, mysteriously, agitatedly, almost breathlessly, said :

"Look here, Scrimshaw, I must have another slap at Westralians."

"Ah ?"

"Yes, Kenilworths will touch ten before the week's out ; Lynton and I have decided to buy for the rise."

"But Lord Lynton's account shows a very heavy balance against him ; and yours—um !"

"Yes, but, my dear fellow, this is bound to come off, I've got it straight from the stable by a side wind, that confounded mysterious syndicate is going to bull the stock for all its worth."

"Indeed ?"

"Yes, a man told me at the Duchess of Shropshire's last night ; he had it from Anastasia Amburgris—she's Prince Paul Stanislaus' friend, you know. It's right as rain."

Mr. Scrimshaw booked the transaction with an imperturbable countenance, and various others from time to time, sometimes in his office in the City, and others in the dining or smoke room of the House of Commons, with the result that ere long when Eric faced Scrimshaw he flinched.

Old Mystery and Scrimshaw sat together one night in the little office upstairs counting up their gains upon the day, upon the week, upon the month, upon the System.

"Why !" exclaimed Scrimshaw, laying down his pen with a sigh of astonishment, almost of bewilderment, "Old Mystery, this beats Monte Cristo hollow !"

"Yes," said the other, "only this is fact, the other was fiction. What do you think of the System now ?"

"I think it's only a question of time for us, by rigidly adhering to it, to garner in the wealth of all the world."

"Given time it would be bound to, but for other things—the revolutions and the riots that would be born of the panics it would cause, even practised upon our narrow scale."

"Narrow scale !" exclaimed the other, looking at the row of eight figures representing his share of the net gain. But Old Mystery went on thoughtfully :

"Yes, narrow scale ; for supposing we had begun where we are leaving off, not a house in Europe but must have gone, scarcely a throne or state whose credit would not have been shaken. Only last week Paris was mad with panic, laying it all at the door of the Jews and Dreyfusards."

"It's playing the dickens with a lot of people," said Scrimshaw sententiously ; "a lot of my clients, little guessing I've been working the oracle, have been telling me the croppers they've come. There's old Viscount Lynton in despair."

"Why, he ought to be jubilant, the Pneumatic Intacto has boomed like a Yankee show."

"True, but my lord couldn't afford to wait. His one pound shares went up to three, and he got smitten with some wild-cat scheme young Geldart and that jelly-bag of a partner of his were keen upon."

"Jelly-bag is good !" grunted Old Mystery.

"Geldart brought the thing along to me ; but I didn't see it, it clashed with a concern of my own, though I didn't tell him so, and I was bound to strangle it, which I did, though no one guessed I had a hand in it."

"So all the money Lynton made with you he dropped in the other affair ?"

"Yes, and a bit more, and now he's tearing his hair and vowing that one thing only can save him from bankruptcy."

"And that is ?" the other asked, with a quick gleam in the eyes sunk like caverns beneath his bushy brows.

"His daughter consenting to bar the entail and bringing her own money to the rescue."

"And she ?"

"She's willing enough, but it's a question whether it can be done, whether the dead hand doesn't grip the estates too tight ; they are the points the lawyers are considering."

"Aha !" Old Mystery chuckled, "the dead hand grips hard sometimes."

"Yes," said the other, "I've another case in point ; there's that fellow Geldart, he's got bitten, too, and it makes my flesh

(*Continued on page 446.*)

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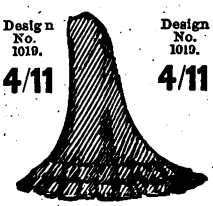

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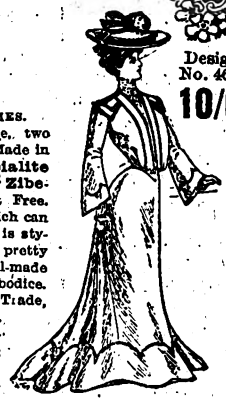

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creep to hear him reviling his dead father for tying up the money so that he couldn't deal with it in a heap."

"And lose it in a heap," chuckled the other.

"Exactly so," Scrimshaw went on, "only it's a bit off after hearing his Nibs distributing prizes and hammering the Fifth Commandment into the Mutual Improvement young men and young women, and his smug references to his ever-lamented father. Yes! and the very tablet he rigged up where the worthy old man's lying, to hear him going for his thick-headed stupidity and crassness. Well, good-night, Old Mystery, I must be off to the House," and Scrimshaw, looking at his watch, hurried to the door.

On opening it suddenly he exclaimed:

"What the dickens are you prowling about here for?"

"I just came up to ask if you wanted me to wait any longer, sir," stuttered Mr. Springle, shambling there on the landing.

"I never told you to wait."

"No, but I thought you might want me, sir."

"You thought! If I thought for certain what I'm almost thinking I'd kick you down those stairs. Mark me, let me catch you prying into my concerns, listening to my conversations, or playing the spy, I'll make you wish you'd never been born. You thought I might want you; nobody in the world wants a thing like you; you're only fit to wear a stand-up collar and to talk skittles to a barmaid across a counter."

"If that's so, perhaps, sir, I'd better look out for something else," said Springle, trying to be brave.

"Just as you like," said the other, fixing him steadily with a gaze before which Springle squirmed, "only before you go remember I'm going to check your petty cash account myself. Now go downstairs, don't let me catch you loitering near this door again."

Springle, white and trembling, obeyed. And Old Mystery, who had hastened to the door, asked: "What does that mean?"

"That some of the petty cash has stuck to his fingers, that's about the size of it," said Scrimshaw.

"Then I should get rid of him," said the other; "there's not much use in a thief."

"I don't know; sometimes they are useful, as for instance when we set one—to catch one."

"Ah!"

"And this fellow is useful in many ways. I know he carries what he thinks are secrets to various of my high-minded clients, who think any trick or dodge is fair against the 'bucket-shop keeper,' and so I take care to myself select the information that is going to leak. When a man plays me false, Old Mystery, I leave no stone unturned to crush him underneath my heel. Good night."

"Good night," Old Mystery replied, and returning to his little office he sat there alone in the silence of the City after hours, intensified rather than broken by the scratching of his pen, the ticking of the clock, the creaking of doors and timbers and the other sounds that seem born of stillness. And he too added up the figures of his gains.

"Just as I always told them!" he soliloquised, "and they believed I was dreaming, mocked and scoffed at me. No doubt, now, deeming me dead and gone they still scoff at what they deemed the excrescence of my disordered brain. How well it happened, after all! They say all's for the best!

"It was a near thing to the horror of all horrors, only a chance that when I woke up I didn't wake to find all dark with tons above me, walled in by wood and hemmed in on every side by bricks and earth, to that and swift suffocation. But as it all turned out I woke in time to learn that those I had believed false were true, that those whom I had believed faithful were false.

"And now haven't I carried it far enough? I've made enough in this second spell of mine to render what I left them to wrangle for, to lie for, to thieve for, a flea-bite. I've proved the System, the system that I dreamt about and worked out all through the old life, I've carried out in the second. Now I am hungering to go back to the first; I want to go back to my boys; I'm hungering to forgive the one and to ask forgiveness of the other."

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Ronald Learns the Truth.

With a beating heart, Clare Armitage set forth that night to meet Ronald Geldart and make a clean breast of the story of the wrong she and his brother had wrought him, to lay bare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; for in her hand she held his letter answering hers:

"*Meet me to-morrow night at ten outside the Sloane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields.* Ronald."

What was it, that vague chill that seemed to strike her like an icy wind, when standing before her glass she fixed on her hat and cloak. What was it that the wind without seemed moaning to the trees? "Don't go! don't go!"

She went out in the busy street, let herself out at the door—the latch had slipped and for a while stayed fixed and sodden as though its will was that she should not go. Out in the streets she hailed an omnibus, the driver took no heed and the conductor shook his head.

"Full up, miss!"

Impatient and annoyed she signalled to a cab that rattled past.

"Got a fare, miss!" he shouted cheerfully.

She walked on; a drab mist was gathering, a bleak east wind was blowing, bearing on its cutting breath an icy sleet that beat her veil against her face, as though to bid her not to go and drive her back! A clock chimed out the hour. Half-past nine and as its clang fell on her ears it seemed to say: "You are too late, go back—too late to go, not too late to turn back, turn back in time!"

But she would go on, she was going to do right, she said, not for the sake of doing right, but of getting quits with one who had done wrong. Not because he had done wrong to him she was going to right, but because he had wronged her, had not kept faith even in wrong doing.

A little child approached her, she had lost her way. Would she help her to find it? The way lay behind and the little child's imploring voice whimpered: "Lady, take me back!" But no, no, she had no time, she pointed the way back to the child, then on she went.

A black cat stalked across her path, almost beneath her feet, so that she almost stumbled over it, and, startled by her cry, it turned and, arching its back, blazed its yellow eyes and spat at her.

Round a sharp bend in the street four men crossed her path, and she, halting, with an icier chill than ever at her heart, saw they carried something on their shoulders, and the covered shell, whether empty or not, seemed to whisper to her: "Don't go—don't go!"

But on—on she went, though life and death both seemed to whisper warning. Shutting her eyes and ears to the reiterated unfavourable omen on she went.

In the Hampstead Road she succeeded in securing a cab at last. Reaching Tottenham Court Road, however, the driver turned to the right, despite her expostulation, and presently the cab's violent eccentric motion, the horse's affrighted behaviour, and the spasmodic jerking of the reins and frequent slashings of the whip, told all too plainly the condition of the driver.

Clare made every effort to prevail upon the man to stop, or, failing that, to attract the attention of passers-by and police.

Presently there came a succession of excited warning shouts, a thudding crash, and Clare was whirled from one corner of the cab to the other, back against the window, expecting any moment to be overturned.

Springing up with the aid of a constable, she scrambled out of the swaying cab, while a number of men secured the head of the prostrate, plunging horse, and another constable, dragging the driver from his seat, took him into custody, exclaiming: "You drunken ruffian, you might have killed that lady!" and Clare, with a shudder, thought of the omens that had met her on the way.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Familiar Flirt.

"I FELL really in love a week or two ago," writes "GERTY," "and thought the young man returned my feeling. We met at a friend's house, and he paid me marked attention. He called several times and took me out. Then he suddenly told me he was going abroad. He did not even say where he was going. He parted quite suddenly, left no address, and did not promise to write. Can you explain this?"

* * * * *

I fear this is a favourite habit with many men. They really like the society of a girl, and are prepared to trifle with her affections so long as it suits them. Then they suddenly break the connection. Why? Well, in many cases because it is impossible for them to go further. Sometimes these men are actually married or engaged. At other times they are just unscrupulous flirts, who like a girl for the moment, but no longer. I am sorry for you, "GERTY," as you are one of too many girls who have been similarly treated by "charming" men.

A Wife Who Is Too Tidy.

"I AM very fond indeed of my husband," writes "LENA," "but he is a very careless man. What do you think? On muddy days he very often comes into the drawing-room without first changing his boots. Then he sometimes sits down on my new chairs or sofa in a dusty coat in which he has been cycling. After he has gone out I have to spend ever so long with the carpet-sweeper and duster before the room is neat and tidy again. What do you advise me to do? I do not want to 'blow him up,' as he is rather quick-tempered."

* * * * *

"LENA" is, of course, quite right in one way. A man certainly ought to cultivate neat habits for drawing-room use, and not enter with muddy boots or dusty clothes. But I rather sympathise with the poor fellow myself for having such a very neat and precise little wife. After all, a man's home should be *home* to him, and when he is there, he should not be always on his "company" manners. A man does not want to be always changing his coats and boots before sitting down in one of his own rooms. My advice to "LENA" is that she should be a little more human. A chair is meant to be sat on, not as an ornament. Supposing your husband did omit to change his cycling coat? The amount of dust left on the chair cannot be enough to seriously injure it. As to the muddy boots question, see that he wipes them properly on coming in. If he is a very busy man who cannot always be changing clothes, I suggest that you should use one room as a "den" for his own use, and another for purely drawing-room purposes. Men, as a rule, hate drawing-rooms, and if there is anywhere else to go, very seldom wish to sit in them. Just think over my advice, "LENA," and see if you cannot take it.

Cousins' Love.

"I AM very much in love with a girl cousin," writes "D. F." "Is it right for me to tell her this, as she is a relation, or is it wrong for a man to marry his cousin?"

* * * * *

Love between relations is not necessarily wrong. Cousins are, as a matter of fact, very often the best friends. But I do not advise a proposal. As a general rule, such marriages are not to be encouraged, though they may, under some circumstances be very happy. I advise you not to say a word for at least a year, when you will know whether or not your cousin is the girl who is necessary for your future happiness.

Sea Side Airs.

"THE girl I am engaged to," writes "FREDERICK," "has just come back from her holidays. Her manner towards me has altered very much. She seems superior, and, to put it plainly, 'puts on side.' They were staying—she and her people—at a smart boarding-house."

* * * * *

Very likely the "side" will not last. The girl has been probably living a little above her ordinary social life for a few weeks, and it has turned her head. When the dark days come on, and she again settles down to humdrum life, she will soon become her old self again. Meanwhile, just be fairly independent yourself, and do not let her think she can snub you as she pleases.

How to Start Courtship.

"IGNORANT" writes: "I have been seeing a young lady home from chapel lately, and now want to start courting in earnest. How should I let her know my intentions? Must I gain her father's consent? It will have to be a long courtship, so I want to know when I should pop the question?"

* * * * *

Don't be in too much of a hurry about the "question." Go on seeing the girl home from chapel, and if you are really fond of her, you will soon find yourself telling her so without wanting to know how to go about it. When you get on more intimate terms, ask her if she feels she could love you as more than a friend. If she agrees, then ask her father's consent to pay her attentions, telling him your prospects, and when you would be in a position to marry.

A Captious Yankee Girl.

"I VERY much admired an American girl I met recently," writes "GUS," "but I cannot quite understand her. She seems to expect a man to be eternally at her beck and call, never thinking of moving herself. She very often says the most biting things to me, should I make a slight blunder in conversation, or fail to turn a remark into a compliment. Can you advise me how to proceed with such a girl?"

* * * * *

You have evidently hit on a "real American girl," from your description. Over in the States, a woman is looked on as an object of worship by most men, and girls are quite used to the kind of treatment your friend seems to demand from you. It is just an international difference, that is all. In Britain men, nowadays, are far more independent, and often selfish, than their American cousins. As to your own case, I certainly do not advise you to become a creature of this fair American. It may be customary in her own country to regard men as glorified light porters, but if I were you, I should politely show her that it is not the view taken in our own land. Be as attentive to her as you would be to the most charming British lady, but not one whit more, and in time she will get to see that the position of the stern sex is not quite the same as in her own country.

Cynthia.

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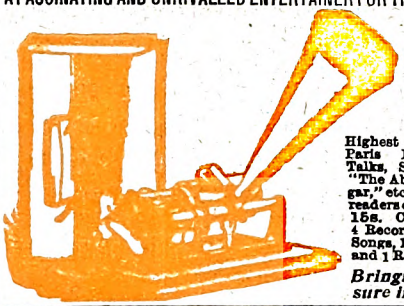

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SHORT STORIES

No. 771.] Week ending October 10, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Reflected in the glass, I saw the door of my room open. A man entered with a stealthy, cat-like tread—in his hand a pistol, cocked and loaded.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Mystery of Enid Bouce." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 771.] Week Ending October 10th, 1903. [One Penny

The Mystery of Enid Boyce.

A Tale of a Lost Father.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

I SUPPOSE there never was a girl more lonely than I was on the day when I stood before the altar, and took Fabian Chambers as my husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death should part us!

I was an orphan, with, as far as I knew, not a single relation in the whole, wide world, and although Fabian's family had been civil to me as his promised wife, their civility was of a distant and formal kind. They did not take me into their hearts or lives; they never allowed me to feel one of themselves; I was outside the charmed circle inside which dwelt all the Chambers clan!

Perhaps their attitude of mind was not surprising, when it is remembered that Fabian met me (picked me up—his mother said, I believe) at the house of some people to whose child I was governess; when it is further recollected that my whole worldly wealth consisted of twenty pounds a year left me by my mother, and when it has still further to be told that I was able to tell Mrs. Chambers nothing whatever about my family or belongings—good, bad, or indifferent. To all my future mother-in-law's probing questions I could only give the same answer:

"I do not know," and it was literally true. I knew that my name was Enid Boyce; I knew that I had lived with my mother in the pokiest, dreariest of lodgings until her death, and that she had saved and scraped and pinched—first to give me a decent education, then to leave me a tiny sum that I might not be utterly penniless. About my father I could give no information whatever. My mother never spoke of him. She merely told me that I had lost him when I was a baby, and that he had left her in terribly straitened circumstances. I had often thought it odd that we seemed to possess no portrait of him; but after my mother's death I found amongst her papers, a miniature which bore underneath it the words "Robert Boyce"—my father's name; and this I treasured greatly, marvelling much that my mother had spoken so little of the singularly handsome man whose gay, reckless eyes met mine out of the picture, making up my mind finally that her great love, and her great grief, rendered speech about her lost husband impossible, even to me—their child.

Before I married Fabian, Mr. and Mrs. Chambers made, I believe, every possible effort to discover some particulars about my family—but their efforts were unavailing, and as Fabian loved me for myself, and not for my family, he insisted upon marrying me in face of the stern disapproval of his own people.

Thus it came about, as I say, that I was a very, very lonely girl on my wedding day; married from lodgings, dressed by a sympathetic landlady, and given away by the doctor who had attended my mother, and who was kind and friendly, though he only became our friend during my mother's last illness.

It had been arranged that we should drive straight from the church to the station, whither I had dispatched my modest luggage on the previous day; and my new relations saw us off from the church steps, their frigid courtesies striking a chill to my heart, after the emotion and strain of the great service in which I had just taken part.

Mr. Chambers made one or two commonplace remarks to me, whilst his wife drew Fabian aside to bid him farewell. Were my ears more quickened than usual that day, or did she purposely raise her voice? I only know that I heard her say, in tones pregnant with meaning:

"Remember, Fabian, what's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh. You have given no heed to our warning, you have taken your own way, but I insist on speaking now."

I fancy Fabian tried to stay her flow of eloquence, but she continued without heeding his protest:

"You have married a girl of whom we know nothing, less than nothing, except that she is pretty! She is your wife now; I will say nothing against her, I intend to be civil to her, but—remember—we are in utter ignorance of her antecedents, and they may be of the very worst. I only advise you, Fabian, to watch over her carefully, to check evil tendencies,

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and to guard her from all associates who can harm her. She is young and easily moulded. I warn——"

"Thank you, mother," Fabian's voice at last managed to interrupt her torrent of words, "I am perfectly satisfied with Enid—*as she is*, I don't care a straw about her parents; I beg that in future you will remember you are speaking of my wife, when you mention her name."

At that, he came down the steps that separated us, drew my hand under his arm, said softly:

"Come, my darling," and led me away to the carriage, amongst whose cushions I sank back, stifling a choking sob.

"I will try to make you a good wife," I gasped out, when he drew me into his arms, heedless of gaping passers-by, "I wish I could tell you all about my father—my mother was the dearest, sweetest soul on earth! My father died so long ago—surely——"

I broke off with a sob, and Fabian soothed me tenderly, murmuring some remarks about his own mother which were neither filial nor complimentary.

"Never mind, my sweet," he went on presently. "I am entirely independent of my people—as you know—thanks to my dear old godfather. You and I will be as happy as the day is long in our country home—and by and bye my people will understand that my wife's beautiful face is only an index to her beautiful soul!"

In this way my husband comforted me, and surely never was there so blissful a honeymoon as the one we spent in dawdling through Switzerland and Italy, coming back in the early autumn to Fabian's lovely house in Surrey, left to him by an old godfather, with a sum of money which, to my unsophisticated ears, sounded like the fortune of a millionaire.

I had never in my life known such luxury as Fabian loved to heap upon me. The lodgings of my childhood, the uncomfortable rooms of my governess life made me appreciate the charm and comfort of the exquisitely furnished and appointed house of which I was now mistress.

Whilst as for the garden! I—a cockney born and bred—simply revelled in the garden, and in the gorgeous expanse of moorland surrounding it. We were in a somewhat lonely neighbourhood, the next house to ours being a mile or so away, and surrounded by its own park, and the village was two miles distant. But I loved the loneliness, the peace, the restful silence of the country, and Fabian and I were blissfully happy with our books and music indoors; our walks and drives; our gardening and sketching without. We had a certain amount of gaiety as well. Fabian, rich and attractive, was popular in the country-side, and we were invited to many dinner parties and receptions which I enjoyed with all the zest of youth, and with the knowledge that I was fair to see and pleasant to talk to!

Fabian loaded me with gifts; my toilettes were admired, and, I think, envied by the ladies of the neighbourhood, whose husbands were less generous than mine, and my jewels were talked of with awe, and were indeed superb. Fabian had a most ingenious safe built into the wall of his dressing-room for them, lest, as he said, "the wily burglar" should hear of their fame and come to look for them!

One evening in early November, a few months after our wedding, we had been dining at the house of our nearest neighbours—the Lynn Davis's—and as I was tired I had come home early, leaving my husband to enjoy a game of billiards with our host. I went straight to my bedroom, and having taken off my satin gown, dismissed my maid, whose eyes showed that she was worn out, and began to prepare myself for bed.

My jewels I always put away myself, for by Fabian's express wish, not a soul in the establishment (excepting our two selves) knew of the existence of the safe in his dressing-room, and until my maid had left me I always laid my rings and other trinkets in a casket on my dressing-table—conveying them to their permanent quarters when I was alone.

On this night I proceeded leisurely to unclasp my pearl necklace and lay it in the casket, where I had already placed the magnificent rings, which were Fabian's latest gift, and then lifted my hand to draw from my hair the sparkling diamond combs which shone like stars against my dark tresses.

As I stood thus, my hand uplifted, my lips idly humming the latest waltz tune, my eyes absently fixed on my own reflection in the glass before me, I suddenly saw a sight which so paralysed me with horror, that I remained motionless, transfixed—my hand still clutching the comb in my hair, my face growing white and terror-stricken before my very eyes.

Reflected over my shoulder in the glass, I saw the door of my room—which was behind me, slowly, slowly open. I saw a form enter with a cat-like, stealthy tread, which was in itself unutterably terrifying, and finally I saw the dim form resolve itself into that of a tall man in evening dress, holding in his hand a fully-loaded pistol, which was directed towards the back of my head.

"Utter a single sound and I fire," said a low voice, which was a perfectly superfluous command, for I could no more have spoken than I could have flown out of my barred and shuttered window, so frozen was I with deadly fear.

I simply stood where I was, watching with fascinated stare, whilst the intruder shut and locked my door behind him, and then crept across the room towards me, his hateful little pistol always pointing straight at me. His face was as sinister and evil a one as I have ever seen, the face of a man between fifty and sixty, who has lived a wicked and a hard life, but the face nevertheless of a gentleman! And he was clad in irreproachable evening dress.

All this I took in as he advanced towards me, but when he had come close to me, when he was able to catch his first glimpse of my white, terrified face in the glass, of my wide, frightened eyes and quivering lips, a most extraordinary change passed over his own countenance. The pistol he held dropped from hands grown suddenly nerveless, an awful terror looked out of his deeply sunken eyes, his lined cheeks grew ashen white, his jaw dropped, his lips fell apart in a perfectly ghastly fashion. All at once he stretched out two feeble, shaking arms towards me, crying out in the voice of an old, old man:

"Enid—my wife—my wife!" and sank a crumpled, huddled heap at my feet.

Dazed, terrified, bewildered, I shrank away from his unconscious form, my eyes gazing at him with a horror and amazement too deep for words, when a step behind me made me start violently round, to find myself face to face with my husband, who had entered by the dressing-room door.

His face was set and stern, as I had never before seen it; his mouth was closed firmly in a straight, severe line; his

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eyes looked at me hardly and coldly, as though I had committed some crime.

"Fabian, oh, Fabian!" I cried pitifully, tottering towards him. "I have been so frightened—help me—that man——"

"That man, your *husband!*" was Fabian's amazing answer, as he drew himself away from the touch of my clinging hands. "I happen to have heard his remark before he fell at your feet. 'Enid—my wife—my wife!' So this was the reason of your great fatigue at the Lynn Davis's—this was why——"

"Fabian! Fabian!" I almost screamed, aghast at the awful things he was saying, at the terrible fabric he was building up out of what seemed to me such slight materials.

"What are you saying, dear? I am so frightened!" And again I shuddered nearer to him. "This man came in and threatened to shoot me; then he suddenly called out—what—what you heard, and fell—like that." I glanced at the inanimate form, and shivered from head to foot.

"Why did *your husband* wish to shoot you?" Fabian asked, with hideous emphasis on those two words.

"He is not my husband," I cried. "I never saw him in my life, I do not know who he is. I thought he came to rob me—I never saw him in my life."

My voice faltered under my husband's stern, searching gaze, he mistook the reason of its trembling.

"Your own shaking voice betrays you," he said shortly, "we will not discuss the question now. That man must be attended to." And, paying not the slightest further attention to me, Fabian dragged the unconscious stranger on to a couch at the foot of the bed, and proceeded to try to restore him to a sense of his surroundings. After what seemed to me an interminable time, a sort of long shiver ran through the man's frame, and he opened his eyes. They fell first on me, standing at the foot of the couch, and with a gesture either of fear or repulsion, he half-raised himself on his elbow, and waved his hand wildly towards me, saying in a thick, husky voice:

"Enid—my wife! Do not—do not ——"

Then, with a horrible rolling of his eyes, and a dreadful contortion of his face, he sank back amongst the cushions again, in total unconsciousness.

How the weary hours of that night dragged by I do not know. They seemed as though they would never end, as I sat in my dressing-gown, watching Fabian's efforts to revive the stranger, forced to listen to the stern, cold words he now and again spoke to me, carrying out the short commands he occasionally gave me.

The unconscious man roused up more than once, but only to babble deliriously and unintelligibly, and when morning dawned Fabian sent one of the grooms to summon the nearest doctor, and, meanwhile, transferred the stranger to the bed in his dressing-room.

"For the sake of your reputation and my name," he said to me, "I shall tell everyone that this man is a relation of yours, whom I brought back with me from the Davis' last night; and that he fell ill after we reached here. You still decline to tell me his name?" and Fabian's eyes, cold and stern, scrutinised my face searchingly.

"I do not know his name," I said. "Fabian—believe me—please believe me, I never saw the man till he broke into my room last night. I have never deceived you—never, never!"

He laughed, a sarcastic laugh. "My mother was a wise woman," he answered. "She gave me a warning. I disregarded it. I *trusted* you." (Oh, the biting scorn he threw into that word). "You have given me the reward I doubtless deserved. When your husband is able to speak, no doubt *he* will be more ready to speak and tell the truth than you are. I wish to have nothing more to do with you. Your place is by his side."

I think my heart broke when Fabian spoke those words, but I only looked at him gravely and sadly, and replied:

"God grant that some day you may know how grossly you have misjudged me—your faithful and loyal wife"—and then I left the room, seeing that argument and explanation were useless.

All that day I wandered about the house and grounds too miserable to do anything, refusing my meals, and fleeing whenever I caught sight of Fabian. I felt that I could not bear further reproaches and scorn, they hurt me to my very soul's core. From my maid I heard that the sick man upstairs had not recovered full consciousness, and I think she wondered why I did not take my place by his side, seeing that according to Fabian's story, he was a relative of my own. But I feebly explained to her that the sight of his unconscious form upset me most terribly, and she accepted my statement with the stolidity of a well-trained servant.

My husband I successfully avoided throughout the day. The doctor came and went and returned again, bringing with him a trained nurse, but evening had fallen before I again saw the stranger who had wrought such havoc in my life.

Fabian found me at eight o'clock sitting listlessly in my boudoir, and said sharply:

"Come upstairs and see your husband, he is asking for you." Lacking the spirit to contradict him, I rose wearily and followed him to his dressing-room, wondering whether I could really be the same woman, whose cup of joy had yesterday overflowed its brim, who had been so full of irresponsible girlish gaiety.

Fabian preceded me into the darkened room, then drew back and allowed me to approach the bed.

The man who lay upon it, his eyes turned towards me, shrank away into the furthest corner when he saw me, then his hands went out to me with a supplicating gesture, very pathetic to behold.

"My wife," he whispered, "I thought—I thought——Forgive me now, let bygones be bygones—I——"

His voice died away, his strength seemed insufficient for the effort he had made—his face grew so ghastly, that the nurse who stood by his side put a glass to his lips, and said gently:

"He must not be excited."

"You had better stay here," Fabian said in a hoarse undertone. "This is your place."

"Is he—dying?" I asked, in an equally low voice, my eyes going back involuntarily to the figure on the bed.

"No, he is not," Fabian answered grimly. "Do not buoy yourself up with *that* hope. He has had a stroke, but the doctor says there is no reason why he should not soon be well again. Death will not release you."

The cruel, cutting words, penetrated my brain and heart. I was worn out, exhausted by hunger, fatigue, and the long strain of misery, and without a word of reply, I lifted appealing

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eyes to Fabian's hard, unresponsive face, and then slipped at his feet in a dead faint.

I do not know how long that faint lasted. For hours and hours I seemed to be groping about in impenetrable black darkness, where was no life, nor human voice, nor cheering sound.

Then gradually, very gradually, a far-away light struck upon the blackness, and a confused sound like that of rushing waters, came to my ears—a sound that presently resolved itself into voices speaking softly.

"She is coming round, but it is plain she has had some great shock." It was the doctor's voice. Fabian replied. "She has had a great shock," he said, and I dimly recognised some anxiety in the tones. "Is she recovering, doctor?"

"Hush, yes. You are feeling better, Mrs. Chambers?" I opened my eyes and met the doctor's kindly glance.

"Yes," I said, my voice sounding far-away, "but—tell my husband I——"

I wanted to tell Fabian all that was in my heart, but no more words would come, and I heard a low exclamation break from his lips, as he muttered, so that only I could hear:

"She has owned it. He *is* her husband."

Those words gave me strength. With a tremendous effort I raised myself, and put out my hands to Fabian.

"He is not—he is not," I cried, greatly to the doctor's stupefaction. "I never saw him before, never—never." And, with that, my hardly worn strength gave out again, and I sank back into the darkness.

For many days after those two long fainting fits I was genuinely ill, and as I heard afterwards, the doctor sternly forbade all reference before me to the stranger who still lay in Fabian's dressing-room.

My maid nursed me, and Fabian came to see me at stated intervals. He was kinder now, I think because the doctor had insisted upon it—but he was kind as an acquaintance might have been, not as a husband.

And as I slowly crept back to health, the bitterness of all that had caused my illness sank deeper into my heart. The iron entered my soul.

When I was pronounced really well again, Fabian came into my boudoir one afternoon, and, standing before the fireplace, whilst I sat back in an arm-chair, said quietly:

"This state of things cannot go on, Enid. Do you still refuse to own that the man who came to you on that fatal night is your husband?"

"I entirely refuse to own it," I said firmly. "I never saw him before—he came for my jewels, I am sure of it. Why, otherwise, did he level a pistol at me?"

"It is not a pleasant thing for a man to find his wife has married someone else. He probably intended to kill you when he was struck down by illness. Enid—for Heaven's sake own the truth! In any case you cannot remain here; you are not my wife; you must leave this house; must leave me and return to your own husband; but I beseech you—*own* the truth."

I grasped the arms of my chair, and looked at him blankly.

Leave him? Leave the man I loved—the home in which I had been so happy? Go away from Fabian—my husband? Oh, impossible—impossible!

"I have spoken the truth," I said, rising to my feet, and advancing towards Fabian with outstretched hands. "Indeed, indeed, you need not drive me away. I am your own true wife. I am not the wife of that man. I——"

A low exclamation at the door startled us both, and we turned quickly to see, standing there, the very person of whom we spoke. He still looked very ill, but his eyes had in them a clearer expression than I had seen before. They were fixed strangely on me, and I left Fabian's side and went slowly towards the other man.

"I am not your wife," I said firmly. "Look at me well; you have made a mistake. I am not your wife."

The man drew his hand across his eyes with a bewildered gesture, then looked at me again; his hand grasped mine suddenly, his eyes left my face and fixed themselves on a miniature hanging before him on the wall.

"Who is that?" he cried. "Can you deny that it is my portrait?"

"Your portrait?" I exclaimed, too bewildered to take in the full significance of his words. "Oh, no, it cannot be yours. That is my father, Robert Boyce."

There was dead silence for a moment, then he said slowly, his hand still grasping mine:

"You are the living image of your mother. I thought you were her, I thought—thought you were Enid—my wife. But I—child—I am your father—your father." And, as he uttered the words, his voice broke—I saw that his eyes were full of tears.

It was all true! The man who had come to rob me was my father, who had not died in my childhood, but who had passed from one evil course to another, until he had sunk to being a gentleman-burglar. It was his custom to do his burglaries in evening-dress as rousing less suspicion should he come across a stray servant.

Having heard rumours of Mrs. Fabian Chambers' jewels, he had watched the house—seen me come in alone—opened the front door with a skeleton key (it had been left unbolted for Fabian) and stole upstairs.

Then the sight of my face in the glass had made him think he was in the presence of his wife—for he said I exactly resembled what she had been when he deserted her, and the awful shock had prostrated him at my feet.

Fabian has never been able to do enough to make up to me for his want of trust—and he is goodness itself. My father, who, broken down and aged, lives with us, is devoted to his grand-children—Fabian and Enid. My girl bears her mother's and grandmother's name—may, she never endure the agony I endured at hearing those words: "Enid—my wife!"

L. G. Moberly.

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Daisy and the Curate.

Telling of a Petulant Girl and a Strong-Minded Young Clergyman.

"I WONDER if this one will fall in love with you."

"Harry, don't be so horrid!"

"But you know very well they all do. I am sure I don't know why,"—with brotherly candour.

"I know, and it's very disagreeable!" said Daisy.

"You don't seem to think so at the time."

"The disagreeability comes when—when they propose," said Daisy ruefully. She jumped up from her seat suddenly. "I know what I shall do this time. I shall snub him unmercifully; show him unmistakably that I—I am——"

"Not indulging in curates," put in Harry, and dodged the sofa cushion thrown at him skilfully.

"Wretch!" said his sister.

"Let me go through the list now," continued her tormentor. "There was Long John."

"Pooh! Animated bandbox!"

"Old Whiffles we will not count, as he had a large wife and six small children."

Daisy sniffed.

"Then there was dear little Bobby with his red hands and his red hair."

"Harry, you are irreverent!"

"No, not at all. Simply stating a series of palpable facts."

"Oh, do be quiet," exclaimed Daisy; "go and play tennis with Connie Weston. She'll make love to you!"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp, as Daisy Kemp knew.

"Not I," said Harry loftily, "not quite my taste."

"She used to be," said Daisy softly.

"Oh, shut up!" And Harry retired defeated.

The scene was the morning-room at Avondale Vicarage, and the speakers were the only children of the Reverend Archibald Kemp, who adored them both, and as his parishioners—some of them—averred, spoilt them. The time was June, and the pretty garden on which the open French windows looked out, was ablaze with sunshine and bloom. Daisy Kemp—everyone called her that, though her real name was Margaret, after her long-dead mother—was twenty-one, her brother nineteen. There was no trace of Tennyson's "Rare, Pale Margaret" in the former. She was a curly-haired, round and rosy-faced kitten, with a dimpled chin, and, as may have been gathered, a horror of being made love to by curates! Her brother Harry was a replica of his father—open-browed, tall, broad-shouldered, and honest-eyed, a typical country English lad of the type one hopes, for the honour of the country, will never be extinct.

Perfectly true it was that all her father's curates fell in love with Daisy. She sincerely wished they would not. But they all did, some at first sight, some gradually—but they all did! Then they proposed to her, were friendlily but firmly refused, and went away in search of pastures new and forgetfulness. It was, as Daisy said, and she meant it, too, very disagreeable.

The Vicar, easy-going and large-hearted, was amused probably. But he went on tending his roses, of which he was a lover and a connoisseur, as well as a great grower, and only bemoaned one fact—that he was singularly unlucky in his curates. The last one, whom Daisy had refused in terms more straightforward and unmistakable than usual, had been a fine specimen of muscular Christianity, and the Vicar had liked him more than the others. But he went; and his successor was expected daily. The Vicar did not want to lose his little housekeeper, as he called her, but he would not have been very displeased to give her to Ronald Mortimer. However, there it was—and the Vicar hid his disappointment, if any existed, in his roses.

Avondale was not a large parish, but in it every strata of society was represented, from the aristocratic, through successive stages, to the democratic. Some of the Vicar's curates had found it difficult to manage. Those who got on well with the higher circles, were very unpopular with the lower. And, quite naturally, the Vicar wanted to keep friends with both. Hence the reason, in addition to refusal by Daisy, of the frequent changes of curates. They came, they saw, they were conquered—and they went!

"What is Mr. Bentham like?" was Daisy's question at lunch that day. Harry gave a grin; the Vicar looked at his daughter innocently.

"Wait and see, my child," was all he said.

"When is he coming?"

"I told Mr. Smithers to have his rooms ready to-night."

"Another victim," murmured Harry, in a low tone, and was favoured with a sisterly frown from Daisy. More than this her father would not say, indeed, did not know. But on her return from a kindly visit to an old pensioner whose cottage lay some mile beyond the outskirts of the little town of Avondale, Daisy found out for herself what "Mr. Bentham was like." For she found her father and the curate in the twilight, saying "Good-night."

"My daughter, Mr. Bentham," said the Vicar absently. "Yes, as you were saying, there is much always to be thought of and to do."

"Yes, indeed," replied Mr. Bentham, in what struck Daisy as a peculiarly unpleasant voice.

"Dad," she remarked, when indoors later, "he is absolutely ugly."

"Oh, no, dear, Plain, perhaps, but not so bad as that."

"I don't like him."

The Vicar discreetly said nothing. He knew his daughter almost as well as he knew his favourite roses.

Seen in the daylight, Richard Bentham almost, but not quite, bore out Miss Daisy's opinion. But only the close observer,

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with perception of character, would have seen that his mouth was firm, strong, and humorous; his eyes were keen, honest; his bearing that of a mannered gentleman, if his figure was slight and, perhaps, a little crooked. He was quiet—some of the ignorant called him shy—but in less than a month the Vicar adored him, and he was Harry's inseparable companion when duty offered occasion.

But Daisy hated him, and made no scruples about saying so. He hurt her pride by snubbing her, by being quite indifferent to her. He came into the morning-room at the vicarage, where the Vicar had established him as one of the family, and caught Daisy in a favourite position, namely, sitting on the table. Out of sheer defiance she remained where she was. She was apt to be wilful at times.

Richard Bentham shook hands with her, and in a voice whose matter of fact tone robbed the remark of every trace of rudeness, said:

"A curiously inelegant position, Miss Kemp."

"I like it," retorted Daisy.

"I don't think it very ladylike," said the curate calmly, turning to Harry as he spoke.

Daisy coloured furiously.

"And who taught you what ladylike manners are?" she demanded, as angry as a child in a fit of temper.

"My mother," said the curate simply.

Daisy sprang from her seat, opened her lips to speak, and ran out of the room without a word.

"You have put your foot in it," said Harry, after a short silence.

"I forgot. You have had no mother for years. Oh, will she ever forgive me?"

"If you ask me," said Harry drily, "I don't think she will. You know, old fellow, the Vicar loves you, and you are the best friend I ever had, but my sister hates you—there—the truth is out. And she doesn't trouble to conceal the fact."

"That is very evident. I am sorry. Will you apologise to her for me? I was inexpressibly rude. Now, what is this business you wanted to ask me about?"

But Daisy was too angry, too full of wounded pride to cry. She was locked in her own room overlooking the roses, saying over and over again, "I hate you, I hate you." Presently she saw her brother and Richard Bentham crossing the garden. She clenched her little fist and shook it at the curate.

"I hate you," she repeated; "and I will never forget it, or forgive you!"

After that day she studiously avoided Richard Bentham. If compelled to be in the same room with him, she never addressed him. She accepted his gently tendered apology with the curt remark that she had completely forgotten the matter, and did not understand his meaning. This was quite true—in one sense. She had never thought of the use by him of the word "mother" in reference to herself. He thought she did, and that he had offended her past all pardon. Nothing was further away from Daisy's thoughts. He had hurt her self-pride, that was all she could think. He made one attempt at explanation. She refused point-blank to listen to him. She calmly ignored him. And Richard Bentham did not know whether he was sorry or merely surprised.

Out of such small beginnings as this, great things grow. But two months of July rain and August sun tempered with such changes of the climate as the beneficent clerk of the weather felt from time to time inclined to bestow upon Avondale, went past. Upon the very hottest day in that summer, Daisy Kemp was cool—to the curate. When they met, as they necessarily did at times, she spoke as little to him as possible and looked less. It may have hurt him, but if it did he did not show it.

One muggy, unseasonable day in late August, Daisy met her brother on the tennis lawn. He was swinging his racquet carelessly, but the expression on his face was not quite careless. Daisy knew that he had, with the Vicar, been talking to Mr. Bentham.

"I have a message for you," Harry said curtly, as though he did not much enjoy the delivery of the said message. Daisy smiled. Then she noticed her brother's serious face, and the smile died away.

"What is it?" she exclaimed with some anxiety. For Harry was as a rule so bright and merry that a premonition of ill seemed to strike her at once.

"Oh, it's all right! But Bentham told me to tell you not to go up to the Sinclairs again until he lets you know."

"He lets me know!" said Daisy, with a scathing emphasis.

"Yes," said Harry; and he turned away.

"What right——" began Daisy; but her brother was out of reach and hearing. Her heart began to beat furiously. Indeed, what right had Richard Bentham to send her such a peremptory message. The Sinclairs were her friends—the little four-year-old Dolly Sinclair was her especial pet, and Mr. Bentham had forbidden her to see them! What did it mean?

Daisy stamped her little wilful foot on the green lawn. It made no kind of impression on the grass, but it relieved the beating, angry heart very much.

"I will go," she said to herself, "and I will go this very afternoon."

The Sinclairs lived in a tiny cottage in the worst part of Avondale, and Daisy, having once been able to help them, had taken a great delight in making frequent visits to their unpretentious home. She adored little Dolly, and the child gleefully looked forward to her visits.

And now—and now—thought Daisy, Mr. Bentham had forbidden her to go and see the Sinclairs, without one word of reason or explanation. What did it mean?

"I *will* go!" said Daisy angrily, hating Richard Bentham, curate, with all the power of hate she could muster up in her womanly heart. And she went.

That same afternoon Richard Bentham found her, sitting in the little parlour of the Sinclairs' cottage, with Dolly Sinclair asleep in her arms.

"Hush. She's asleep," said Daisy, in a more tender tone than she had ever addressed to him. Richard Bentham stood clenching his hands.

"You!" he said. "You!"

"Why not?" said Daisy defiantly.

"Did Harry give you my message?"

"Yes—and what right have you to say what I shall do or shall not do?"

The curate dropped his hat on the little table and sank into a chair.

"I only——" he began.

"Well?" said Daisy, as he hesitated.

The curate rose and paced the little room for a few moments before he spoke.

"You have been away, Miss Daisy," he then said, "away for ten days."

"Yes."

"You do not know what has happened since you went in Avondale?"

"Of course not. I only returned last night."

"Your father did not tell you?"

"No. He was out late—very late—last night."

"Can you not guess—or must I tell you? Fever, malignant fever, has broken out in this part of Avondale, and is claiming its victims, old and young, every day. That little mite you are holding in your arms is sickening for it. Now—now can you understand why I warned you, through Harry, not to come to the Sinclairs?"

Daisy gave a brief, tender glance at the child in her arms.

"I should have come even if I had known," she said; "even you——even you could not have prevented me."

"But——"

"I knew when I came into Vale Cottage; Mrs. Sinclair told me at once. I am nursing Dolly while she is lying down for half an hour. I am not afraid. Are you?"

The scorn in Daisy's voice went through Richard Bentham's heart.

"I was thinking of—of you," he said.

Daisy's silence was more expressive than words. But, hearing voices, Mrs. Sinclair, with profuse apologies and much tearful gesture, came upon the scene

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"Give her to me now, Miss Kemp," she said. "I told you Mr. Bentham said I was not to let you nurse her or come near her."

The few simple words were as a lightning-flash to Daisy's brain.

She threw a brief glance at the curate, but he was unconscious of it. Then her pride arose within her and, with a few words of adieu to Mrs. Sinclair, she went away. Mr. Bentham opened the door for her without a word. Daisy herself was too—well, what was it—hurt, offended, proud, pained ?—to speak. But ten days later there was a little white form in the cottage, a baby voice hushed for ever, and a footfall silenced in this world. For Dolly Sinclair—little four-year-old Dolly—was dead. Never again would those little round arms be laid lovingly about Daisy's neck—never again would one sweet baby face be lifted up to receive a kiss.

And then — ah, yes, and then — Daisy Kemp learnt how unselfish, how brave, how strong Richard Bentham had been. It had only been a brief epidemic, which had carried away to the eternal rest some little ones who had scarcely learnt the meaning of life, and some others who had learnt almost all the world could teach them — but it had been a bitter month for Avondale, a time of grief and mourning, work, prayer, and sorrow, and Richard Bentham, beaten at last, lay in his room at Mrs. Smithers' tiny cottage, fighting for life.

"No wonder," said the Vicar sadly. "No-wonder," echoed all Avondale. He had absolutely slaved during that brief time of trouble. Now he lay, weak as a child, careless of living or dying, at the mercy of the very fiend he had been strenuously fighting against for the sake of others.

That same afternoon Richard Bentham found Daisy in the cottage of the Sinclairs, with the child asleep in her arms.

Over and over again those words of Connie Sinclair came to Daisy's mind. "I told you Mr. Bentham said you were not to nurse her or come near her." He had thought of her and her safety then. Why ? She had so scorned him, so despised him ; and he was now lying so near to death. Why had he so thought of her ? Could it—could it be that he, too, like the others, had fallen in love with her ? But no. There was never any suggestion of such a thing in his voice, his manner, his—oh, and now there never might be !

"If he dies !"

That was the one phrase ringing in Daisy's thoughts.

"If he dies !"

The brief epidemic had passed. Richard Bentham's work had killed it, had stamped it out. And as if in revenge the demon-fever had seized upon him, laid him low, bound him, and was dragging him hourly nearer and nearer the gates of eternity. His was the last case—and the worst. The Vicar had obtained a London specialist, but his verdict was "perhaps," and the glorious golden September sunshine flooded the ripe earth, the green leaves turned browner and browner, the sweet days shortened twilight by twilight—and Richard Bentham, curate, knew nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing.

The fever passed, but the heart, sadly weakened by the long strain, was at almost its last ebb. The haggard face, uglier than ever, and yet with a half divine light in the pitifully weary eyes, lay on the pillow from day to day, and the lips ever spoke in a low whisper, barely audible, one name :

"Daisy !"

Not a little wilful English rosebud was she now, but a reproachful and sorrowful woman—woman all of a sudden. Ever and again that old question would return to her. Why had Richard Bentham been so careful of her ? Why had he thought of her in——

Then she knew. As a flash it came to her. He loved her. Oh, how was it she had not divined it all along !

"Daisy !"

It was her father's voice, broken with unmistakable tears.

"I want you to be brave, my girl, and come and say good-bye to — to ——"

The Vicar broke down here.

"Good-bye ?" whispered Daisy ; "is—is he——?"

"Yes. He is dying."

Without a word Daisy Kemp went with her father hand in hand to Richard Bentham's bedside. She steeled herself for the ordeal, and with agony in her heart, knelt down beside the dying man whom she knew now she loved — loved indeed.

His tired eyes turned to her drawn face ; his thin hand clasped hers.

"Daisy !" he murmured ; "I wanted to see you before—forgive——"

She put her quivering lips to his hand in reply.

"Daisy—I love you—I have—always loved—you—from the—first."

"Dear——"

"Tell me—you—care—if——"

Daisy's eyes were blurred with tears, her whole form shook with pain. She rose slightly and put her warm lips upon those of Richard Bentham, and kissed him tenderly.

No one but herself heard the words that he murmured :

"You have—brought—me back—to life—beloved."

And she had.

The love of a strong man is not always shown by sweet words and tender expressions, but by his deeds.

Clifton Bingham.

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Jack Browne's Mistake.

How a Young Officer Made a Bad Affair Worse.

Jack Browne and a select few of his brother officers sat in solemn conclave in the mess-room one evening after their seniors had retired, discussing the desperate condition of his affairs.

Jack was a foolish, extravagant, young subaltern in a line regiment, who had contrived to get deeply into debt without the slightest chance of extricating himself from his difficulties. His only relative was a strong-minded maiden aunt, who not only refused to assist him, but even threatened to withdraw the allowance she made him since he entered the Army.

He considered he was being very hardly treated, for the truth is, he did not properly appreciate what his aunt had already done for him.

There was no doubt, however, that he was in an awkward predicament, for on the one hand he could not possibly remain in the regiment unless his debts were paid, and, on the other, his aunt declared that if he resigned his commission she would have nothing more to do with him.

Jack did not at all relish the prospect of being compelled to earn his living, especially as he had no idea how to set about it. Moreover, he was extremely popular in his regiment, and was consequently loath to leave it. His brother officers, unfortunately, could only assist him by their sympathy, and by suggesting various expedients for raising money, none of which were practicable.

"I should try the old lady again," urged one of his friends; "make a clean breast of everything and work upon her feelings."

"She has none!" returned Jack ruefully. "Her venerable heart is insensitive to tender emotions."

"I suppose you haven't concealed what a serious fix you are in?" suggested another.

"No. At least, I put my position to her as plainly as I dare," said Jack; "but it's no go."

"Won't Isaacs raise the wind?" suggested somebody.

"My dear fellow, the only possible way I could raise a shilling would be by pawning my boots, and as they are not paid for I might get into difficulty over that," said Jack, as he plunged his hands deeper into his pockets. "Besides, I've no evidence that I'm named in her will."

"I've an idea!" exclaimed his particular friend, Charlie Bashford. "Why don't you volunteer for service in West Africa?"

"Volunteer to catch cholera! No, thanks," said Jack, making a grimace. "Besides, there is no fighting going on now, so what would be the use?"

"There is a terrible deal more danger now than there was during the war," remarked Charlie, sagely.

"Yes, but no glory. If I wanted to exchange, I would go to India, but, the fact is, I'm past that dodge. My creditors would be down on me directly if they heard I was off. They are down on me enough already," he added despondently.

"What I meant was that you might bamboozle the old lady. Hang it all, Jack! She must care for you, or she would have thrown you over long ago," said his friend, with charming candour. "Perhaps if she heard you had determined, in desperation, to go to Africa, at the risk of your life, she might relent."

"Well, there's something in that," said Jack, brightening up. "At all events, she might give me a cheque for an outfit. The worst of it is, I don't want to go."

"I know a namesake of yours in the 78th, Jack, who is going out next month," interposed another. "If the worst came to the worst, you might go by proxy."

"By Jove! I really think that might be managed," exclaimed Jack excitedly. "It is just possible, as Charlie says, that the old girl would pay my debts to keep me in England. If she doesn't, seeing the other fellow's name in the papers, she will imagine I have gone."

"You can easily keep up the joke by getting your namesake over there to post some letters for you," chimed in Charlie Bashford. "If she doesn't beg you to return after a week or two, you can pretend to be laid up with cholera. That will bring the old lady up to time, if anything will, but in case it doesn't, you can be ordered home—see?"

"Meanwhile, I shall have to keep quiet, and will go away on sick leave," added Jack, in a great state of excitement. "Here, give me pen and paper. I'll fire off a letter at once."

Impulsiveness was one of Jack's failings, and on the spur of the moment he sat down and wrote the following heart-rending epistle—

My Dear Aunt,—*Your refusal to assist me further leaves me no alternative but to quit my native shores for ever. I have volunteered for service in West Africa, where, as you know, the cholera is raging. I start on the second of next month per P. and O. steamer* Capua, *and proceed to join the 78th, which is stationed in the centre of the most infected district. It would be useless to attempt to conceal the fact that I shall encounter terrible risks from the awful disease, but the desire to serve my country at a post of real danger is no less an inducement to me than the prospect of being released by the hand of death from my debts and embarrassments. I can scarcely hope, from our recent correspondence, that my departure will be a source of concern to you, but, at all events, I shall always gratefully remember your many kindnesses. My outfit means a matter of two hundred pounds, but whether you care to assist me in getting it is a question which you alone can decide. Hoping your rheumatism is better,*

"Believe me, your affectionate nephew,

"J. L. Browne."

All the company had a hand in producing this masterpiece of composition, which was universally admired.

The general opinion was that the old lady would be entirely overcome. Jack was easily persuaded to indulge in hopeful anticipations, though he had secret misgivings.

Unfortunately his forebodings turned out to be well founded for his aunt did not attempt to dissuade him from going.

Her reply was so cold and formal that Jack could not help suspecting that she doubted his good faith, and more especially as, in consenting to pay for his outfit, she stipulated that the bills should be sent in to her for settlement.

Jack was somewhat unreasonably aggrieved at this precaution, which, however, reconciled him to the idea of carrying out his project of deception.

He had no difficulty in securing the co-operation of his namesake, and by arrangement with this fatefully good-natured young gentleman, he succeeded in securing the best part of the money which his aunt advanced for his outfit.

The old lady little suspected that she was paying the bills and the passage money of a perfect stranger, and that the latter handed to Jack the amount he had intended to devote to that purpose.

Jack suffered considerable qualms of conscience while hatching his conspiracy. His necessities, however, were so

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pressing that he could not resist the chance of getting a little ready money.

Had he anticipated that his aunt would have manifested genuine emotion when he went to bid her farewell he would probably have abandoned his scheme.

But by that time it was too late, for he had paid away the two hundred pounds among his hungry creditors, and the date of his supposed departure was fixed for the next day.

Jack applied for three months' leave of absence from his regiment to obviate the risk of his presence in England coming to his aunt's ears.

The colonel, knowing nothing of his plans, but sympathising with his pecuniary troubles, granted his request without asking inconvenient questions.

Jack's brother officers were pledged to secrecy, and one of them—the incorrigible Charlie Bashford—wrote the old lady a pathetic account of his friend's departure. Jack, on his part, retired to a remote village in North Wales, where he could solace himself with trout-fishing while awaiting the issue of his equivocal manœuvres.

He was not without hope that his aunt would speedily recall him from Egypt with a promise to pay his debts.

He had authorised his namesake to open the old lady's letters, and to telegraph to him immediately in case his anticipations should be realised.

Meanwhile, he had furnished his fellow-conspirator with a number of letters to be posted in West Africa from time to time, and these contained such harrowing details of the ravages of cholera that his aunt could scarcely fail to become seriously alarmed and uneasy.

Jack remained a month or six weeks in Wales, during which his scheme worked without a hitch.

His aunt was completely deceived, and even forwarded his first letter from Africa to his friend, Charlie Bashford, to read.

The note in which she inclosed the letter plainly showed that her heart was softening towards him, and Jack began to feel a good deal ashamed of himself.

During his solitary walks and rambles he had fits of penitence which considerably damped his satisfaction at the success of his experiment.

He even felt tempted at times to abandon the deception he was practising, but before he had arrived at any determination to do so he was surprised at receiving a visit from his friend, Charlie Bashford.

"Hullo! What brings you here?" demanded Jack apprehensively as they shook hands.

"You've heard the news, haven't you?" said Charlie.

"What about?" said Jack.

"Haven't you seen the papers lately?" asked Charlie, opening his eyes.

"Not for a week or ten days. What is it?"

"Then you don't know poor Browne is dead," said Charlie. "We all of us thought you knew of it, or I should have written. It was in all the papers a week ago. He died of cholera."

"What! you don't mean the man who went to Egypt the other day?" gasped Jack.

"Yes," said Charlie, grinning at his friend's dismay.

"Well, but that is fearfully awkward for me! My aunt must be under the impression that I am dead. What the dickens shall I do?" exclaimed Jack.

"I wrote the poor old lady a letter of condolence to keep up the deception," said Charlie.

"What an infernal fool you were, then!" exclaimed Jack vigorously. "What on earth did you want to do that for?"

"Well, I did it for a joke, but I was sorry for it afterwards. In fact, as far as the poor old lady was concerned, I've repented it ever since. However, there is no harm done as far as you are concerned," added Charlie, cheerfully.

"I'm not by any means sure of that," growled Jack. "I can't be lost for ever, and the matter must come to my aunt's ears. If you had written and hinted that there might be a mistake you would have done me a good turn. As it is, you've only made matters worse."

"We thought you would be in a furious stew when you heard the news, and wondered at your keeping so quiet," said Charlie. "I came down out of pure charity to ease your mind. You have had a lucky escape.

"The poor old lady is dead, so, as I said before, there is no harm done to your prospects."

Under the cricumstances, it is perhaps excusable that Jack's first sensation was a feeling of intense relief. A moment ago he was fairly horrified at learning the awkward position in which he was placed by the death of his namesake.

Considering that his future prospects depended entirely upon his aunt's goodwill, it seemed as though ruin stared him in the face. Exposure of the trick he had played upon her was apparently inevitable, and her forgiveness could scarcely have been hoped for.

Of course, he had known all along that he had run this risk, but he had never anticipated the sad event which upset all his calculations, and had considered himself tolerably secure from detection, whatever else happened.

The grief and remorse which lurked in Jack's bosom in consequence of his aunt's death were, therefore, at the moment overshadowed by mingled relief and excitement.

The vital importance of the sad event as regarded his private affairs not unnaturally preoccupied his mind. If, as he not unreasonably believed, he was the old lady's heir, he would be able to pay off his debts and make a fresh start under favourable conditions.

He hurried up to town without a moment's delay, and went straight to the office of his aunt's legal adviser.

He knew that this gentleman was her executor and had the management of her affairs, and he was anxious to put an end to the suspense and uncertainty regarding his future prospects. In his eagerness he forgot the surprise his sudden appearance was likely to cause, and consequently felt rather abashed when the lawyer started back on seeing him.

"What, Mr. Browne!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as he could speak. "Why, I—I—and everybody else, thought you had died in Africa the other day."

"No. The fact is, it was all a mistake," said Jack, in a shame-faced manner.

"Oh! Then I suppose you never went there at all," said the lawyer, after a short pause, during which he fixed his sharp eyes on the young man's face.

"No, I did not," said Jack, overcome with confusion, "I—I am very sorry."

"Well, so you ought to be sir, for you killed your aunt. Ah! you did, indeed! I mean what I say," he added sharply. "When the news of your supposed death appeared in the papers she had a fit and never recovered the shock. But if she had not cared for you more than you did for her she would be alive at this moment.

"She blamed herself for being the cause of your death, and that intensified the shock. Had she followed her own inclination she would have made any pecuniary sacrifice to keep you out of danger. But she thought, for your own sake, you had better do a little campaigning; and, besides, she was inclined to suspect—rightly, as it now appears—that you did not really intend to go."

"I'm glad, at all events, that she never found me out," said Jack, wiping away the beads of perspiration that had gathered on his forehead. "She did not suspect what a brute I was in return for all her kindness."

"No," said the lawyer, fixing his keen glance upon Jack's face again. "Unfortunately for you, she never doubted you were dead."

"Why unfortunately?" inquired Jack absently.

"Because she sent for me at the last moment and made a fresh will, in which your name is not mentioned. Up till then you were her residuary legatee." **Hal Evans.**

THE PAPER A BOY CAN TAKE HOME IS "THE BOYS' LEADER."

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THE COUNTRY COUSIN.

A Bachelor's Love Story.

JAMES RYDER was a confirmed bachelor, but not in the sense which people usually attach to that term. He had not the slightest inclination to marry, and not one of the many persons who knew him was under any delusion on that head. When a man still on the sunny side of fifty, good-looking, and possessed of independent means, declares solemnly that he will never marry, his friends generally smile (when out of sight) and remark that they have heard that kind of talk before; but no one did this in connection with James Ryder. He was not averse to the society of ladies; he lived alone, but he was always ready to accept an invitation to a party and was usually a favourite with the fair sex, yet it was quite understood that he was determined to remain a bachelor.

The majority of his numerous friends and acquaintances found this problem a perplexing one; it passed their comprehension. If the man had been crossed in love, he would have had his disposition soured and would have vented his ill-will on all the members of the opposite sex. James Ryder did nothing of the kind. He had actually helped one worthy young couple in the district to get married; the swain had been working hard to save enough money to purchase the home, but illness had overtaken him, lessening the amount of his savings, and further postponing the happy day. Ryder sent him away for a month, which restored him to robust health, and then gave him a handsome money present which obviated the necessity for further waiting. Ryder was asked to give away the bride and did so.

What ailed the man? A slight clue was obtained when Ryder once laughed at love at first sight. After that it was remembered that he had occasionally laughed when he heard that such or such a couple were in love, and asked the informant if the pair were really certain that they were in love. There was a trace of cynicism in his tone which made the listeners wonder. However, the real facts were a mystery till his nephew, a handsome young fellow of two-and-twenty, came to stay with him for a week, and, during that period, confessed that he was in love with the best and sweetest girl in Christendom and meant to propose. He had fallen in love with her the first moment he set eyes on her bewitching——

"Yes," said Uncle James drily. "I know all about that; I had an attack myself once on a time, when I was about your age. Oh, you need not protest, Bob! Love is a kind of madness; a man gets an attack of it and it blinds him for the time to the attractions of all other women. The question of suitability doesn't trouble him; he wants that girl and no other. Later, he will admit to himself that he did not choose as wisely as he might have done. And the girl will think the same respecting her own choice."

"You are wrong, uncle!" cried Bob emphatically.

"Perhaps I am," returned James Ryder equably. "Yet I think I am right in four cases out of five. A man often has the chance of obtaining a wife who would make him a splendid helpmate, yet he cannot see his opportunity. Love is a strange thing and a man—or a woman—ought to keep a level head when looking for a life partner!"

"Why, you would destroy all the romance of courtship!" declared Bob aghast.

"I wonder," asked Ryder musingly, "how many people can look back on their courtship and be satisfied with it, romantic as you say it is? Perhaps, if there were less romance at that time, there would be more of it after marriage! However, Bob, I do not wish to interfere with your love affairs, but I will tell you my own story and that will give you an idea of what a strange thing love is and how a man may be unaware of his own feelings. Different circumstances—— But let us get to the story! Light up a cigar and don't interrupt me!"

The two men settled themselves comfortably in the cosy chairs of the bright apartment which James Ryder called his "den." Bob listened while his uncle revealed his secret.

"I have already mentioned" (so ran James Ryder's story), "that I was about twenty-two. I had an aunt in an East Anglian village and that aunt had two daughters. She also had two sons, both of them were fellow students of mine at a medical college. I never completed my medical studies, I may say, by the way. The youngest of the four was Emily, and she and I became good friends. I did not fall in love with her at first sight, but she attracted me both by her pretty face and well-moulded figure and by her general goodness. That's the best word to describe her character and manners.

"The idea of becoming enamoured of a country cousin would have made me laugh before I went down, and probably this had its effect on me and prevented me from forming a proper opinion. As the time wore on, I found greater pleasure in her society, and I was really sorry when I had to go. I thought that she was sorry too.

"I became more sorry after my return to ordinary duties. It was not the mere reaction of going back to work after a holiday; I felt that I would like to see more of Emily, and I began to blame myself for not having given more evidence of my sentiments. I comforted myself with the reflection that I had once expressed my opinion, to her sister, that Emily was more attractive than I had expected to find her. Perhaps that would be reported to Emily, I thought; for sisters must have their confidences!

"So the time went on and winter arrived. I had by that time come to the conclusion that I would endeavour to spend a week in that village at Christmas time and ascertain whether I still liked her as I thought I did and whether she liked me.

"The winter promised to be very gay for us; there were balls and parties galore in prospective, and we anticipated a grand time. I danced with this girl and that girl, but, notwithstanding their great smartness from a Society point of view, I still looked back to the country cousin.

"I had heard very little of her from her brothers, who seemed reticent. I could not introduce the subject too often, as that would betray me. So very little was said on either side.

"Then came a night which I am not likely to forget. There was a masked ball with fancy dress to this extent—that we could dress in the costume of any European country at any period. I resolved to get myself up as a cavalier; I was rather

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partial to the Charles I. style of dress, and I fancied that I appeared rather fetching with the long curls and so forth. I was not quite pleased that it was to be a masked ball, because the domino hides the upper part of the face and spoils the effect, but it was a fad on the part of our hostess, Lady Mitcham.

"My two cousins went to the ball, but we did not drive there together as we usually did, because they had arranged to take a lady to whom the elder was engaged. I soon recognised them in their costumes, which were very ordinary and need not be mentioned.

"I was in grand form and had no lack of partners, for I was a good dancer. Very early in the evening my attention was drawn to a French peasant who looked very charming and whose eyes shone like — well, I was going to say 'like meteors,' because 'like stars' is such a hackneyed metaphor, but I'm not sure that all meteors do shine brilliantly. Anyhow, those eyes seemed to go through you, and it occurred to me that they were often fixed on me. I resolved to have a dance with that French peasant girl, so I waited my opportunity and, when a partner led her to a seat, I approached her and asked for the honour of a dance.

"I was fortunate enough to get the next dance, a delightful waltz. Ah! I cannot recall it, after all these years, without a thrill! She was a grand waltzer, and that dance was bliss.

"The waltz terminated, I was leading her back to her seat, asking her if I might have the next dance, when she interrupted me.

"'I am hot and rather tired!' she said softly. 'I would prefer to sit in the conservatory, where it is, at least, less warm, and you may leave me if you wish to join the next dance.'

"'Impossible! I cannot leave you alone! What would the next dance be without you!' I cried ecstatically. 'Only permit me to rest here with you!'

"She made no reply, but the face was turned from me. I bent forward in order to catch a glimpse of the eyes that had thrilled me, and it seemed to me that they were liquid—the fire had disappeared and moisture filled them. My heart felt as if it had been stabbed. I placed my hand on hers and asked her to tell me her trouble. I was positive that she was in trouble.

"I drew her closer, and once more tried to press my lips to hers. Again she gently put me off."

"However, just as I thought she was about to reply, my two cousins strolled through the conservatory. I suppose that Jack, the elder, had left his sweetheart dancing with someone, for the strains of the music flowed towards us, and that they had come here for a rest. They looked at me, and Jack said quizzically: 'I won't disturb you, old fellow!' and they passed on with a courtly bow to the lady.

"'Confound their impudence!' I muttered. 'I can talk to a girl if I wish, can't I?'

"And I did wish! I took her hand and spoke softly to her. I knew—or I imagined I knew!—that I had found my affinity. Why should I be so attracted to this stranger, if it were not that she were the one being in the world who could make me happy?

"I cannot tell you all I said. I besought her to confide in me and —— But there! As you are in love yourself, you understand very well what I said! It's much the same with every man!

"She told me that I reminded her of a man who had not proved worthy. He had paid her great attention and had gone away and left her. It was something of a shock to discover that she had cared for another, even if ever so little, but I soon got over it. I assured her that it was fate; that if it had not been so, I should not have been the lucky fellow I was that evening, and that she would have missed the one man who could and would make her life a path of roses. I ended by trying to clasp her in my arms, but she gently repulsed me.

"'Perhaps I am doing him an injustice!' she murmured. 'It may have been only my own foolish fancy! He never breathed a word that I could construe as a confession of love, but in other ways I was led to imagine that——' She sighed. 'Yet he was so noble! I cannot think that he intended to treat me as a mere toy! I do so wish to act justly towards him. Would you consider it—I mean——'

"She became confused.

"She was evidently anxious to learn whether or not I regarded it as wrong on the part of a man to flirt or to trifle with the affections of an innocent girl. I was on the point of declaring energetically that a man should not pay marked attentions to, or flirt with, any girl and then leave her with an aching heart, when a terrible thought struck me. It might

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be that Emily was thinking the very same about me at that moment!

"But I forced the thought out of my mind. Emily had been well enough in her way, but this French peasant by my side was a queen to her.

"I did not attempt to answer the question which she had tried to put to me. I leant over again, and drew her close to me and whispered words of love into her ear. She listened, half-unwillingly, as I could not help fancying, but I continued. Then I drew her closer and once more tried to press my lips to hers. And again she gently put me off!

"'Have *you* ever loved another woman?' she demanded suddenly. 'How can I be sure that you are sincere, after my former experience?'

"I was staggered, and not best pleased with this prosaic turn of things. Poetry is what you want when you have an attack of love fever, not matter-of-fact prose like that? Besides, it was an awkward inquiry, I might truthfully have said that I had never made love to a woman, but in my own heart I had to admit that I had experienced very tender sentiments for Emily lately! I hesitated. I imagined I detected a look of triumph in the eyes that were now gazing fully at me. She was distinctly agitated; I could see her breast heaving and her breathing was laboured. I remained silent.

"'I heard,' she said softly, 'that you were in love with a cousin in the country!'

"I could have uttered something uncomplimentary about my male cousins; they must know this girl and they had said something to her concerning my holiday!

"Then my coolness returned to me; I was able to reflect calmly. I sat with my eyes away from hers, boldly revolving the thing in my mind, and I decided against Emily. There was no haste about it, despite the circumstances. I decided deliberately in favour of the French peasant girl. I realised that the latter was waiting anxiously for my reply, and I felt a sentiment of triumph.

"'I am not in love with my country cousin!' I cried at length. 'I know who has told you that, but he is wrong, they are both wrong and I will pay them out for prejudicing you against me!'

"'Then you do not love her?' came the query in a trembling voice.

"'How could I, when I have you?' I answered hotly. 'She is as a common field-flower compared with a flower of rarest excellence—you are incomparable! Take off that mask and tell me your name, that I may know and possess you!' I added ardently.

"'Not now, not now!' she cried in agitation. Her voice appeared very different. 'You will know before long! I will make myself known to you! I must go!'

"And before I could grasp the fact, she had fled!

"I searched everywhere for my French peasant girl, but without avail. I should have recognised her at once naturally, even if there had been ten other French peasant girls at the ball instead of her being the only one; but she was gone!

"At supper we unmasked and there were some surprises, as usual, but I was not interested. I wanted to have a word or two with my cousins and give them a piece of my mind for telling tales out of school, but the younger was gone and the elder had his sweetheart with him, so I could do nothing.

"The next day, Tom—that was the younger of my cousins—came to me and asked me if I enjoyed the ball.

"'I needn't make that inquiry, though!' he cried, without giving me time to speak. 'You fell in love with a girl there, didn't you? You will be glad to learn her identity. That note will tell you!'

"He flung a note on my table and walked out with an expression of annoyance and contempt on his features. I had a good mind to call him back and administer a thrashing, but I refrained and tore open the note.

"It was from Emily. I remember what was in that note very well; every word is engraved on my memory; but I shall not repeat it. I will merely tell what had happened.

"Emily had been invited to spend a few days with an old friend of her mother; she had accepted the invitation gladly. Her brothers enjoined her to keep her arrival a secret and to go to the ball, where she would meet me. They believed that I was in love with their sister, and that a surprise meeting would be a happy event for me.

"She went, and her brothers contrived to draw my attention to the French peasant girl; they wondered if I should recognise her in her disguise. That disguise, aided by the domino, had been so good that it had deceived me.

"Emily herself had played a small part; she loved me dearly, but was in doubt about my feelings towards her. Unconsciously she had followed my movements with eyes of love, and this had helped to draw me nearer to her and had made those eyes shine more brightly. Have you never experienced the strange sensation of *feeling* that someone is looking fixedly at you, and have turned to discover that it is really so?

"I cannot explain why I fell in love with that peasant girl, and why, under the influence of that spell, I scorned Emily, for they were one and the same!

"Emily had thrown herself thoroughly into the part, so far as the make-up was concerned, having actually darkened her hair and otherwise disguised herself. I have no doubt that her original intention was to give me a surprise—a pleasant one, as she believed. Then probably, being only human, she thought to gain some idea of the state of my feelings. When I actually began to make love to her as the French peasant girl, she half believed that I knew quite well to whom I was talking, but she asked about the country cousin in order to make certain. And then she heard herself spoken of with derision!

"Did I tear up that letter? No, I did not; I kept it as a proof of man's peculiar construction. I despised and loved the same woman, according to circumstances! It was not as if she had done anything to make me despise her, mind you. It shows that love is a mystery beyond solution by mortals. Weeks afterwards, when I could meditate calmly, I recognised charms in Emily which I had not seen during my holiday, and I anathematised myself for my stupidity, and yet—I loved the French peasant girl also! If they had been distinct personalities, and I had married one, should I have been happy or should I have wished that I had married the other?"

"That's a curious experience!" cried Bob when James Ryder had ceased speaking. "But how lucky you would have been in the circumstances if you had married her!"

"H'm!" said his uncle doubtfully. "However, I didn't marry her; she wouldn't look at me after that, of course! I have lost track of her these many years, but I have never forgotten her!"

"You mean that you have never ceased to love her?" asserted Bob boldly.

"You rascal! Well, you are right! But my story may act as a warning against falling in love at first sight! It may be a lesson to you——"

"Ah, but Amy is the best of——" began Bob.

"It's all right, Bob!" laughed James Ryder. "No amount of experience on the part of one man will alter the course taken by another in matters of love! I congratulate you and wish you joy!"

J. Hubert.

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Concludes in this Number.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODE TWENTY-THREE.

Ray to the Rescue Again.

"THERE, dear, drink this. It'll do you a world of good."

I looked up languidly, to see Mrs. Windsor bending over me. She held a glass of medicine to my lips, and after drinking it mechanically, I felt so much better that memory of recent events suddenly returned to me.

"Oh!" I shuddered, "however did you get me away from that horrible man?"

"It was Mr. Ray who did it," replied Mrs. Windsor. "He came here a little while after you had left. If you had gone the nearest way to the station you would have met him."

"Mr. Ray! Whatever could have brought him here!"

"You, of course! He wanted to know how you were getting on, and when I saw how concerned he was about having missed you, I told him everything I knew. My word, he was in a rage! I fancy he'll give more than one person a piece of his mind. But he didn't stop here long, for he wanted to find you before you got into your train. He was following the directions I had given him, and was walking quickly round the bend of the Spinney Lane, when he heard a faint cry ahead of him, and ran till he came up to where a man was bending over a prostrate body. The man thought the coast was clear, and didn't observe Mr. Ray till he was close upon him. But he felt the weight of his fist, and made off in a hurry, leaving Mr. Ray to get you home the best way he could. As luck would have it, the grocer's cart came along the lane soon afterwards, and the grocer's man helped Mr. Ray to bring you here, for you had fainted. And that's all!"

So I owed another deep debt of gratitude to the man who had already done so much for me! Of course, I could never repay him. Neither could I hope to retain his goodwill, or even his friendship, after the exposures which were now inevitable. Mr. Taskot's information about the artist's supposed engagement was, I felt convinced, a falsehood of his enemy's own invention. Nevertheless, it was hardly likely that a man who was so clever and distinguished would think with anything but tolerant pity of a girl who was everlastingly needing somebody to help her out of her troubles.

Still, it comforted me to know that I owed my rescue to the man who had already shown such zeal on my behalf, and I felt as if the solution of all my difficulties must now be close at hand. In this restful mood I fell asleep, and when I awoke, the effects of the attack upon me had quite disappeared. So I got up, put on a fresh frock, and went downstairs, much to the delight of Mrs. Windsor, who had been afraid of serious injury when I was brought home unconscious.

"And here comes the handsome gentleman back again!" she added. "I'll let him in, and I'll leave you to tell him how you are yourself."

Mrs. Windsor was as good as her word, though she would have saved me some embarrassment if she had stayed with me, for I was more than half afraid of meeting the reproaches which my conscience told me were deserved from Mr. Ray.

But he soon put me at my ease, for his manner was kindliness itself, and as soon as he became convinced that I was not much worse for the afternoon's alarming experience, he explained the cause of his presence in Essondon.

"For some time after I had, as I imagined, seen you safely ensconced at Mrs. Grainger's," he said, "I was very busy with the commission I told you of, and did nothing in the way of visiting. But I had no sooner finished the portrait than I set off to pay you a call. I met Mr. Bainbrig by the way, and he told me that there had been a terrific scene of some sort at Mrs. Grainger's, resulting in the hurried departure of yourself and Mr. Taskot."

"Mr. Taskot has been my evil genius," I murmured, flushing hotly at the recollection of the scene in the open four-wheeler.

"Yes, I know that," was the response—"perhaps even better than you know it yourself, for I am too well acquainted with him not to be fully aware of his capabilities. Still, I hardly thought he would go the length of trying to abduct you."

"Was that what he intended doing?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But why?"

"Well, thereby hangs a tale, which I will proceed to unfold. Milward Taskot poses as a rich man, with tremendous expectations to boot, and he is usually accepted in Society at his own valuation—until a scandal occurs. Then he is quickly sent to the rightabout, and seeks fresh fields to exploit. But he is not rich, nor is he ever likely to be rich. So he has tried various ways of earning a living without having to work over it. One of his methods, which has met with more or less success, is to fleece unwary cardplayers, and the Vernons made a huge mistake when they imagined they were going to relieve him of a lot of money, for he is as great a rogue as Vernon himself, which is saying much."

"But they did get a lot of money out of him."

"Yes, but I have compelled them to disgorge it, and I have given it back to Taskot, threatening to expose the whole of his disreputable history if he ventured to annoy you again. I also insisted upon the surrender of the snapshot negatives, so you need fear nothing more from them."

"The Vernons must be afraid of you."

"So they are, and I shall not give them much more rope. They will presently break the conditions I have imposed, and then they will have to leave the neighbourhood which they disgrace by their presence."

"But Vernon Towers is Harry Vernon's ancestral home. At least, Annabel told me so."

"That was only one of her little fibs. They took the place on a lease, and altered its name from Walmsley Towers to Vernon Towers. When they leave the house, as they will soon have to do, it will revert to its former name. But that doesn't explain why Taskot wanted to abduct you."

"No, and I cannot understand why he should, for he must have known I should always hate him."

"You are a 'quick study,' as theatrical people say, and he intended you to marry him under the impression that he was desperately and disinterestedly in love with you. By compromising you with all your friends, he thought to drive you to such despair that you would welcome even him as a means of proving your respectability. Once married, possibly under the coercive influence of a stupefying drug, he would have compelled you to earn money for him by cheating at

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cards. The fact that you refused him upset his calculations, of course, but he was bent upon subjugating you, somehow."

"What a dreadful man! But you must blame me for many things until you hear my explanations."

"No, there you are mistaken, Miss Beresford. I saw the scoundrel kiss you, and I walked away in a great rage, for appearances were certainly against you then. Later on, after I had had time to think things over, I interviewed the cabman, and learnt from him that the kisses were stolen without your consent, for the cabman has good ears and eyes, and had taken note of all that passed. At the station, too, I was able to piece various events together when I made inquiries, and I concluded that Milward Taskot had intended to compromise you by making it seem that you had travelled together. That was what made me decide to come and see how you were getting on, for I dreaded lest more mischief should befall you."

"Mrs. Windsor told you about the vicar calling here?"

"Yes, and I will speak to that charitable gentleman before I leave Essondon. By the time I have finished with him, I daresay he will wish he had possessed a little more charity. By-the-bye, there is an anonymous letter in his possession, is there not?"

"Yes; Mrs. Windsor does not know all the dreadful things that are in it. But she knows that it was the cause of my having to leave here."

"H'm! The reverend gentleman shall give me that letter, and I will tear it up. We must not allow it to crop up again at some unexpected moment."

"You are kinder to me than I deserve, and I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently."

"My dearest, I can never be kinder to you than you deserve! And as for thanks—what thanks does a man want for trying to work out his own happiness?"

This speech was accompanied by such ardent glances into my blushing face that I was filled with confusion, and rose with the intention of putting an end to it by asking Mrs. Windsor to send some tea in. But Mr. Ray, who always seemed to do exactly as he liked with everybody, laid his hand persuasively on mine, and—— Well, really, the things he said to me were such gross flatteries that I will not record them, for nobody but Maurice himself can ever indorse half of them.

"But it is just miraculous!" I stammered at last. "Only this very morning I was the most miserable girl on earth, and the most friendless. Now everything is changed, and if I am to believe my ears, you, who are a thousand times too good for me, actually want to marry me!"

"There is nothing wonderful in that, except that I am the most fortunate man alive to secure such a prize as you are. Why, the first minute I saw you, I knew that my fate was sealed either for happiness or misery!"

"I don't think I ought to accept you—I have been so foolish. And my enemies may continue to persecute me. In that case, there would be danger of disgracing you, and disgrace would ruin your professional career. No, no—you shall never be brought to poverty through me!"

I was quite sincere in resolving to sacrifice my own happiness rather than risk evil consequences to Maurice. But he carried the day in this, as in everything else, and, very much to my amazement, I was presently receiving the congratulations of Mrs. Windsor, who was so delighted at this sudden change in my fortunes that she almost cried her eyes out!

EPISODE TWENTY-FOUR, AND LAST.

The Downfall of the Vernons.

There was considerable sensation in and about Essondon after the grocer's assistant had noised it abroad that a young lady had been attacked in open daylight, and that she would have been abducted if he had not arrived on the spot just in time to vanquish her assailant. His story was slightly beside the mark, but that did not prevent people from regarding the Spinney Lane as too dangerous a place to frequent except in company.

"He was the biggest man I'd ever seen!" so said the grocer's man to Mrs. Windsor. "And his legs were the longest. No wonder he disappeared like the wind when me and the gentleman tackled him."

Probably my assailant did run off at his top speed. But he was no giant, and Maurice by no means despaired of finding him very soon. For he discovered incidentally that Mr. Smedley's guest had had a nasty fall on the kerbstone, after being out for a walk, and that he had broken his ankle.

"Our bird has caged himself," said Maurice. "So if you will, dearest, we will have a final interview with him."

"Do you think I ought to see him again?"

"Certainly! He has certain confessions and retractions to make, and we cannot get the matter settled too soon."

Thus it happened that Maurice and I called at Mrs. Smedley's, and were shown into the breakfast-room, where Mr. Taskot, surrounded by evidences of careful attention, was lying on a couch, with his ankle bound in splints.

The sight of Maurice and me together seemed to enrage him, and he snarled viciously: "To what am I to attribute the honour of a call from you?"

"To my determination to put an end to your persecution of Miss Beresford," was Maurice's instant response. "You met with an accident when returning from your foolish attempt to kidnap my intended wife."

"Your intended wife?"

"Yes, Olive has made me happy by promising to marry me."

"You will have plenty of time to rue marrying a girl who is already spoken of as a——"

"Dare to say the words, and I will choke you, in spite of your present helplessness."

Maurice's vehemence cowed Mr. Taskot at once, and he mumbled sulkily: "What do you want here, anyway?"

"I want the surrender of that set of snapshots you hold."

"You won't get them."

"Either you surrender them at once, or I disclose to our Uncle Walter Taskot all about a certain forgery on your part. There are also other disclosures which would probably cost you at least ten thousand pounds."

"Do you mean that the old fool has altered his will, and that I am only to have ten thousand pounds?"

"Precisely. And the ten thousand pounds will dwindle to a shilling if I am compelled to tell all I know."

I listened to this conversation in increasing wonder, for it explained Maurice's familiarity with Milward Taskot's doings. They were evidently cousins, and it would seem that Maurice was the very nephew whose chances of inheriting from the maligned Walter Taskot, Esq., of Malvern Lodge, were represented to me as so very remote. There was some furious muttering. But Maurice gained his point, and I thankfully saw the compromising snapshots given up by my enemy.

"And now that you have got them," he hissed, "you may be confronted by a fresh set any day."

"No, no," was the complacent answer. "I have secured and destroyed the negatives, together with some copies which the Vernons intended to use presently. Furthermore, I hold the sworn and signed confession of both Harry and Annabel Vernon that the charges against Olive Beresford were fictitious ones. It paid them better to concede to my demands than to risk the instant exposure I threatened, and I feel no compunction at having given them a certain amount of rope, for their swindling career is almost at an end."

"Well, Maurice Ray, I am not so much in love with you that I want to see more of you than I can help."

"Just so, my worthy cousin. I am going as soon as you have written and signed a confession to my dictation."

There were some more protestations and disclaimers. But before we left Milward Taskot's presence he had confessed to many things, Mrs. Smedley being called in to witness the signature to the document, the contents of which were not disclosed to her.

But it set forth that the anonymous letter received by the

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Vicar of Essondon had been Milward Taskot's own concoction, and that none of its contents were justified by facts. In short, Maurice omitted nothing that could exonerate me completely in the eyes of the world, and our next visit was paid to Mr. Snaith, the vicar, who looked very haughtily at me until he was shown Milward Taskot's signed confession.

"I'm very sorry," he stammered, "that I placed a moment's credence in so vile a story, and I apologise most earnestly."

"What has become of the anonymous letter?" asked Maurice, who was none the less stern because the vicar was apologetic.

"I have it locked in my bureau," was the answer. "Nobody but myself has seen it since it came here."

"And nobody else must see it, sir. Kindly give it to me, so that I may tear it up."

This request was granted without hesitation, and it was a very happy girl who presently walked back to Mrs. Windsor's in company with the man who had undertaken to manage her affairs for the rest of her life.

On our arrival, Mrs. Windsor met us with a face so full of mystery and concern that we guessed at something serious.

"Whatever is the matter?" I asked, my hopes instantly dropping to zero, for my happiness was so recent, so unexpected, and so undeserved, that I instantly feared that it was about to vanish.

"Such strange things!" replied my old friend. "What a mercy it is, dear, that you are safe at home!"

"Olive has had rather an exciting time of it while we have been out," observed Maurice. "Suppose she sits down before she hears what you have to tell?"

"To be sure! Come along, dearie. The tea is just ready, so we can talk while we are having it."

I was shaking so much with nervousness that I was glad to sit down, and I looked on with dilating eyes while Maurice read something in a paper Mrs. Windsor handed to him.

"The afternoon edition came in just now," she said, while she busied herself with the tea-cups. "I always like to know what's going on in the world, so I sat down for a half hour's reading. But, my goodness, I did get a turn when I saw 'Vernon Towers' in a big heading."

"Now I can't wait another minute. Let me see what has happened."

"My dear girl," was Maurice's answer to this very natural demand of mine. "There is nothing whatever for you to be anxious about. But it's a terrible thing for Lord A. His son, it seems, formed part of the house-party at Vernon Towers last week. He went with a friend, the son of a well-known Member of Parliament. The local correspondent asserts that they were plied with drink, and that the greater part of their losses took place while they were incapable of playing intelligently. Their joint losses at Bridge amount to forty thousand pounds, only a small part of which, of course, was within their means of paying. The lord's son regarded himself as ruined for life; could not face his people; and shot himself this morning."

"What an awful thing!" I gasped.

"Thank Heaven, there is one comfort, though. Nothing can now save this gang from full exposure, and I expect the next news we hear will be either that they have absconded, to seek fresh fields of mischief, or that the police have arrested them for swindling. There will be no more house-parties held at the Towers."

Maurice was right. The next news we heard corroborated all his deductions. Unfortunately, the brace of swindlers, plus their accomplice, Mr. Dean Fisher, took the alarm directly the young viscount's death was discovered, and absconded with all the money in the house. They have not yet been caught. Milward Taskot also quitted England.

Maurice and I are married now. Mrs. Windsor lives with us, and manages my big house to perfection.

The Bainbrigs, too, are very great friends of ours. But they are like me in that they have sworn never again to have anything more to do with "The Bridge of Ruin."

THE END.

Your Editor Chats.

I SUPPOSE you are all looking forward in anticipation of next week's number to read the opening chapters of our new series. I can assure you that the realisation of it will be even better than the anticipation, for a more exciting opening instalment would be an impossibility. It tells how Sara Gillespie enters the employ of Messrs. Templeton & Co., general agents, as a lady typist. The head of the firm seems to take a very friendly interest in the girl, and also in her absent lover, Noel Masterman, who is at Nice. But it transpires that the assumed friendship of the firm is only a decoy used to enable them to make the girl a tool for their schemes against Noel, concerning whom they hold some documents of the utmost importance. Sara, however, overhears their plotting, and ascertaining that everything connected with Noel and her happiness in the future depends upon the fateful papers that they are discussing, she makes a bold effort for her lover's sake. The cover of next week's issue will depict a striking incident in the first instalment.

———

I MUST thank "C. W." for the very interesting letter he has sent me, and also for the compliments the missive contains. He has, however, an idea that I might with advantage publish a serial story dealing with the chivalrous and romantic times of old England, something after the style of "The Lovers of Yvonne," in preference to modern tales. Now, I quite agree with "C. W." that the old-world epochs afford plenty of scope for stirring stories of love and honour, but I have one great objection to using them at all regularly. "C. W.," who says that he has been an unfailing subscriber for a long time, must have noticed that all my serial stories and series of stories serve two objects; firstly, to amuse and entertain, and secondly, to point out present-day dangers to young men and women. Take, for instance, "The Bridge of Ruin," which concludes this week; and, "C. W.," you will quite see what I mean.

———

YOU will find on two of the earlier pages of this number a couple of sketches entitled "A Society Pair" and "The Coster Couple." These are the forerunners of a set of drawings which I am positive will bring forth your admiration. They are intended to depict the style and actions of lovers in various spheres of life, as well as of different nationalities. The artist who is executing these pictures not only has made a clever study of the faces and general demeanour of his subjects, but has also put a most pleasing finishing touch to his works by inclosing them in very dainty frames. In future issues I shall show, amongst others, types of Parisian, American, Irish, "Coon," Dutch, Russian, Italian, and Breton lovers. Will you let me know what you think of them?

———

I HAVE told you in my first paragraph about the new series in next week's number, and I am writing this to remind you that I have another pleasant surprise in store for you. In a week or so there will be starting in this paper a fine, thrilling serial story by Mr. George Griffith, who, as all of you are probably aware, has written many fine romances. It will be called "A Criminal Millionaire," and the plot is a decidedly original one, quite out of the ordinary running. It is graphically told, and is certain to hold the interest of every reader, as the excitement is sustained throughout.

———

YOU will find on page 467, an announcement regarding the "Juggled Letters" Competition. **Your Editor.**

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The - - Maitland Millions.

Relating How a Girl Schemed for Wealth.

"If my grandson, Eric Maitland, should die before the age of twenty-one the estate shall revert to my nephew, Lionel Verner, and his heirs."

Sir Richard delivered the words with emphasis. In the quietness of the summer afternoon his voice carried far. Far enough, at all events, to reach his lady secretary. That young person paused half way up the staircase, then with some considerable care and agility retraced her steps, and took up her position—an indiscreet and uncomfortable one—at the key-hole of the library door. Inside Sir Richard was discussing the provisions of his will.

"It's no use, Paine," she heard the Baronet exclaim. "I've made up my mind. If anything happens to Eric, I should prefer that my sister's son should come after me, to the daughter of a scoundrel like Phillips. Yes, yes, I know what you're going to say," he interrupted testily, "that if Phillips was her father my poor daughter Triss was her mother. But her mother married against my will, and though both she and her scamp of a husband are dead, that's no reason why I should acknowledge their child. Once and for all, I will have nothing to do with her."

"Helen Phillips is entirely dependent on her own exertions," said the solicitor quietly.

"Well, put her down for a hundred pounds if you persist, and have done with the matter," Sir Richard replied impatiently.

The lawyer silently acquiesced, and the disposition of Sir Richard's property went on without further interruption.

Outside the door the private secretary was standing with flushed cheeks and eyes bright with excitement.

What she had heard was sufficient to make any girl excited!

She had just learnt that Lionel Verner, the man who for three years had been her persistent, if penniless, lover, was the nephew of a Baronet; and she had snubbed him unmercifully! Even kept from him the address of her present situation lest he should find courage—and the railway fare—to seek her out and renew his attentions.

To think that shabby young man should be the heir to a splendid place like Brayton Manor, and that he was head over ears in love with her. Why, it was the biggest piece of luck that could have happened. True, in their last interview she had forbidden Lionel to so much as think of her, but that was easily got over. A few soft words would bring him to her feet again, more enslaved than ever.

Already she saw herself mistress of Brayton Manor, with wealth and luxury at her command. Lionel's present poverty she ascribed to a difference of opinion with his uncle. Now she came to think of it, she remembered hearing Sir Richard allude to his nephew as "an ungrateful scamp."

Well, she must persuade Lionel to propitiate his uncle, and *then*——

Her daydreams were rudely interrupted.

"Miss Louis," said a childish voice, "I've been looking for you everywhere, will you take me for a walk?"

Eric looked eagerly up at her, and as Laura met his eyes all her castles toppled to the ground. She had forgotten—Lionel was only heir—"should my grandson die."

The words haunted her all the time she was dressing; they echoed in her ears. Her pen mechanically traced them on the paper when she tried to write, and it was only with a great effort that she put them out of her mind, and, giving all her faculties to the task, assured Lionel of her unalterable devotion, and her fixed determination to be true to him, in spite of poverty, for ever!

With a sigh she completed her preparations for the walk, picturing herself meanwhile in white satin, diamonds, and pearls, regretfully placing on her pretty head a sailor hat in lieu of the tiara, which in imagination she had fastened among her thick, dark braids.

It was a glorious afternoon, and, the letter safely posted, they turned towards the woods. Eric ran on in front to gather water lilies, and Laura returned to her visions of splendour and magnificence.

Hitherto her ambition had been set on charming the old Baronet into making her an offer of marriage. But at the best, she thought, the wife of a man of over seventy would be but another name for nurse; whereas married to Lionel, master of Brayton Manor, a very different future presented itself.

"Should my grandson die"—what was that scream, that cry that rang out shrill and piercing? Instinctively she hurried towards the lake where the child had been playing. He had stretched over the water to grasp a lily out of his reach, his foot had slipped, and now, his small hands clinging vainly to the branch of an overhanging tree, was in danger of sinking. Even as she looked the frail support gave way, and the child was struggling in the water.

There was no danger for a man or woman in the shallow pool, but Eric was under-sized for his age, and his feet did not nearly touch the bottom.

The girl took it all in with a flash of comprehension. The slender figure, the small, white face with its tremulous mouth and pleading eyes, the plaintive voice that called in an agony of childish wonderment—"Help me, oh, *please* help."

She saw it, understood it all. And stood motionless on the bank.

Another second and the child would not be there. Another second and Lionel, her lover, would inherit his uncle's wealth. And she could bid a long good-bye to the poverty and hardship that had soured her girlhood.

If only he would not look at her with such inquiring eyes. If only——

The child was young. He had no hold on life; it did not owe him years of happiness, she claimed.

And yet——

Would the child never drown?

Two small hands clutched wildly in the air, still grasping, poor little chap, the lilies that had cost him so dear.

The woman wavered, this last appeal touched even her hard heart. He should be saved.

Before she put her tardy resolution into practice, she was pushed roughly on one side. A young girl, flushed and panting, waded into the water, grasped the child, and carried him in safety to the bank.

"How could you stand there, letting him drown before your eyes?" she asked Laura indignantly. Then laying the boy upon the ground she commenced to chafe his hands.

"Are you a coward, or what?" she cried.

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But Laura was too stunned to answer or offer a defence. She stood on one side until at last the boy opened his eyes and drew a long deep breath.

Then the instinct of self-preservation reasserted itself. Snatching Eric in her arms, she motioned the girl out of her way.

"It was you that frightened him with your screams," she said. "Well," as the girl stared, too astonished to reply, "are you waiting to be paid for what you've done? Call up at the Manor, and I daresay you'll be rewarded."

The listener's face flushed scarlet. Her pride was up in arms, but at the mention of the Manor she drew back, surprised almost—it seemed afraid.

"It is Eric Maitland?" she cried suddenly. "Oh, I must speak to him."

Would the child never drown!

Laura paid no attention to the words, however, but hastened on towards the Manor. The girl made no attempt to follow, but the recollection of the scorn, the accusation in her eyes, was hard for Laura Louis to endure. The child, already weighing down her arms, seemed to grow heavier at every step, and when at last she reached the house, in an uproar at Eric's absence, she was just able to put the boy in his uncle's arms, and then fell fainting on the floor.

She had no strength to suffer more.

"Is he any better, nurse?" Three times within the last half hour the poor old Baronet had made the same inquiry, and each time received the same sad answer, "No better."

It was three weeks since Eric's accident—for accident it was believed to be—and from then it had been a struggle between life and death for the boy, the issue now leaning to one side, now to the other.

Laura had taken to herself the credit of Eric's rescue, explaining that his foot had slipped, and that he had fallen into the water before she came to the spot. As the child was too ill to talk, her claim was undisputed, and she was regarded as his most devoted attendant.

When, therefore, in accordance with the doctor's directions, a trained nurse was sent for from the nearest town, Laura's indignation knew no bounds. "Could she not be trusted to nurse the child, whose life she had saved at the risk of her own?" she asked, and Sir Richard was hard put to it to quiet her.

She was prepared to treat the nurse as an interloper, and advanced to meet her with more than her usual air of insolence. But at the first sight of that fair, sweet face, at the sound of the rich, full voice, she started back frightened and amazed. In the quiet, self-possessed young girl who stood before her, she recognised the stranger who had saved Eric in the wood.

Perfectly polite, the nurse had behaved as if all recollection of their former meeting had vanished from her mind. What did she know—what did she suspect?

With the exception of the girl's reappearance, however, things were shaping themselves gradually to Laura's ends. Sir Richard had quite broken down since Eric was taken ill, and quietly acquiesced in Mr. Paine's suggestion that his nephew, Lionel Verner, should be sent for. And now Laura was waiting to receive him in the library, Sir Richard being unwilling to spare even a few moments from the child.

"How beautiful you are, my darling! how beautiful!" And Lionel bent to kiss the lovely face upturned to him.

But, the first joy of the meeting over, he grew quieter and more subdued, almost disturbed in his manner, and asked question after question about Eric, and Sir Richard, till Laura could have cried with vexation.

"Are you not pleased to see me?" she asked angrily.

He looked up, hurt and astonished. "You forget," he said coldly, "that little Eric is my cousin, and that I am anxious to know how he is."

And then, irritated by what she termed his stupidity, she made her first mistake. "You can't really want him to get better," she said, "for if Eric dies you will be Sir Richard's heir!"

She knew directly she had spoken that she had committed a grave error, and strove to banish the impression of her words by caresses and endearments; but he drew back from her touch and sternly asked her what she meant.

"How have you come by such a piece of information?" he said.

"Never mind!" she answered sullenly; "it *is* so, that's enough—if

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"I am your grand-daughter, and my name is Helen Phillips."

Eric dies you will be master of Brayton Manor, and I shall be its mistress."

He moved away with a feeling of repulsion, almost disgust.

"It is true," she repeated. "Eric will die and you——"

"Miss Louis, Mr. Verner, Sir Richard wants you at once. Poor little Eric is very ill!" The nurse spoke hurriedly, but it seemed to Laura that even in her agitation there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

The child was sitting up in bed, smiling at his grandfather in his old wistful fashion. But when Laura entered the smile faded, his eyes grew wild with fear and terror.

"The water!" he shrieked. "Take her away! The water—oh, the water!" and, noting the terror in the childish face, Lionel pushed her gently from the room and closed the door.

By ten o'clock that night it was all over. The little life had ended—finished. Lionel stole quietly from the room. Sir Richard stood gloomily by the window hidden by the curtains. Thinking herself alone, the nurse knelt down by the bedside and kissed the small, white cheek.

"My poor little one!" she cried. "My dear, dear little cousin!"

"Cousin!" Sir Richard started. "Who are you?" he asked her. "What is your name?" Unshrinkingly she met his look.

"I am your grand-daughter," she answered; "and my name is Helen Phillips."

The old man dropped wearily into a chair. "Life's a strange tangle!" he said—"a strange tangle."

When at last she came to say "Good-night," Sir Richard kissed her gently on the forehead.

"God bless you, my child!" he said. "God bless you!"

* * * * *

In the morning they found the old man sitting by Eric's bed, his hand clasping the little wasted fingers, his grey head lying beside Eric's golden curls. For the world-worn, weary wanderer, and the little child, had set out together on life's last sad journey, to the land of Death!

It was the evening after the funeral and the members of the household were assembled in the library of Brayton Manor to listen to Sir Richard's will. Laura's heart beat fast, and her cheeks flushed as John Paine quietly unfolded the document, and prepared to make public the terms of the legacies.

"Before I commence," he said, "I have a duty to perform. Both of you have, I think, heard of Sir Richard's grandchild, the daughter of Beatrice Maitland who married Robert Phillips. In deference to this lady's wishes, I have kept silence up to the present, but the time has now arrived when I must introduce Miss Helen Phillips."

The young nurse bowed quietly. Lionel impulsively stepped forward and took her hand.

"We must be friends, cousin," he said kindly.

"Where are your proofs?" interrupted Laura. "What grounds have you for supposing this woman to be other than an impostor? Are you mad, Lionel, to take things so much for granted?"

"Sir Richard acknowledged this lady as his grand-daughter in my presence the night before he died," interposed the solicitor, "when he also made a new will."

"I leave all my property to my nephew, Lionel Verner, provided he marries my grand-daughter, Helen Phillips. If he declines the said Helen Phillips shall inherit in his stead; if, however, she is unwilling, then Lionel Verner shall take possession of the whole, with a deduction of £2,000 for her benefit."

Laura sprang to her feet. "Infamous!" she cried. "Infamous! Sir Richard knew that Lionel and I were engaged. How dare he offer me such an insult!"

"I don't think my uncle quite understood, Laura," said Lionel quietly, "or he would not have introduced such a proviso. You must not think me lacking in courtesy, Helen," he said, smiling at the fair, fresh face, which crimsoned under his steady gaze, "but the Fates have already provided me with a charming *fiancée*," and he took Laura's hand within his arm.

"You forget, Lionel," she interrupted impatiently—"you forget; it is for Miss Phillips to decline to marry you. Otherwise you will not have a penny."

"Miss Louis is quite correct," interposed the solicitor; "if Miss Phillips is willing to accept you for a husband, and you decline, the property is hers."

"It seems that I am not to be spared a rejection," he said, laughing; "so, speak on, Helen, and say that you'll have none of me."

The girl raised her eyes, the flush in her cheeks deepened, and then paled as suddenly.

"Why don't you speak?" said Laura sharply. "Are you waiting to be asked? Perhaps Miss Phillips is anxious for the experience of a proposal," she sneered; "you'd better make it in due form, Lionel!"

Helen's eyes filled, her lips quivered, and in pity for her evident distress Lionel decided to bring matters to a close. Taking her hand in his, he asked her, smiling: "Helen, will you be my wife?"

For a moment she looked up at him—his firm, yet tender mouth, the steadfast, kindly eyes. Then, with a little catch in her voice, she answered: "Yes!"

"What did you say?" shrieked Laura. "Do you know he is going to marry me? You are beside yourself. You shall *not* have Lionel or his money!"

At that Helen's wrath burst out.

"I do not want a penny of the money. I do not even lay claim to it."

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"Are you so much in love with Lionel then?" sneered Laura.

"Take care," cried Helen—"take care, or you will try me too far! Ask your own heart, question your past, and you will find a key to this problem. Can you not guess?" she cried. "Can you not——"

"Helen!" cried Lionel quietly. "Helen!"

"Oh, forgive me!" she said, choking back her sobs—"forgive me! In time to come, cousin—in time to come—you may not think so strangely or so bitterly of me!"

"It's a vile conspiracy!" said Laura. "Can you say nothing, do nothing, Lionel?"

"There is nothing to be done," he answered sadly. "Come, darling!" he added, "we are young and strong, we can afford to brave poverty, my dearest, you and I."

"Poverty! I? I marry a man without a home—an income—*nothing?* You're a fool, Lionel, not to see through this minx! There's nothing left to do but to go to law and dispute the will."

"That I shall never do," he answered gravely. "Surely you cannot put the fear of poverty before the power of love? Think, dearest, but a little while ago you wrote to tell me nothing should ever part your heart from mine."

But she laughed derisively in answer. "Love!" she screamed; "it isn't in me! What should I, who have been fed upon poverty, know of love? It was money I wanted, not love. I have lied, stolen, cheated, heaped sin upon sin upon my soul, to gain that which I longed for, prayed for—wealth. And then, then, when the cup is at my lips, it is dashed upon the ground, and you—you talk of love!"

She was mad with rage and hate—mad to the point of murder. In her fury she seized a lighted lamp from a table standing near, seized it to throw at Helen. But passion blinded her eyes, clouded her judgment. The lamp fell crashing into splinters at her feet.

Her skirts aflame, her whole figure in a blaze, she dashed herself against the door, and before anyone could reach or touch her, rushed into the corridor. Faster and faster she sped down the passage, until her shrieks grew fainter, and then there was silence.

* * * * *

After Laura's awful death Lionel went abroad for over two years.

His return was unannounced and unexpected.

"I thought you'd made up your mind to settle out in Florida?" said John Paine, the solicitor. "What brings you back?"

"Curiosity," said Lionel. "I want to find out Helen's reason for acting as she did. Why did she say 'yes' to my offer of marriage? An offer made only in jest."

"Love—of money, perhaps," said the lawyer. "She did not want to lose the Maitland millions."

"Impossible! You tell me yourself she refuses to touch a penny of my uncle's money."

Paine glanced shrewdly at the young man.

"Why not ask her yourself?" he said.

"I can't. It would appear as if I reproached her for poor Laura's death."

The lawyer paused. Then he told him how Laura had heard of the will, and how she had contrived to let Eric drown Lionel, was thunderstruck.

Presently he roused himself and sent for his cousin. Love of Helen had drawn him back to England, love, and the hope that she returned it. Now the lawyer's story had destroyed much hope. It would be an insult to her to suggest it.

"I am leaving England, Helen," he said quickly, "but before I go I want to thank you for all you have done for me—how much I only knew to-day. I leave Brayton Manor in your hands, the property is yours."

Helen Phillips drew a little nearer and laid her hand upon her cousin's arm.

"Am I so very ugly?" she said, mischief in her eyes. "Oh, Lionel, Lionel, won't you take me and Brayton Manor too? I could not bear to lose you—or the Maitland millions."

But for answer Lionel kissed her.

John K. Prothero.

Juggled Letters Competition.

In this competition 139 competitors sent in absolutely correct lists, and in accordance with the conditions a further set of letters has been sent to them to decide in what order the prizes are to be awarded. The following is a list of the stations admitted as correct:—

1, Glasgow; 2, Belfast; 3, Oxford; 4, Liverpool; 5, Swansea; 6, Dublin; 7, Dover; 8, Portsmouth; 9, Leeds; 10, York; 11, Taplow; 12, Aberdeen; 13, Wigan; 14, Falkirk; 15, Mill Hill; 16, Perth; 17, Manchester; 18, Cwmbran; 19, Bradford; 20, Killarney; 21, Sheffield; 22, Holyhead; 23, Cork; 24, Yarmouth; 25, Exeter; 26, Brighton; 27, Norwich; 28, Carlisle; 29; Hereford; 30, Derby; 31, Leamington; 32, Killaloe; 33, Llandudno; 34, Inverness; 35, Salisbury; 36, Windermere; 37, Fenagh; 38, Bristol; 39, Margate; 40, Cynwyd; 41, Southampton; 42, Queenstown; 43, Arbroath; 44, Wakefield; 45, Glenfarg; 46, Richmond; 47, Balne; 48, Kildare; 49, Falmouth; 50, Tilbury; 51, Garngad; 52, Shrewsbury; 53, Paisley; 54, Limavady; 55, Morar, or Brora; 56, Leicester; 57, Greenock; 58, Cassillis; 59, Buncrana; 60, Sevenoaks; 61, Gretna; 62, Newport, Preston, or Prescot; 63, Hartlepool; 64, Brentor; 65, Salford; 66, Blantyre; 67. Hitchin; 68, Ventnor; 69, Eastbourne; 70, Ynysbwl, Wensley, or Swanley; 71, Dollar; 72, Tredegar; 73, Pembroke; 74, Farnham, Dearham, or Farcham; 75, Ballineen, Ebdon Lane, or Llandebie; 76, Manea; 77, Llanrhaiadr; 78, Holloway; 79, Croydon; 80, Stranraer; 81, Halewood, or Dawsholm; 82, Killybegs; 83, Walsall; 84, Uttoxeter; 85, Lairg, or Irlam; 86, Ystradowen; 87, Crook; 88, Friezland; 89, Achnasheen; 90, Brayton; 91, Smeaton, Stanhoe, Bentham, or Bensham; 92, Menheniot; 93, Hirwain; 94, Embsay, Seamer, or Ramsey; 95, Kirkcaldy; 96, Rhayader; 97, Lauder; 98, Eglwysbach; 99, Carrigans; 100, Balmoral; 101, Scrooby; 102, Hoghton; 103, Eskmeals 104, Belturbet; 105, Delgany; 106, Whauphill; 107, Findermore; 108, Yiewsley; 109, Whalley, Weyhill, or How Mill; 110, Invershin; 111, Pencoed, or Caledon; 112, Batley, Oakley, or Botley; 113, Treeton or Steeton; 114, Stalham, or Waltham; 115, Monikie; 116, Harrogate; 117, Gravesend; 118, Ystalyfera; 119, Carrowen; 120, Penzance; 121, Barlaston, or Darlaston; 122, Esplanade; 123, Rossington; 124, Delabole; 125, Aspatria; 126, Wenhaston; 127, Slateford; 128, Bullgill; 129, Golspie; 130, West Hoathly; 131, Flecknoe, Caerleon, or Greenock; 132, Muir of Ord; 133, Ulleskelf; 134, Ovoca; 135, Crianlarich; 136, Glossop; 137, Llanilar; 138, Warwick or Wickwar; 139, Kinaldie, Ilkeston, or Dinsdale; 140, Blackpool; 141, Healing, Cloghan, or Gilgach; 142, Loughrea, or Dolygaer; 143, Annaghilla; 144, Ferbane, Fencote, or Banteer.

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MYSTERIOUS MR. MARPOLE.

Relating how a Burglary Helped Two Lovers.

WOODLEIGH-UNDER-EDGE, in Gloucestershire, is famous for two things. One of these is its beauty, and the other is that it is the seat of Sir Herbert Wilcox, K.C.B.

"Neathwood" lies just off the main road to Bristol and is on an eminence commanding a magnificent view of the country round. Woodleigh Hill, on the side of which Woodleigh-under-Edge is perched, stands up at the end of a range of low hills, and on each side of it the beautiful undulating scenery can be seen for many miles.

Sir Herbert rejoiced in the possession of an exceedingly beautiful daughter of whom he was justly proud. Edith Wilcox was of medium height and a perfect figure. Great blue eyes shone beneath a white forehead in a shapely oval. Masses of curly brown hair which glinted golden in the sun surmounted her exquisite features. Small wonder is it that all the eligible young men in the countryside were in love with her.

But her love was already given, and her cousin, Charles Wilcox, son of Sir John Wilcox, of "Rattledown," in Wiltshire, was the fortunate possessor.

Sir Herbert Wilcox was, however, unaware of the state of affairs that existed between his nephew and his daughter. But the young people were quite decided, and had arranged everything, down to the pattern of the drawing-room carpet.

Charlie Wilcox spent half his time at "Neathwood," playing tennis, or boating on the river which runs through Kingswood. His father made him an ample allowance, besides which he had inherited a considerable sum from an uncle.

It was the evening before Edith's twenty-first birthday, and soon after that festival Charlie had made up his mind to speak to Sir Herbert, and to endeavour to get his consent to the engagement.

That evening Lady Bolton called in, full of the details of a burglary which had happened at her house some nights back.

"Yes," said this lady, "the men got in through the conservatory, and they've taken my diamond tiara, my diamond necklace, and a lot of things. I'm distracted, but the police say they've got a clue."

"What shall I do?" she rambled on. "The burglars ought to be hanged, indeed they ought."

Sir Herbert endeavoured to console her, but in a moment she had commenced again though this time on another tack.

"Oh, and what do you think? Why, a man has moved into Charford Hall, quite alone they say. I have found out his name is Marpole; but what can a single man want with that great place? I'm sure I don't know; he's something good-for-nothing, I'll be bound."

How often that is the case. When a man lives in seclusion and does not blare forth his doings and sayings to the world, they, whoever the estimable "they" may be, regard him with suspicious eyes.

Edith's twenty-first birthday dawned bright and sunny. As Charlie Wilcox looked out from his bedroom window over the fields to Woodleigh Hill (for he had stayed the night at "Neathwood."), he thanked the providence that had cast his life in such sunny places.

Suddenly he heard a commotion in the house, and looking down on to the terrace, he saw the butler, followed by two footmen, talking rapidly and gesticulating the while, emerge from the drawing-room door. They pointed to the ground and then went down the steps on to the lawn.

Leaning out of his window, Charlie called to them:

"Whatever is the matter?" he cried.

"Lor', Mr. Charles," the butler answered, "we've had burglars in during the night, and they've taken everything they could lay their hands on."

"One minute, and I'll be with you. You'd better call Sir Herbert, too."

Hastily completing his toilet, Charlie hurried downstairs, meeting Sir Herbert on the way.

It was easy to see where the thieves had got in, for the French window lock had been forced and the bolt filed through. The men had taken a lot of plate, a valuable picture had been cut from its frame, and various other articles were missing.

"The same gang that got into Lady Bolton's, I'll guarantee," said Sir Herbert.

They tried to trace which way the burglars had gone but found this beyond their powers. Eventually they gave up and Sir Herbert wired to Bristol for detectives. The Bristol force had already been endeavouring to trace the gang since the burglary at Lady Bolton's house.

"It's not the plate I mind so much, confound it," angrily said Sir Herbert. "It's the picture—it was an original Rubens. I'd give anything to get it back."

"You mean that, uncle?" said Charlie. The two men were alone in the great drawing-room which had been the scene of the burglary.

"Mean it? Why, of course I do," answered Sir Herbert, glancing curiously at Charlie.

"Well," said Charlie slowly, "let me strike a bargain with you. I love Edith, and she returns my love. I know you have views of her marrying Viscount Derwent, but I can assure you that Edith does not care a snap of the fingers for him. If I get back your picture will you give your consent to our engagement?"

Sir Herbert's brows contracted somewhat. It was true that he had thought otherwise for Edith, but if she cared for his nephew it would, no doubt, be as well to agree to Charlie's proposal.

"Very well," he said eventually; "it's a bargain."

The two men shook hands and then Sir Herbert went out of the room whilst Charlie sat and brought all his wits to bear on his self-imposed task.

For nearly an hour he sat thinking, and endeavouring to get out a plan of action. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "This mysterious man at

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Charwood Hall. What did Lady Bolton call him? Marpole, yes, that was it."

"That's your man, Charlie," he went on, still speaking his thoughts aloud. "Discover what you can about him for your first move."

After breakfast he met Edith in a secluded portion of the grounds. It was hardly by accident, I am afraid I must say.

"I've spoken to uncle, Edie," was almost the first thing Charlie said. The thoughtful reader will appreciate the use of the word "almost."

"Yes, Charlie. What did he say?"

"Well, if I can get the picture back for him that was stolen last night, he'll consent to our engagement. It seems almost like putting a price on your head, doesn't it, dear? But I am of the private opinion that he would give his consent anyhow."

"Do you think you'll be able to do it, dear?" anxiously queried Edith. "It will be clever of you."

"Well, I am going to have a jolly good try," responded her lover, with a determined look on his handsome countenance.

He commenced his task almost immediately by going down to Charwood Hall and surveying it. Presently he plucked up courage and entered the grounds. There was not a soul to be seen, so he returned to "Neathwood" again to find out some means of getting to know the lonely inhabitant of Charwood Hall. His desire was very quickly gratified without any trouble on his part, for, as he passed through the little wood in front of "Neathwood," his gaze alighted on the object of his thoughts.

Mr. Marpole was a stoutish-built man of average height. He had white hair and wore blue spectacles, and was, in fact, as mild looking a man as you would meet in a day's march.

When Charlie saw him, however, he was on his knees intently surveying the ground before him. Immediately Charlie's suspicions were awakened, and he dropped to the ground behind a bush to watch unseen the movements of his prey.

"Are you a geologist, too?" came Mr. Marpole's voice after a moment or two.

"How the dickens did he see me?" muttered Charlie to himself. He was somewhat chagrined for he imagined he was on a hot trail, and working in quite a Sherlock Holmes style.

"I have a very fine specimen of strata here," went on Mr. Marpole as Charlie came up to him. And then he went off with a long scientific explanation on the strata of the neighbourhood.

"Nothing but an old bore of a geologist," disconsolately thought Charlie, and then aloud he made some suitable reply, for he had gone through a course of geology at Cambridge.

Mr. Marpole seemed delighted with his new-found acquaintance and insisted on Charlie going back to Charwood Hall with him to lunch.

At the end of the day Charlie was no nearer the solution he desired, and in a rather disconsolate frame of mind he retired for the night.

Before he turned in he went up the turret stairs on to the roof to smoke a cigarette. It was a lovely night, and, after finishing his cigarette, he put on a pipe. Presently he heard twelve o'clock strike, and then he resolved to seek his bed.

Suddenly a form emerged from the trees and cautiously came up on to the terrace. With bated breath Charlie hid behind the coping and watched. It was Mr. Marpole, and immediately Charlie's suspicions were again aroused. The midnight visitor did not wait about long, but retraced his steps after a few moments. Hurriedly Charlie went downstairs, and out on to the terrace, then into the wood. But all trace of Mr. Marpole had vanished. Once more he returned to his coign of vantage on the roof, and closely watched the grounds beneath him.

Charwood Hall is visible from the position Charlie occupied, and presently he was mortified to observe a light in the room which he knew to be Mr. Marpole's bedroom. He stayed and watched until he heard two o'clock strike, and then he gave in and went to bed, the light still burning.

Not a word of his suspicions did he vouchsafe to anybody. But to Edith he remarked that he had a clue, and hoped soon to have some important information to give.

He began to assiduously cultivate Mr. Marpole's acquaintance, until he thought the time was ripe for action. Each night he had gone to bed late with the light still burning at Charwood Hall, until traces of his short nights began to be apparent on his face.

Edith commenced to worry at Charlie looking so ill, and even Sir Herbert remonstrated with him.

"Let it go, my boy," he said, "I shall not stand in your way with Edith."

But Charlie was obdurate, more especially as he seemed to be so close on the trail of the thieves.

"No, uncle," he said. "We've made a bargain, and I'll do my best to carry out my part."

He had thought out a scheme whereby he hoped to learn a little more of this mysterious Mr. Marpole.

At "Neathwood" he had stated that he was going back to "Rattledown" that night, and apparently had cycled off in that direction after dinner. It was only a twenty mile ride, so that the lateness of his start escaped comment.

Certainly he did cycle in the direction of "Rattledown," but when he had got past Wickbattle, a village about a mile and a half away, he turned sharply off the main road, and took a direction which eventually brought him over the common to near Charwood Hall.

The hour was only half-past nine, and as he did not propose to commence work until twelve o'clock, he did not wish to be seen in the vicinity. He lifted his bicycle into a field, and then climbed over himself.

So he sat and waited; never had hours passed so slowly. But at last it turned a quarter to twelve, and then, with a sigh, he deliberately punctured his bicycle.

Slowly he wheeled his machine down the road and into the grounds of Charwood Hall. With a little grunt of satisfaction he observed that the light was still burning.

Charwood Hall had been built by a retired Indian colonel, and was of the bungalow type. Thus Mr. Marpole's sleeping apartment, where the light was burning, was on the ground floor.

Cautiously Charlie crept along, having left his bicycle by the front door. Suddenly his foot caught in something, and with a tremendous crash he fell to the ground. As he fell a bell jangled loudly inside the house, and at the same time he caught a glimpse of a face at the window. It was Mr. Marpole's, but without the blue spectacles, and in that telegraphic view Charlie observed the eyes, and saw, to all intents and purposes, that they were as good as his own. Then why the spectacles, unless as a disguise?

By this time Mr. Marpole was at the door, and a light was streaming out into the pathway.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Who's there?"

"It is I, Charlie Wilcox. My bicycle is punctured and as it was so late and I saw a light burning, I came to ask hospitality. I was going to tap at your window, when I fell over and made all that row."

"Come in, my dear fellow," cried Mr. Marpole heartily, as he returned a revolver to his pocket. "You fell into one of

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my little burglar traps; I have to be prepared for the gentry. I hope you did not hurt yourself?"

"Oh, no," hastily replied Charlie, who noticed that Mr. Marpole now had the blue glasses on again.

"Wheel your bicycle into the hall and come in. Have you dined?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. If you give me a bed it is all I want. I am very sorry to trouble you like this."

"Trouble?" cried Mr. Marpole. "Not at all, I'm only too delighted to have company."

He lit a lamp in a living room, and produced a box of cigars, but Charlie excused himself on the plea of fatigue.

His bedroom was in the same corridor as his host's room, and Charlie sat cudgelling his brains for some pretext of getting about the house, for he was convinced that Mr. Marpole was in some way connected with the burglars.

"Got it," he suddenly muttered, and then rapidly undressing, he donned the suit of pyjamas put out for him.

He waited for half an hour, and then undoing the door, he crept down the corridor to his host's room. He rapidly turned the handle and gazing striaght before him with a fixed, staring look in his eyes, as that of a somnambulist, he entered the room.

Before Mr. Marpole turned round Charlie caught sight of a diamond necklace, and then the hurried movement of his host caused him to return to his fixed stare.

Slowly he walked round the room, and stood gazing out of the window. His nerves were strained to their utmost, and he felt he could not keep it up much longer, and was half inclined to turn and grapple with Marpole. For some little time he stared out of the window and then, turning slowly, walked across the room, meeting the steely gaze of his host, who was fingering a revolver, without flinching.

The tension was tremendous, and now he was anxious to get away as quickly as possible from his trying situation.

"Mind that stool in your way," suddenly came the voice of Mr. Marpole.

Instinctively Charlie glanced to the floor, though only for a second, but that second was all sufficient.

"Exactly as I suspected, Mr. Wilcox," said Marpole, as he stood between his visitor and the door. "I know you have been spying on me. Do you think your overtures of friendship have blinded me? Do you think I did not see through your thin artifice to-night, first the puncture, and then the sleep-walking.

"Now, Mr. Wilcox, the game is up, so please sit down, and we'll talk over matters," continued Mr. Marpole, whilst he toyed suggestively with his revolver.

Charlie recognised that he was discovered, and, deeming it best to give into his captor, he sat down with a defiant expression on his face.

"You've been fairly clever, I admit, and I suppose you now imagine that you've run down the burglars in their haunt."

Charlie nodded.

"Well, I suppose nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand would come to the same conclusion. Just wait a moment, but don't try any fancy tricks whilst my back is turned as I can see you quite well in the mirror."

When he turned round again, Charlie gasped with astonishment. This was not Mr. Marpole; the white hair and glasses were gone, and the features entirely altered.

"What the dickens?" muttered Charlie.

"Permit me to introduce myself. John Hardcastle, at your service."

"What?" shrieked Charlie, "why, you're 'Smiling Jack.' Well, I'll be——" He relapsed into an astonished stare.

"I believe they do call me 'Smiling Jack.' I'm glad you recognise me or it might have been awkward," genially responded Marpole, or Hardcastle, to be correct.

John Hardcastle, known as "Smiling Jack," was the leading detective of the London force. His name and photo were often seen in the papers, for he had been responsible for many smart captures.

"But I thought——" began Charlie, in bewilderment.

"Exactly," said Hardcastle, cutting him short, "I thought you did. No, my friend, as you see my connection with the burglars is somewhat different."

"But Lady Bolton's diamonds?"

"Quite so—but confidence for confidence. Why are you so anxious to discover the thieves?"

"Why—er—because they've got away with uncle's picture and plate."

"Is that all?"

Charlie became a little embarrassed, and coughed slightly to give him time to think. Then he decided to make a clean breast of it all to the detective. When he had finished Hardcastle smiled encouragingly at him.

"Quite romantic, isn't it?"

"Think so?" muttered Charlie disconsolately. "But you will upset it all. Now I shall not have a chance to carry out my scheme."

"I don't see that exactly," said Hardcastle. "There's no reason why you shouldn't play a leading part in the discovery."

"What?" cried Charlie. "You mean you will help me? By Jove! you are a good chap."

Hardcastle smiled and looked at his watch.

"We've still half an hour before we start," he said.

"Half an hour before we start?" Charlie repeated in a mystified tone.

"Yes, my boy, now listen." Then "Smiling Jack" told Charlie how he had got on the track of the thieves. How he had discovered the hiding place for their loot preparatory to taking it to London. How, a few hours ago he had gone and transported it to Charwood Hall, and how he intended to capture the burglars that same morning at Lovell Court.

"They are quite a common or garden crowd," he said. "I had not the slightest difficulty in tracing them. At two o'clock this morning they are to break into Lovell Court, Lord John Lovell's place, and there they will fall into our hands. I've got the police ready, and you and I will have the credit of it."

"I?" cried Charlie. "But I've had nothing to do with it!"

"Well, my boy, you traced the stolen property, didn't you? Now you might as well finish off the job by helping to capture the burglars, see?"

Charlie saw, and was profuse in his thanks to John Hardcastle.

By seven o'clock the police with their prisoners were in the train bound for Bristol. Charlie stood on Charwood station to see them off.

"Good-bye," said "Smiling Jack" as they gripped hands. "You've got a pleasant morning before you." He referred to the picture which Charlie carried, and which by a special act of courtesy he was allowed to retain.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hardcastle. Thanks ever so much for all you have done for me. You'll come down and see me sometimes, won't you?"

"As a geologist, eh?" laughingly cried Mr. Hardcastle, "with a mirror which helps me to see out of my back?"

Charlie strolled into "Neathwood" as they were sitting down to breakfast. They were not surprised to see him again so soon, as he rode over at all hours.

"Morning, uncle, and everybody," he said. "By the way, uncle, you'd better get a man down to put the picture in." He spoke with a great air of *sang froid*, and handed the picture to his uncle in a nonchalant way.

"What!" almost screamed Sir Herbert Wilcox, whilst all present indulged in astonished exclamations.

"Come and shake hands, my boy, I'm proud of you. I've got an announcement to make," said Sir Herbert, "that is, these young people, my nephew and my daughter, have made up their minds to marry each other, and now await your congratulations."

Edith blushed vividly as Charlie turned and in front of them all deliberately kissed her.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Engagement Not Announced.

LORD DUFFER: "You're a girl after my heart." Miss Price: "And you're a man after my money."

Would Come as a Shocker.

MISS THIRTYODD: "I want to give my *fiancé* a surprise on his birthday. Can't you suggest something?" Miss de Flypp: "Well, you might tell him your age."

Would Use Them as Object Lessons.

WIFE: "You haven't used any of those cigars I bought for you." Husband: "No, I am keeping them for Tommy when he wants to learn to smoke."

And They Struck!

HE: "I suppose you are aware of the tender feeling I have for you?" She: "No; I'm quite in the dark." He: "That being the case permit me to suggest that we strike a match."

Where They Are Similar.

FINNICK: "If you notice, the poets invariably refer to the earth as 'she.' Why should the earth be considered feminine, I'd like to know?" Sinnick: "Why not? Nobody knows just how old the earth is."

Insult to Injury.

"BRIDGET," said Mrs. Hyflyte, "your lady friend mustn't stay so late again. Her uproarious laughter woke me up at one o'clock this morning." "Yes, mum; I was tellin' her about how you tried to make a cake one day."

Farming Extraordinary.

MABEL: "There's Mr. Stubbs. He's the only farmer on record who has made his money out of weeds." George: "He surely didn't do that?" Mabel: "Yes, he did." George: "How, pray?" Mabel: "He married a widow."

Sweet Tempered Man!

WIFE: "You do not speak to me as affectionately as you used to, George. I think you have ceased to love me." Husband: "There you are again! Ceased to love you! Why, I love you better than my life. Now shut up and let me read my paper."

Hubby Suspected a Visitor.

MOTHER: "You say your husband no longer spends his evenings at the club." Daughter: "I soon broke him off that." Mother: "How did you manage?" Daughter: "Before going to bed I put two easy chairs close together by the parlour fire, and then held a match to a cigar until the room got a faint odour of smoke."

He Got Rather Muddled.

HE: "I trust you have forgiven me for not recalling your name the other evening, although I remembered your face perfectly." She: "Oh, yes; but my name is such a plain one I should think you would have remembered it quite as readily." He: "Not at all; your name isn't half as plain as—er—beg pardon; your face is much more aristocratic than your—I mean to say that your name is harder than——"

Unselfish Man.

THE BRIDE (on the honeymoon): "Why, you only bought one ticket, dear!" The Groom: "By Jove! I never thought of myself."

More Pierpont-Morganism.

"GRANDPA, what is a morganatic marriage?" "A morganatic marriage? H'm! That must be a marriage for money."

Sensation Extraordinary.

HUSBAND: "I am just in the mood for something sensational and startling—something that will make my hair stand on end." Wife: "Here is my last milliner's bill." His hair stood!

The Banns are Published.

ADA (pensively): "I hope you'll invite me to the wedding when you get married." Jack (boldly): "I'll invite you before I ask anyone else, and if you don't accept there won't be any wedding."

On the Instalment System.

MOTHER: "I am afraid Mr. Crisscross is not serious in his attentions." Daughter: "Oh, he's very bashful, you know; he's offering himself by pieces. Last night he wanted me to take his arm."

How They Do Things Now.

GLADYS: "If she doesn't love him, why does she encourage him?" Edith: "Well, she's hoping her father will suspect she loves him, and send her on a trip to the Continent to overcome her infatuation!"

She Did Not Study Astronomy.

SHE: "And you say you can tell by the stars if he loves you? Why, I didn't know that you ever scanned the skies." Belle: "I don't; but I scan his love letters. He is one of those fellows that marks a star for every kiss."

Nice and Roomy.

MRS DE STYLE: "Oh, John, please buy me that drum! I know you can get it cheap." Mr. de Style (dumfounded): "Gracious, what in the world do you want a bass drum for?" Mrs. de Style: "Why, it will make such a splendid box for my theatre hat."

Alas! Too True!

A LECTURER on optics, in explaining the mechanism of the organ of vision, remarked: "Let any man gaze closely into his wife's eye, and he will see himself looking so exceedingly small that——" Here the lecturer's voice was drowned by shouts of laughter.

And the Echo Answers "Why?"

FIRST COUSIN: "It is annoying that our names are the same. You often get my letters, and I often get yours." Second ditto (sweetly, but insinuatingly): "Well, why don't you ask your friends to put 'senior' after your name, when they address letters to you?"

Just Fancy!

SUE: "Blanche had an awfully embarrassing experience at the theatre last night. Her hair came down!" Nell: "How excessively annoying." Sue: "But that wasn't the worst of it. It rolled under the seats, and was only recovered after a good deal of trouble, and then you can fancy what a condition it was in."

At His Own Expense.

MR. BLUFF: "Look here, young man, you're always going about with my daughter, and I want to know what your intentions are regarding her?" Young Man: "I really have no intentions, sir." Mr. Bluff (angrily): "Then what do you mean by amusing yourself at my daughter's expense?" Young Man: "I'm not amusing myself at your daughter's expense, sir, but at my own expense. I always pay for the theatre tickets and refreshments."

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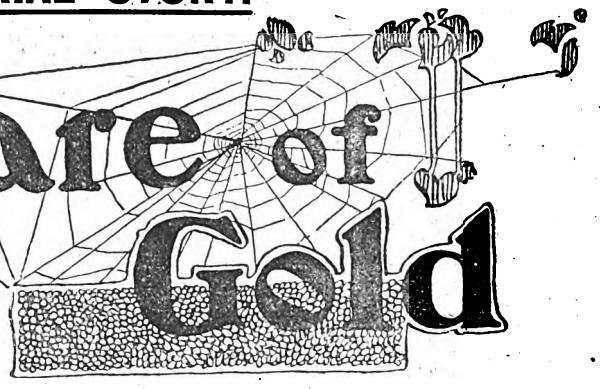
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

George Geldart, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

Eric Geldart, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

Ronald Geldart, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

Clare Armitage, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who was betrothed to Eric, who now scorns her love.

Boanerges Blagdon, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

Sampson Scrimshaw, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

Mr. Stanyer, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

Madeleine Lorraine, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

Phyllis Daventry, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

Jack Widdicombe, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Ronald Learns the Truth.

Hailing another cab, Clare drove to Little Turnstile, and there alighting, walked through into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

She was late and hurried along, fearing Ronald might not have waited, and in her haste and anxiety not observing through the falling mist that she was being followed.

She crossed the wide road and hurried along by the railings. Turning the corner of the square, she still further quickened her pace, for there on the opposite side of the road she made out through the murky vapour a tall, well-knit form, clad in a light ulster, pacing to and fro. Swiftly going over to him, and extending both hands, she exclaimed:

"Ronald, I was so afraid you would not wait. Fate seemed to be conspiring to prevent my getting here in time."

"Clare," he said compassionately, "you are white and trembling with cold."

"Not with cold, Ronald, with fear; my heart is full of a thousand fears."

"What is there to harm you?"

"I don't know, I can't tell. Most of all I was afraid something was going to happen to prevent my meeting you and saying what I have to say."

"Let us walk round to the hotel there, Clare, it is chilly for you here."

"No, no! I want to say what I must say here and now. Ronald, listen to me, but don't look at me, I couldn't bear your eyes upon me while I am telling you the awful, wicked truth."

And then, pacing to and fro along the pavement of the deserted square, along by the railings of the stone-paved courtyards to the quaint, gloomy old houses, once the mansions of nobility, now the storehouses of their title deeds and haunts of their legal advisers, Clare told Ronald Geldart the appalling story of her treachery towards him, how she had abstracted the notes and cheques from his father's desk and planted certain of them in his room in the pockets of one of his jackets, and how she had conspired with Eric, his traitor brother, to turn his father's heart against him, and fix upon his character and name a foul, unjust, indelible suspicion.

Ronald listened with horror in his heart, horror that a fellow creature, let alone his own blood brother, could so forget all ties of blood, could even dream of, let alone devise and carry out, a villainy so monstrous.

That Eric had lied about him to his father, had done all in his power to embitter that father's heart against him, he from the first had known, although he had no means of proving it, but even at his worst he had not deemed his brother quite so black as in the light of truth he proved to be.

As for the woman by his side, the ingrate whom he in other days had loved and reverenced as child companion, as friend, of his boyhood and his youth, almost as a sister, it passed all bounds of wonderment how she could have requited his belief in her, respect for her, by malice so envenomed. And she, pacing at his side with hands clasped and eyes cast down, seemed to read the workings of his heart, for she wailed in anguish.

"Ronald, Ronald, what have you to say to me? What are you thinking of me? You were always so gentle and so kind to me, my playmate as a child, my protector and defender in my girlhood, my almost brother, my more than brother. Oh, Ronald, when you are thinking the very, very worst of me, remember that it wasn't Clare, it was a poor, weak, hypnotised, resistless creature, helpless in his hands, resistless to his will. Oh, God! I could throw myself down here upon the stones and beg of you to trample me beneath your feet, to spurn me with your heel."

They walked along in silence, a silence broken only by her sobs. At last he stopped and turned.

"Good-bye, Clare, I will leave you now. I don't know what to say or what to think."

"But, Ronald, what is to be done to clear your name, to bring the guilty ones to justice?"

"I don't know—I don't know. Even now it seems to me you are speaking out the truth not so much to clear the right as to avenge yourself on the wrong-doer who has been false to you. Clare! Clare! let me put you into a cab and leave you, then I'll try and think out what is to be done. It's gone so far, the evil that you've done, that there's no knowing if it ever can

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be quite undone. You know the workings and the windings and the mischief of a lie. It is cast upon the air like an evil germ or like the breath of a disease. None know whither it may wend its evil way; it may be met and killed, or it may not, but who can call it back?"

"But, Ronald, you must meet the lion and kill it, and I will aid you. Oh, believe me, I do repent. I've been haunted by the memory of my sin by night and day. Oh, Ronald, Ronald!" she hushed her voice into a whisper, "believe me, at times I do believe your father's restless spirit has faced me to reproach me with my sin, for since he died I can almost swear that I have looked and met the gaze of his accusing eyes."

"But you must see," said Ronald, "that you have no simple task to right the wrong you wrought so easily. It must be palpable to you that, were you now to rally to my side and speak the truth to all the world, you must ere long be ranged before the world beside your partner and accessory in crime—your partner, I should say between your partners.

"Clare Armitage, to undo the evil you have done me would be to risk the standing in a prison dock beside my father's unctuous traitor partner, Blagdon, the smug, suave pillar of respectability, the bulwark of and the warden of his church—the man who, with his oily, treacherous smile, fat and sleek with evil gains, snug in the garnered harvest of his black and base rascality, tells little children that it is a sin to steal and lie, and that if they are good they will be happy, and bids the little innocents beware of the snare of gold. With that man on your right hand and on the other my brother Judas."

"Ronald! Ronald!" the anguished girl cried in a frenzy of contrition, despair, remorse, "all this, all this I will do, all this I will risk, all the penalties of the law that I deserve I will undergo if I can undo my sin." Then in a gentler voice and with a kindly hand upon her shoulder he said:

"Clare! Clare! you must think, we both must think what is best to be done—for both our sakes! I cannot let you sacrifice yourself altogether. I can understand that it was not the promptings of your heart that made you do these wicked things. The memory of the old days pleads for you in my heart. Go now, Clare, and perhaps there may be another way; perhaps you can write it all down and sign it before credible, reliable witnesses. Having done your best to undo the wrong, you may for a while withdraw beyond the pale of the laws that you have outraged. Now let us part to think things over."

"Ronald!" she wailed. "God bless you for speaking to me in that strain. Your kindness smites me harder than any words of anger or scorn. God bless you, Ronald. Good-bye, good-bye, until we meet again."

"Until we meet again," he said, hastening away, and little recking that ere they met again life for one of them would have merged into eternity, and the river would have met the ocean.

He disappeared in the gloom, and Clare retraced her steps, re-crossing the road towards the railings of the grassy, thickly-timbered square; something meantime whispering in her heart: "Don't go that way, you are alone"; and oppressed by this troublous sense of impending peril, she quickened her steps, and in her gathering panic almost ran along the greasy pavement.

And a cry broke in her throat as through the murky mist a form approached her, a hand was laid upon her arm.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Why—it's Eric! Oh, I was so frightened!" and all her alarm vanished. But alarm gave place to pain, so rough and ruthless was that grip upon her shoulder.

"Eric!" she pleaded, "don't—don't, you're hurting my arm. Eric, dear Eric, why are you looking at me like that?"

"You she-cat! You fiend! So you've kept your word, you've carried out your threat. You will have it—then take it!"

His right hand poised itself behind his head and fell with a heavy blow upon her heart.

"Oh, Eric, to think that you should strike me!" for she

(*Continued overleaf.*)

DISTRESSING FATNESS AND ITS CURE.

IT is an extraordinary fact that thousands of men and women go on month after month and year after year carrying a burden of superfluous fat, a burden often unsightly and always more or less distressing, without taking any whole-hearted measures to rid themselves once and for all of the incubus. Others, perhaps less excusable still, undergo all kinds of weakening methods involving semi-starvation, the excessive use of cathartics, dangerous drugging and other evils, without any permanent benefit in the way of destroying the tendency to get stout, but with, too frequently, a disastrous effect upon the constitution. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred as soon as these health-destroying methods are dropped the fat forms again with redoubled persistence, notwithstanding the fact that the subject is obviously enfeebled in general health and vitality. The thousands of persons who have gone through any of these painful processes, and who have finally turned to the famous "Russell" treatment—the one scientific, rational, and permanent cure for excessive stoutness—are unanimous in their grateful acknowledgment of its marvellous effects, both as to radical cure of obesity and wonderful strength-giving powers. The "Russell" treatment not only eliminates from the system all superabundant fatty deposits, both internal and subcutaneous, but tones up the jaded system, promotes appetite, assists digestion and assimilation, and builds up health and nervous vigour and muscular strength by sheer force of increased nutrition. Its fat-eliminating powers are evident from the very first; for within twenty-four hours of adopting the treatment there is a decrease of weight varying from ½lb. to 2lb., according to the individual case. In cases of extreme obesity the decrease is considerably more, and sometimes approaches 4lbs. After the initial decrease indicated there is a consistent daily reduction while the treatment is followed, and with the ultimate certain attainment of normal proportions, the *régime* may be abandoned without fear of a relapse. The reduction is proportionate over the entire surface of the body, with the result that beautiful facial lines are as surely regained as correct abdominal girth. The muscles become firm, the skin clear, the complexion roseate, the bearing alert and graceful. After a complete course of "Russell" the patient is veritably a new being. The recipe of the principal preparation employed is given in "Corpulency and the Cure" (see note below), the standard work on the causes and the cure of corpulency. This compound is a harmless, pleasant-tasting liquid, of purely vegetable ingredients, and its grand tonic properties are such that it could have none but the best effects upon the most delicate constitution. A perusal of "Corpulency and the Cure," which contains information and advice of the highest value to stout persons, as well as a thousand extracts from letters of persons of both sexes who certify to the permanent beneficial effects of the "Russell" treatment, is most earnestly recommended. The address is given below.

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On receipt of three penny stamps to defray postage under plain sealed envelope, &c., Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, 27 Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., will be pleased to forward to all readers of "Short Stories," a gratis copy of his authoritative work, "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages 8vo). It contains the most exhaustive information on the causes and cure of obesity, besides a thousand testimonials from the author's patients, and as many extracts from the Press.

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only felt the dull pain and shame of the blow of his clenched hand—not the sting of what was in it—for a while.

But he raised that cruel hand again, gripped her throat within his elbow, forcing her backwards across his knee, and in the dim glimmer of a lamp above she saw that hand upraised again, a something glittering in it and daubed with a crimson splash.

"Eric! What are you doing! Oh, Eric, for—God's sake, don't stain your soul—not for my sake, but for yours, my dear. Don't—don't!"

But the red, remorseless hand came down again, a sob bubbled up in her throat, a sickly numbing faintness followed the shock of that twice murderous stab.

Heavy and inert she lay back in his arms. Brutal villain that he was, he let her fall upon the stones, looked close into her face, placed his cheek against the mouth he so often had kissed with lies of love eternal, this time to make sure she had ceased to breathe.

The teeth were clenched, the jaws were set and rigid, the eyes were closing.

"God—forgive!" With one heave of her lacerated bosom she sighed, a shudder thrilled her, her head fell back, leaving her chin, hard and cold as marble, upwards.

"She is quite safe now," he said. Swayed by a sudden impulse he kissed her—then left her.

Ere he had gone a dozen yards another form loomed through the mist.

"Eric! What have you done?" Blagdon, now a quaking jelly of a man, quavered. "Where is she? What has happened to her? Why have you left her so soon? What is she going to do? Eric! For God's sake, tell me, what have you done? You haven't—oh! you haven't——" He could not frame the word to clench his sentence—but he knew that Eric had.

Whining and whimpering, he hurried along beside him till they reached a fountain, and there the younger man, filling the cup, poured it over his hands, laved them, rinsed them again and again, washing away in that crystal spring the stain that not all the ocean could cleanse from his soul.

Wiping and drying his hands upon a handkerchief, he strode along towards Little Turnstile, his elder, but less desperate, villain comrade at his elbow.

As they neared the north side of the square a man crossed their path some yards ahead, and was lost in the deepening gloom, but ere the view of him was lost for a moment a glimmering ray fell on his face and the two ruffians clutched each other's arms.

"My God, Blagdon, did you see that face?"

"I thought I saw it, Eric, but it couldn't have been. My eyes were playing tricks. Oh, tell me, what was it that you saw?"

And Eric Geldart, M.P., thief, and murderer, replied:

"I saw the face and form of my dead father!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Springle Gets into Difficulties.

The topics at this particular period occupying most public attention were the fixtures for the opening football and the closing racing season, the latest play, and the doings of Sampson Scrimshaw, M.P.

Opening your morning paper you were met with interesting columns as to the plans of the "genial and able manager," the migration from Slagton to Stockham of Punter and the trial of the Cambridgeshire crack.

Turning to another sheet you would read something like this: GIGANTIC CITY DEAL. MAMMOTH TRANSACTION BY THE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE M.P.

For, although the world had not guessed the secret of the System so elaborately planned and manipulated, thought out by Old Mystery, and worked out by him in conjunction with Sampson Scrimshaw, the world could not help knowing, and Scrimshaw cared nothing that it knew, of the big deals he made as the outcome of that System, and the magnificent margin of profit resulting to him in connection therewith.

Scarcely a day passed without some startling movement in the financial field by this new Napoleon, who bought up at twenty-four hours' notice the enterprises and corporations of big firms, industrial and commercial, amalgamating some, separating and developing others, and in all operations displaying skilled insight and foresight, garnering in to his own credit tens of thousands, where others had despaired of even thousands. Newly-acquired enterprises flourished more vigorously than ever, and Scrimshaw's fortunes grew and grew.

"Mystery," said Scrimshaw, "we shall be worth more money than we know what to do with. If people only knew."

"But they don't know, they mustn't know, else our chance of going on piling it up is gone for ever."

"But why go on piling it up? I've enough to live in ducal style on for all my days, and you—what you're doing with it, goodness knows; hardly anybody knows even where you live. What do you do with all the money you're making?"

"Count it," said Old Mystery. "There's always that pleasure when you've money, when you've bought all you want to buy, and there's nothing you want to acquire, and nobody you want to bribe. You can count—count—count—it's like wine, to have a big total all your own."

Financier as he was to the tips of his fingers, Scrimshaw turned, oppressed by a creepy feeling, from this old man with the cavernous eyes, who, living the life of a nameless drudge, he knew to have amassed with him hundreds of thousands.

"But then the time will come for you to die, and who have you to leave it to? No kith or kin?"

"To wrangle over it?" returned Old Mystery; then in an altered tone: "How do you know?"

"I don't know; you're simply to me from beginning to end a mystery; a master of finance with more genius for money making than any man I've ever met—but you're a mystery. Well, by-bye. I'm going to dine at the Carlton; then I've a box at the Empire; ladies, Mystery, and real swagger ones too, one a marchioness and the other a Mrs., with a name as old as any title in the country, and they like the Empire best of all the shows, because they won't stand preaching and teaching; and then a supper at the Savoy to wind up with.

"My boy, I'm making my pile to spend it. I mean to live my life. You can go on counting—counting, if you like. But, by the bye, old man, its hardly safe to keep those notes and bonds in a crazy old hutch like this. Why not put them in the bank?"

"They're just as safe here," laughed the old man. "Mr. Bill Sykes might make a dash for the Cosmopolitan Trust; he wouldn't think of wasting time on poor Old Mystery's bare, furnished den. Good night."

Scrimshaw was already half-way down the stairs, and the man left alone, unlocking boxes and drawers, took out rolls of notes and gold and placed them upon the table in a heap, a gigantic heap, if measured by their intrinsic value.

And so he went through them, turning over the crisp notes, coupons, share certificates, and bonds, and adding them up in hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, mere heaps and handfuls of paper, with no chink or glitter about them, only a low, sibilant rustle, as though the secret of their wealth was only to be spoken in a whisper, marked with quaint designs and intricacies of the engraver's art.

But light and flimsy as they were, they were deeds of title vesting in their holder interests in mighty enterprises near and far, unanswerable demands on wealthy corporations for their gold. And all the outcome of the System—that Eric, with his infernal supercilious airs, his affectation of superior intellect, which Blagdon, with his almost boastful disavowal of intellectual gifts, his arrogance of stupidity, had scoffed at.

There was the result, tangible, complete, an accomplished fact, and Eric and Blagdon themselves entangled in the

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toils of finance, enmeshed in Scrimshaw's Snare of Gold, the snare that, though they knew it not, he, Old Mystery himself, had helped to set and to manipulate.

Then he reflected on Scrimshaw's words. What was to be the end of it?

He had set himself to do this thing, had proved his System infallible, here was the proof; and now in his heart of hearts he was wearying of the double life, the sequel, as it were, to the life that had been; was longing to rehabilitate himself in his habit as he lived of old.

He had taught Eric a hard and bitter lesson, had proved Blagdon a blatant fraud. Now it was in his power to demand of Eric his brother's rehabilitation—then he would forgive. It was time now to lift from Ronald the burden of unjust suspicion, and face him out in the light of day, the soul of honour, tried and true as steel.

Someone else was staying late that night.

In the office downstairs Horace Springle pored over the cash account and the cash books, the contents of which evinced no more disposition to agree than oil and vinegar or two cats of the Kilkenny breed.

Horace Springle gazed with stolid despair at the column of figures in the cash book and at the total, and thence at the contents of the cash box, the gulf between which seemed every moment to divide.

How was that gulf to be bridged, for the day of reckoning was at hand. On the morrow he had to present for verification his periodical account, that account which showed so serious a balance against him—a balance that had increased with every effort to replace it.

For Horace in his way had gone the pace, and the luxury had proved an expensive one. Fast living had meant speedy insolvency, and in the hope of replenishing he had backed his fancy, and his fancy had broken its backer.

Then, "to get his own back," he had made that fatal and unhappily frequent error, had used the funds of others, the moneys entrusted to him by his employer, and, these having gone, in yet more frantic efforts, had staked still heavier sums, making still further deficits. And now he stood face to face with the alternative of flight or exposure.

What would they say at Bloomsbury Square? How Grimmage would sneer and how Mrs. Skimper would throw up her hands! And what would they say at the halls, the "boys," the old pals and the "duckies," to win whose boisterous regard he had first ventured into troubled waters?

What was there to be done? Only one thing seemed possible. A further slip down the slanting path, closer to the precipice beyond, a further inroad depletion. Yes, the absolute emptying of that cash-box—and then—flight, and trusting to luck!

Hark! With guilty start he clutched the cash-box convulsively. Listened. The sound was from upstairs. Old Mystery was still at work, for he heard the door close, though Scrimshaw's receding footsteps had sounded half an hour before.

What was the old man up to? There was some secret on the board betwixt him and the governor, perhaps, Springle charitably reasoned, some fraud or plant, public or private, and possibly connected with the governor's recent blossoming from a thriving man into a Crœsus.

If such a secret existed, the possession of it might lead to the repletion of that emptied cash-box. And Horace Springle, quietly slipping off his stool, stealthily glided through the corridors of the big office on the ground floor, crept upstairs past the offices of the Trust on the first floor, and so on tiptoe up the stairs towards Old Mystery's den.

Then he stooped, peered through the keyhole. There the old man sat, all alone, sorting and counting sheaves and piles of papers—papers which Springle, with indrawn breath, recognised as bank-notes, cheques, and bonds—heaps of

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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them! Why, there was a fortune on that table.

The old man's back was towards him. He turned the handle of the door, pushed it ajar, peered into that room, bare of aught, except the accessories to the game of finance. Two thousand—three thousand—the old man was counting under his breath. Yes, ten—twenty—fifty—sixty thousand in clean, crisp notes of Mammon's high temple—the Bank of England! It made Springle's eyes blaze and his mouth water; it made his heart leap to see such wealth so near.

So near—so near! Yes, made it leap with a wild, dangerous impulse, born of that thought; it was so near.

The Snare of Gold was working hard, its tentacles were on the soul of this weak nature, and, weak as he was, those toils infused in him, like some magic magnet, an artificial strength, and nerved the coward fibre of his heart.

Hunger had him by the throat—the hunger of Greed, which has spelt murder in all ages since time immemorial.

He looked about him for a weapon. His eyes lit on a heavy office ruler just beyond one of those heaps of notes. He made a spring for it, the old man sprang up with a deep gasp of apprehension. The young one had his weapon and threw himself upon him, aimed a heavy blow at the silver head, numbed the forearm guarding it.

"Help! Help! You young murderer! You coward!"

Old Mystery seized the weapon of his adversary in a strenuous grasp. Old as he was, he was well knit and strong, had been an athlete in his early days, and the young one was hard put to it. But, besides his youth, he had two hands to struggle with, whereas one of Old Mystery's hung useless at his side; and as they wrestled and writhed, overturning chairs, stools, and table, the old man's breath came and went in deep, spasmodic gasps. A sudden turn, a slip, and he was down, with one relentless hand clenched at his throat, the other raised aloft.

"Mercy!" gasped the old man. "Take the money, leave me my life."

A moment his assailant hesitated; perhaps the white hair unnerved him, for he lowered that menacing hand. But then swift the thought of his own danger flashed across his brain.

"I'll make sure," he said, and poised his weapon for the murderous blow.

And suddenly the door was flung wide open and a man burst into the room and threw himself upon the would-be murderer. Only just in time. He gripped that uplifted wrist, and in another few seconds Old Mystery, breathless and dishevelled, was scrambling up.

Springle himself was cowering in a heap, his weapon wrenched from his grasp, the new-comer shaking him by the collar as a dog might shake a rat, meanwhile demanding: "What's this? It seems to me I'm only just in time!"

And Old Mystery, peering into his face, exclaimed: "Why, it's Fred Stanyer."

"Yes," said the other. "I thought I'd give you a surprise. By the Lord Harry, you've given me one. What was this scallywag's game? Robbery as well as murder?" And glancing at the table piled with notes, and opening his eyes as they caught the big figures, he exclaimed: "It seems he wasn't playing for nuts. But, I say, where does it all come from? It looks as if while I've been trafficking in wool down under you've been shearing the Golden Fleece."

"I'll tell you later," said Old Mystery. "Meantime, what's best to be done with this—thing?"

"That's what I was wondering," said Stanyer. "I suppose the proper course is to hand him to the policeman, eh?" And, spurning the "thing" with his foot, "What's to be done with you?"

"I don't know—I don't care!" answered the culprit sullenly, despairingly. "I was driven to it; it's prison for me any way, on another charge, if not on this. It was because I saw a way out of that, because the sight of the money turned my brain, that I did what I did. Do what you like with me, only make short work of it."

"It was the sight of it." Old Mystery, looking on the abject, pulseless creature, reflected how much misery besides this wretched existence the sight of wealth within reach was responsible for, and he thought of his own boys, almost of this fellow's age, and remembered how the glitter of gold had blinded one of those, his elder and his hope.

A something strange at his heart, a whisper in the ear of conscience, impelled him to stride across to where the hopeless lad lay crouched with the shadow of despair enveloping him.

"Sit up! Stand up!" he said. "So you were going to rob me, even murder me, to prevent it being found out that you'd robbed others. How much are you to the bad?"

"From beginning to end—two—hundred—pounds," said Springle, giving the words the weight the man he addressed would not have vouchsafed to thousands. "But, after all, there are only two sides to the pale of solvency, and he who is an inch beyond it is on the same side as the man a mile across."

Without a word Old Mystery took up three notes for a hundred pounds, fiddled with them in his fingers for a while; then, extending them towards the wondering Springle, said:

"There, if you've told the truth, and somehow for once I think you have, this will clear you, this will give you a fresh start. From the fresh start try to run straight, try to be a man."

Springle gazed at the notes lying in his hands. The Open Sesame to Freedom's door, the keys to Heaven almost it seemed. He tried to speak, but his voice broke in a sob, and, burying his head in his arms, he staggered out of Old Mystery's den, leaving that individual and the man from "down under" to exchange reports and explanations.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Crime Discovered.

The constable patrolling Lincoln's Inn Fields, turning the bend by the little fountain, observed a huddled-up Something lying across the pavement by the railings in the shadow of the trees.

Instinctively exclaiming, "Hullo, here! What are you doing?" he turned the flash of his lantern on to the huddled heap. Then he caught sight of a hand and the glitter of a bracelet at the wrist.

Stooping, he grasped and flung back the fold of a cloak, noticing how moist it was with the mist, not dreaming for the moment of aught else—till, the fold flung back, he looked with horror into a white, distorted face, a pair of glassy eyes, and, letting go the cloak, touched the cheek to find it stone cold—and then it was that upon his own hand told him that the cloak was moist with something else than mist.

"My God! There's been murder here!" he exclaimed. Then sharp, shrill, and clear, his whistle rang out, waking the silence of the precincts of the law.

Soon footsteps came along at a run from the right, from the left.

"What is it, mate?" shouted other constables, breathing deep.

"Something bad. Send for the ambulance, and is there a doctor near?"

"I am a doctor," said a sharp, quick voice, approaching. Dr. Macquoich, on his way from Lincoln's Inn Hall, where he had been dining with the Chancery Bar, pushed his way through the little knot which had already gathered by that magic which brings a crowd to any spot in the Metropolis at any hour, however deserted previously. "What is the matter?"

"It seems, sir, that something very terrible is the matter. She's been stabbed desperately, brutally, and I think more than once."

Macquoich knelt beside that pale, unconscious form

(*Continued on page 478.*)

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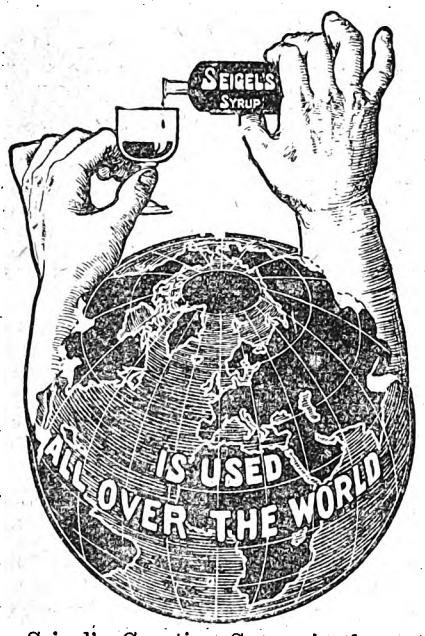

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supported in the sergeant's arms, placed his ear to the breast, then, by the bull's-eye flash, peered intently into the marble face.

"She is dead, stone dead!" he gasped. Then his voice broke into a terrified cry as he exclaimed:

"My God, it's Clare Armitage!" And a thrill convulsed him, and his face, too, went ghastly white as he thus recognised and named her who was to have been his colleague in the sin which, though only of intent, still rested like a cloud upon his soul.

Just then the ambulance arrived and, followed by a straggling and increasing throng of the morbid and the curious, they bore that which had been Clare Armitage to the mortuary.

And the next morning's papers and the placards of next morning's papers bore in big red letters one gruesome line:

TERRIBLE MURDER!

And beneath it:

WOMAN STABBED IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS!

Eric Geldart, having exhausted the pile of letters beside his breakfast tray, glanced at the morning paper, read carefully the report of his last night's speech, reviled the Gallery Man, who had omitted "laughter" after Eric's smartest point and concluded his account with "hear, hear" instead of "loud cheering," scanned the Stock Exchange and Money Market columns, noting with an oath that the Kenilworths had slumped again, and then let his eye rove over the sheets in quest of that which he knew was there, but dreaded to find.

Ah! there it was!

GHASTLY DISCOVERY IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS!

A Woman Stabbed to Death.

Clue to the Assassin!

He flinched and trembled, the paper in his hand shaking like an aspen. Then he arose, went to the sideboard and mixed himself a stiffish brandy peg, and, returning to his arm-chair, he read on to the end the account of the finding of the body of a young lady identified as Miss Clare Armitage, of Belsize Gardens, together with this significant paragraph:

The police are, naturally, at this stage reticent as to the existence of a clue, but it is credibly asserted that they found in the dress-pocket of the dead lady a letter relating to the appointment she had evidently been keeping, and an important arrest is imminently expected.

A letter! Eric in all things putting self first bethought himself. Could it have been in his own writing? Then almost as swiftly he reflected with self-congratulation that he had not written her a line almost for years, had indeed been careful not to do so. And then, the appointment of last night—why, the letter fixing that was in his brother Ronald's hand, his own brother's!

Swiftly for a moment flashed across his brain the memory of earlier, happier days when as children they had played together, prayed together at their mother's knee, and callous as this man was, his heart twitched with a something like remorse.

But there was one whose interests silenced those of any other, whose needs outclamoured the necessities, the claims, the rights of all the world besides, one life was dearer than all the other lives that God had given—his own self stood between his own mind, soul, and the light, shrouding that soul in darkness.

Better even that his own brother should be suspected of this as of another crime, should be arrested, even go forth to the scaffold than that shame or even suspicion should rest upon his name or that one barrier should stretch between him and his goal!

He touched a bell, his secretary entered.

"Note these appointments in my diary," he said, pointing to certain of the letters he flung towards him.

The man nodded.

"By the bye," he said, "this request from Lord Maxmore to support him and address the meeting of the Society for the Propagation and Encouragement of High Ideals clashes with Lady Alastair's At Home."

"Oh, yes," replied the M.P., "ah, well, Society before societies, I'll go to Lady Alastair's."

And to Lady Alastair's that night he went. Not that he was particularly partial to her gatherings, because they consisted of clever rather than influential people, but Madeleine was to be there, and then and there he meant to gain her answer.

Since that encounter by the river at Taplow he had only met her once or twice, and then only for a few minutes, tantalising moments, for she had been so strangely cold.

And it was dawning on him that she was far from grateful for his denunciation of his brother, piqued with Ronald for what she might have deemed his deception, and momentarily shocked by learning of his identity with one upon whose name there rested the shadow of suspicion, as she might have been.

But Eric that night, when by her side he walked back with her to Lady Harwardine's, had noted with disquiet the heavings of her breast, the pain that twitched the perfect rosebud of her mouth, and the tears that glistened beneath the lashes of her eyes, the eyes that were "sometimes grey and sometimes blue" like the glistening dews of violets. Perhaps at the moment she had been angrier with Ronald than with him, but women are sometimes angriest with those whom they love best.

Therefore that night Lord Maxmore read amongst other letters of excuse and regret one from Eric Geldart, Esquire, M.P., regretting that the strain of public duties precluded his experiencing the deep gratification of attending the meeting of that society whose objects were so dear to his heart, and Lady Alastair, standing at the head of the staircase, felt honoured to see the brilliant young member for Little Claverton, for Lady Alastair was a very correct woman, with religious leanings, and all religious people look reverently towards the East—where the sun rises.

Many men and women, abler and older than Eric Geldart, would have been infinitely more gratified than he at being received with cordiality so marked in that house. Many, indeed, would have given much to have crossed its threshold, since to have done so was a passport to High Bohemia, for there were gathered the *élite* of the arts and sciences; the rabble of the "going to do" and the "expecteds" thronged elsewhere, harbouring the hope of reaching this Mecca at the end of a later pilgrimage, when the feet should be more hardened and the peas crushed into dust.

He entered the big drawing-room just on the moment of the hush preceding the ballad of the season rendered by a prima-donna of the halls of James and Albert.

He looked round in quest of Madeleine. There she was listening with heart as well as ears to the tender harmonies of voice and piano, for it was the composer himself who caressed the keyboard in accompaniment to the voice of gold. But there were fifty people whom Eric reviled, seated between him and the girl whom he watched with as rapt a gaze as she watched the singer.

And when the song was over he made his way in her direction. But many of the company rose and surged between them, and when he reached where she had sat she was no longer there.

For this was what had happened. At the close of the song Lady Alastair, touching Madeleine's elbow with her fan, had whispered, "Come with me, dear, I want so much to introduce you to a favourite of mine." And so the hostess led the fairest of her guests into another room of the spacious suite, then exclaiming: "Oh, here he is!" added, "Madeleine dear—Mr. Harvey Bligh."

Then, noting the rose flush that came and went and the undulation of the snow white bosom, it dawned on Lady Alastair that her introduction had been superfluous, but noting the gleam in the young author's eyes she guessed it was far from unwelcome.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

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FURNISHING STORES,
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It's always a pleasure to meet a woman with a lovely complexion and bright spirits. But you cannot enjoy the best of health unless your system is in faultless order—every organ doing its appointed work and doing it regularly and well

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have brought health to thousands of ailing women the wide world over, by relieving distressing complaints, and giving tone to the system generally. Avoid injurious imitations.

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COMBINATION PIPE,
For Fireside or Garden.

Makes long or short pipe. 6d. post free.

Agents wanted. Write for wholesale terms and sample, 6d.

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Set with various stones, all sizes. 3s. each, post free. Wonderful Bargain.

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MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"*I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him.*" With the

FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

SULPHOLINE LOTION

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

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For 1s. Mr. WILDE will send a Reading of the Stars W. T. STEAD, Esq., and many other prominent gentlemen have testified to the accuracy of their forecasts. Send the exact or approximate hour of your birth if possible, date, year, &c., together with P.O. 1s. and stamp. Satisfaction will be guaranteed.

THE RESULT WILL ASTONISH YOU.

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DON'T COUGH *for*
KEATING'S LOZENGES
EASILY CURE
THE WORST COUGH,

One gives relief. An increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 1¾d. tins everywhere.

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Every article in new condition.

SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.

A full list sent post free on application.

SAVE £ d $

13/6 Gent's magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased Chronograph Stop Watch, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together.

12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed), elegant West-End pattern the two together.

14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff; beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14/9; approval willingly.

19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains; real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white, and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Necklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

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ONE HALFPENNY.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Lending Money to a Lover.

"My sweetheart is in money difficulties," writes "STELLA." "Through no fault of his some accounts got wrong at his office, and he has to make up the loss. He has no savings of his own, but I have several pounds in the bank. Would you advise me to offer them to him as a loan?"

* * * * *

If you think he is in serious difficulty, it would be a kind action on your part to offer the money. I suppose he would not borrow it from you unless he were quite confident of being able to repay you fully.

A Friend Not in Need.

"T. L. R." writes: "A girl friend of mine is engaged to a man whom I know gives way to certain bad habits, such as drinking and betting. I do not think she suspects it at all. Would it be my duty to warn her?"

* * * * *

I cannot encourage you to sow discord between the girl and her sweetheart. For all you know, the bad habits may quite disappear when the man finds himself mated to the one he loves. Single men's characters are not always free from blemish, but on marriage a great improvement often takes place. Certainly the girl ought to know everything really important about her husband's character, but it is not the business of a third party to circulate cruel reports. Lovers must be expected to find out each others' virtues and faults from their own observations of each other.

A Lukewarm Lover.

"FREDDIE" writes me a sarcastic letter, which, however, is not without interest. "Is there such a thing as love?" he asks. "I have been engaged five times, and have been very intimate with girls indeed, but in no case has it lasted more than three months, as I have either found the girls flirting with other fellows, or else I have found some other reason for disliking them. Perhaps I have never been in love, but if so, how am I to know when I am? Anyway, I should like to hear from you if a girl can be absolutely in love?"

* * * * *

I imagine you are the kind of man a girl looks upon as something to be trifled with. You admit you have never been sure as to your own feelings. Well, girls have great intuition. I suspect that, after a few weeks in your society, they have seen how the wind blows—that you care very little for them, and when another young man has turned up, have quite willingly fallen to his fascinations. Girls, of course, can love a fellow absolutely, but they generally like some kind of definite return from the other side. A lukewarm lover is generally unpopular, and often gets severely trifled with by the opposite sex.

A Worrying Husband.

"WHEN my husband comes home at night he is often in a very depressed mood. He complains of business worries and bad prospects. When I say I am sorry he seems irritated, and tells me that sympathy is no use. How should I act under such circumstances?"

* * * * *

He may pretend that your sympathy is no use, but in his heart I do not doubt he is very pleased to have it. It is always the lot of the sympathiser to imagine one's efforts apparently useless. But it is not generally justified. You might, though, add to your sympathy a little practical advice. When a man is baffled, I find that he usually prefers even bad advice to none at all.

A Silly Separation.

"My friend and I had two young ladies," writes "R. S." "We had been going out with them one Sunday, when my young lady said something which my friend did not like. He spoke sharply to her in reply, and my young lady then refused to go out with me any more. The other girl threw my friend up for the same reason. Don't you think it was very wrong of them?"

* * * * *

Yes, it seems a little sudden. I do not think either can have been very fond of you and your friend, or they would not allow such a stupid thing to cause a separation. Perhaps you are best rid of such an attachment. A girl who would throw up a fellow because someone else had offended her must be rather a peppery young person, and decidedly fickle.

How to Leave a Party.

No, "EVA," on leaving a private party where there are a great many guests, it is not necessary to shake hands with each and every acquaintance. If you just give a parting smile, and bow to those you know best, and shake hands with your hostess, you have done all that is expected of you. When leaving a party before proceedings are over, it is usual to retire as quietly as possible.

Too Much Good Nature.

"WHAT am I to do?" writes "BEATRICE." "I am in an awkward position simply as a result of good nature. Some time ago a rather depressing, gloomy young man made love to me. At first I thought him rather interesting, though very full of trouble. Out of good nature I allowed him to visit me often, and offered him advice in his grievances. Then, to my surprise, he protested that I was the only woman he ever loved. He said that if I did not return it, he would make away with himself. Now I had not got it in me to tell him outright that I did not love him, especially as he might really mean what he said. So I said simply that I was very fond of him. This was true in a way, for I did rather like him. Some months have passed, and he now talks as though we were to be married. I have no such intention, as there are others of whom I am much fonder. What had I better do?"

* * * * *

You have got yourself into a difficult position, "BEATRICE," and no doubt from very well-meant motives. It would have been better had you avoided from the first giving him the impression that you were unduly fond of him. To break the connection will be exceedingly difficult. It would be a good plan if you could go away for awhile, and try and cool relations off. It would be better that the parting should be gradual, seeing that you have a morbid person to deal with. After your return, try and treat him only on the basis of a friend, and avoid all intimate conversation and meetings.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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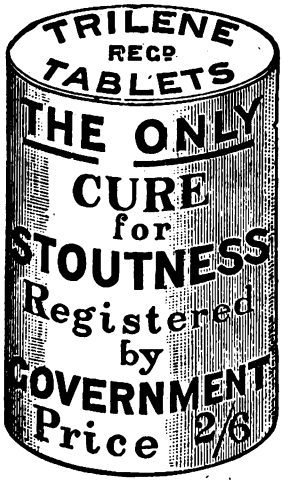
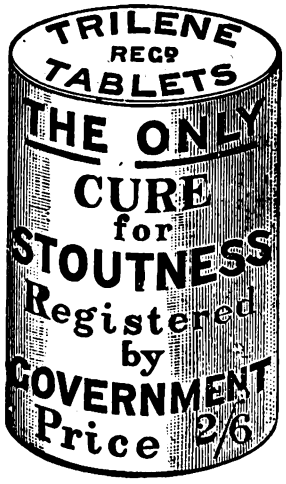


For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."



Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"67 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagilit, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1¼ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9¼st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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Indigestion,

FLATULENCE,

AND CONSTIPATION COMPLETELY CURED.

"I DO not think there is a woman in the country who has suffered more from indigestion and biliousness than I have," said Mrs. Bird, of 26 Sun Street, Rugby, in the course of an interview with a "Midland Times" reporter. "Added to these were flatulency and constipation, and so ill was I that even such light food as bread and butter caused me most intense suffering. It was impossible for me to obtain rest, for the pain was so great that I spent many sleepless nights. I tried all sorts of remedies, which did me no good whatever, and a local doctor, after examining me and prescribing his own medicines without any result, admitted he could do nothing for me. I had by this time often heard of Bile Beans, but never tried them. One day a pamphlet came into the house, and, reading of the cures of cases like mine, I was induced to send for a box. Most wonderful to me was the fact that I soon experienced some relief, and, continuing to take the medicine regularly, I found myself, in the course of a few weeks, completely cured. The pains grew less and less severe. I had no more sleepless nights. I found I could practically eat any kind of food. Of course, this result was brought about entirely by Bile Beans, and I can most conscientiously recommend them to everyone who suffers as I did. I always keep a box in the house, and tell everyone interested of the wonderful efficacy of the Beans." Mrs. Bird's sister, who was present at the interview, added her testimony, and said that she believed Bile Beans had saved her sister's life. In fact, they had completely changed her. At the conclusion of the interview Mrs. Bird remarked: "I hope you will publish this interview, and thus be the means of helping other sufferers to learn how they may regain their health."

Examined by a doctor.

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Bile Beans for Biliousness promptly and permanently cure Headache, Constipation, Piles, Liver Troubles, Bad Breath, Indigestion, Flatulence, Dizziness, Buzzing in the Head, Colds, Liver Chill, Influenza, Debility, Anæmia, and all Female Ailments. Of all Medicine Vendors, 1/1½ and 2/9 per box. (Large Box contains three times quantity small size.)

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FREE SAMPLE COUPON.

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10/10.03.

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No. 772.
Week ending
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Kaputine is the only preparation of its kind used in British and Foreign Hospitals and Infirmaries. Proof positive of its superior and sterling qualities.

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MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

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SHORT STORIES.

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

It was under very ordinary conditions that I, Sara Gillespie, entered the employ of Messrs. Templeton & Co., General Agents, of St. Helens, E.C. I broke off my connection with the firm under circumstances fraught with such menace to myself, such peril to the man I loved, that the recollection sends a chill to my heart, a shudder through my blood, recalls a vivid sense of danger.

The firm had advertised for an expert typine and shorthand writer at a good salary. I answered the advertisement, interviewed the senior partner, and secured the appointment. I had reason, I thought, to congratulate myself on my success. The hours were easy, the work light, and the salary £2 a week—larger than I had expected. I was earning very little at the time and caught eagerly at the chance of making more money. I had no one but myself to consult; my people were dead, my sweetheart, Noel Masterman, abroad. I had but my own judgment to rely on. That the judgment of nineteen is not infallible I discovered to my cost.

The office was a large and handsomely appointed one, with good, solid-looking furniture, the regulation Turkey carpet, massive desks, and a brand-new typewriter.

The firm, it appeared, were agents for all kinds of things, and all sorts of people, and their clients were to be found in every part of the world! Their correspondence was necessarily a heavy one, and the number of letters I had to type increased daily.

Mr. Templeton, the senior partner, before mentioned, instructed me in my duties. He was a middle-aged man with a fresh colour, a bald head, and neat-looking grey whiskers. He showed an unusually large expanse of shirt-front, which, with his carefully knotted tie, and handsome diamond pin, gave him an appearance of benevolent opulence that was most impressive.

He struck me as a very kind old gentleman indeed, the first day I saw him. I had reason later to alter my opinion.

I did not see much of the other members of the firm, Mr. Harrington Shackell and Rigby Starr respectively. As a rule they didn't turn up at the office until late in the afternoon, when the work was finished and it was time for me to go. Mr. Shackell was a broad-shouldered giant, square-jawed, steel-eyed, with a taciturn, at times morose, manner. He was a great contrast to the junior partner in more ways than one. Slight and fair, with a pink-and-white skin, blue eyes and curling lashes, Rigby Starr was invariably cheerful, and on the best of terms with himself and all the world.

Mr. Templeton, unlike the others, was very regular in his attendance. Punctually at half-past ten, with immaculate shirt-front and neatly brushed whiskers, he seated himself at his desk and proceeded to dictate the answers to his correspondence. The letters I had to type were not very interesting, they mostly consisted of price lists and quotations from the share market. We never seemed to get orders from our clients, their requirements seemed limited by the lists before mentioned.

Mr. Templeton appeared to take a kindly interest in me, and between whiles encouraged me to talk freely of my affairs. He was very sympathetic about Noel, and patted my shoulder in a fatherly sort of fashion when I told him my sweetheart was abroad. One afternoon he got quite confidential.

"He is a doctor, you say, Miss Gillespie? It ought not to be difficult for a promising young fellow like that to get an opening in England."

"He has no capital," I answered, sighing. "It's worse than useless for a doctor to start a practice without some hundreds to fall back upon."

"I don't think he should have left England all the same; it's not fair to you. Yes, I mean it, Miss Gillespie; he should have had more consideration."

"You mustn't blame him, Mr. Templeton," I said eagerly. "Noel couldn't help himself. He was brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, who was awfully good to him. All his expenses at hospital were paid, and it was arranged that a practice should be purchased. When—when——" I paused, flushing under my employer's scrutiny—"Noel met me——" I said in a low voice.

"And fell desperately in love, eh? Quite understandable, Miss Gillespie. If I were twenty years younger I should do the same thing myself."

"But Sir Francis had other views for his nephew," I

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continued. "He opposed the idea of our marriage bitterly, and at last gave Noel to understand that if he persisted in the engagement he must expect no further assistance."

"Whereon Noel promptly left his uncle's house, eh?" Mr. Templeton smiled, benevolently.

"Yes. Do you think it was wrong of him?"

"I think, my dear young lady," the senior partner spoke emphatically, "it was the wisest and the bravest thing he could have done."

"Thank you," I said, touched by his sympathy.

"And what is Mr. Noel doing now, if I may ask the question?"

"He's travelling with an old school friend who is in bad health."

"Medical companion, eh? Dear, dear, what a pity I didn't know of this before. I had a letter only the other day from a physician practising in the Midlands, who asked me to look out for an assistant. I should think Dr. Masterman would suit him exactly. You must bring him back to England, Miss Gillespie, and we'll find him something to do."

"It's most kind of you," I murmured; "thank you very much indeed."

"Not at all, not at all. I assure you it's a positive pleasure to me to help young people." He beamed refulgently, the very incarnation of middle-aged benevolence.

"It's an unfortunate thing for a young fellow to be obliged to quarrel with his family," he went on after a pause. "Does Dr. Masterman correspond with his cousins at all?"

"Sir Francis has only one son," I replied. "His name is Herbert; he and Noel are great friends; they still write to each other."

"Most comforting to you, my dear young lady, that it should be so. Sir Francis is a very wealthy man, I believe; failing his son, your sweetheart would, I suppose, inherit the property?"

"I suppose so," I returned surprised. "I never thought of that."

"Dear me, I daresay not. And now"—he turned suddenly to his desk—"we must get to work. There are some letters here which it is important should catch the country post. Please type them at once. You copy all your letters?" He glanced at me sharply, and, a little disconcerted at his change of manner, I murmured that I made a point of doing so.

I remembered the question later, and realised how completely I had been befooled. There was nothing in the routine of the office faintly suggestive of any but ordinary business proceedings; a steady-going, old-fashioned concern, I thought it, and regarded Mr. Templeton as a model of industry and perseverance.

That afternoon Rigby Starr and Mr. Shackell arrived about four o'clock. By this time I was aware of the reason for their absence from the office. The two partners, it appeared, were canvassing for orders during the morning, and called in to report progress of an afternoon!

I encountered the pair in the corridor. I was going out to post the letters, one of which I noted was addressed to the physician whom Mr. Templeton had mentioned. Doubtless the letter contained a reference to Noel; I felt very grateful to the firm of Templeton & Co., and returned Rigby's greeting with a pleasant smile.

It was a fine afternoon, and I felt tempted to prolong my absence from the office. I felt light-hearted and happy beyond expression at the thought that Noel and I might soon be re-united. What a fortunate thing it was that I had seen the firm's advertisement in the paper! What a lucky thing that Mr. Templeton had engaged me. Who would have thought that so ordinary an occurrence would have brought about such wonderful results? I was so busy planning out the future that I forgot to notice how the time was slipping by, and it gave me quite a shock when a neighbouring clock struck five.

For a moment I hesitated as to whether I should return to the office at all that afternoon. My work was practically over, and no one was likely to reproach me for my absence. I remembered, however, that I had left my coat behind, and that Noel's last letter was in the pocket. I hastened back at once eager to regain its possession. I opened the office door softly and stood somewhat timidly upon the threshold; for a moment I thought the room was empty. The sound of voices convinced me of my mistake. Behind the screen that stood between Mr. Templeton's desk and the door, the three partners were engaged in conversation. The screen was large and so arranged that the desk was hidden from view on that side of the room.

I did not wish to disturb their talk, so stepped quietly towards the cupboard where my coat was hanging and slipped it over my arm. I had regained the door and was about to close it behind me, when Shackell's voice, raised above its usual tone, arrested my attention.

"It will be the biggest thing on record if we pull it off," he said exultantly.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't," said the senior partner softly. "The scheme is beautifully simple. The old man can't last very long. Once he's dead the young one will return to England. As the nephew of the deceased gentleman he will inherit the property—failing the son. There will be, in effect, but one life between him and the money."

"And that," said Rigby slowly, "won't be a long life!" He laughed as he spoke, a curious sort of laugh that gave me an odd feeling of repulsion. I closed the door and hurried from the building vaguely disquieted. I pondered long as to what Rigby could have meant by that strange speech, but could arrive at no solution. My thoughts indeed were distracted from the problem by the discovery that Noel's letter was no longer in my pocket. I was absolutely certain that I had left it in my coat, and felt greatly concerned at its loss.

Next morning I found Mr. Templeton at the office when I arrived. He greeted me with a kindly smile, and asked if I had lost anything of value.

"There, there," I won't tease you," he said, "here's your letter, Miss Gillespie. I found it on the table by the typewriter. It's very pleasant to have such letters, I know, but you shouldn't read them in the office hours, it interferes with work."

I was much too abashed by the reproof to protest against the accusation. I never read Noel's letters in the office, they were much too precious. Neither, and of this I was sure, had I taken the epistle from my pocket. It must, I supposed, have dropped from my coat.

Later, I arrived at a different conclusion.

"So your sweetheart's at Nice," said Mr. Templeton, after a pause. "I couldn't help seeing the address, you know," he added, with a ponderous attempt at playfulness. "How does he like the place?"

"Very much, thank you," I said stiffly.

The senior partner made no further comment on the matter, but late that afternoon I noticed on his desk a letter addressed to a man of the name of Martin at the Poste Restante, Nice. It struck me at the time as peculiar he should have written that day to the very place where Noel was staying, but I look on it as a strange coincidence no more.

For the next week things went on as usual at St. Helens. Mr. Templeton did not again allude to an appointment for Noel, and the hope his hint had roused in me gradually died away. One afternoon I felt especially miserable. I sat at the table staring blankly at the typewriter. My heart was aching for my boy; it seemed as though we should be separated for ever. Even if he did return he might no longer care for me.

I remembered that one of the clerks at my last situation had summed me up as "a red-haired girl with a large mouth and green eyes." I had not minded the description at the time, now it appeared horribly truthful. I decided that I was too ugly for Noel to admire, and was tempted to shed a few tears for my lack of beauty, when the door opened and, yes, Noel himself appeared.

Somehow or other I avoided the typewriter and the tables that stood between us, and rushed, I confess it, rushed to

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his side. I forgot the office, the senior partner, my work, forgot everything but that my boy was with me, his arms about me, his dear face close to mine.

When I had regained possession of my faculties, I became conscious of Mr. Templeton's amused regard. He rose nobly to the occasion, however, and insisted I should take leave of absence for the remainder of the day. Noel took a fancy to him at once, and seemed very glad that I was working with such kindly people.

After we'd left the building he told me what had brought him so suddenly to England.

"I had a wire from my cousin Herbert," he explained. "Sir Francis has had a paralytic stroke and is not expected to live. I went straight to the house in Eaton Square, hoping he would see and recognise me, but I fear there is no chance of his regaining consciousness."

"You must not stay away from him for my sake, Noel. You ought to return to the house at once. Let us take a cab and drive there quickly."

"But when we reached the square we found it was too late. The Baronet was dead! And Herbert, his son, reigned in his place.

As I learnt the news, the words that I had overheard in the office came back to me.

"The old man can't last very long. When he's dead the young one will return to England. Between him and the property there's but one life. And that won't be a long one."

"Noel," I said impulsively, "Noel, is your cousin Eric delicate at all?"

"Very far from it," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

I murmured some excuse, and dropped the matter. It was absurd to suppose there could be any connection between Herbert and the man whom Rigby said *would not live long*.

After Sir Francis' death events came very quickly.

Mr. Templeton, in the course of business, had a doctor's practice offered him for sale. He spoke to Noel about it, and suggested he should try to make some arrangements for the purchase. A thousand pounds was the sum required. A large price, but my lover said none too much to pay as the doctor's connection was a large one. Close on the suggestion came the reading of the late Baronet's will, and, to our delight, we found that the old gentleman had relented at the last moment and left Noel a thousand pounds!

"I'm glad he thought kindly of me," said my lover. "I owe him very much."

"You'll be able to buy the practice, Noel?" I said excitedly. "It seems too good to come true."

That evening Noel took me round to Eaton Square to see Sir Herbert. I liked the latter immensely. He was a tall, fair man, with a very charming manner, and a great friendship for his cousin.

"I suppose you two will set up housekeeping directly," he said, laughing. "Are you going to start a practice, Noel?"

"I'm in treaty for one already," he answered. "Messrs. Templeton and Co., the firm where Sara is engaged as typine, have a splendid thing in view."

"You couldn't do better than follow their advice. If they recommend it, you may be sure it's a good thing. I've had some dealings with the firm myself. I found them very decent people. As a matter of fact, I was hard up about a year ago. I'd over-run the constable a bit, and I didn't care to ask my father for assistance. Templeton and Co. let me have an advance of five thousand, and only charged 3 per cent. for the transaction."

"Didn't they want any security?" asked Noel, surprised.

"A merely nominal one. I had to insure my life in their favour. I forget how much the policy was made out for, fifteen thousand, I think."

Impulsively I started to my feet

Sara jumped to her feet. "That valet is Harrington Shackell, my employer," she cried.

"Do you mean, Sir Herbert, that if you died Mr. Templeton would have fifteen thousand pounds?"

"Something like that," he answered, smiling. "You don't credit the firm with bloodthirsty designs, do you, Miss Gillespie?"

"N—no, of course not," I answered, ashamed of my interference. "It seemed a strange sort of transaction, that's why I asked."

"It's not unusual," he replied. "However, I'll call up to-morrow, redeem the debt, and consign my life policy to the flames. Does that reassure you?"

"I'm not really alarmed," I answered, laughing. All the same I felt a vague uneasiness; I was half-inclined to repeat that conversation I had overheard. And yet how foolish such conduct would appear! I really had no cause to distrust Templeton and Co.

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We stayed quite late at Eaton Square. Herbert was delighted to have his cousin back again, and seemed as if he could not bear to part with him. Just as we were going, he remembered a certain pearl necklace belonging to his mother, which he said would just suit me.

"I'll ring for my valet, he knows where it is. I won't keep you waiting long, Miss Gillespie."

The valet at this juncture appeared, and was dispatched for the trinket. Some few minutes later he returned, a small casket in his hand.

He was a tall, square-shouldered man, with a grim, clean-shaven face. As he stood under the electric light his face seemed curiously familiar.

With a cry I started to my feet, and, pointing to him I cried:

"That man is Harrington Shackell, one of my employés!"

"My dear Sara, what are you thinking of?" said Noel. "Mr. Shackell has a moustache. It's merely a chance resemblance"—and he motioned to the valet's face, innocent of beard or moustache.

"How silly of me," I said, with a gasp. I looked the apology I was too nervous to make.

"Now you come to mention it, Watkins is rather like Shackell," said Herbert. "Capital man, Watkins," he added, "been with me over a year."

The valet signified his appreciation of the compliment with a profound bow, deposited the casket in my hands, and left the room.

The necklace was very exquisite, and in my enthusiasm for my pretty present, all thought of Watkins and his strange likeness to Mr. Templeton's partner left my mind.

Next morning I was at the office early. The arrangements for the purchase of the practice were to be concluded, and I was all excitement till the thing was settled.

Noel arrived looking very handsome, in his light tweed travelling suit.

"I've had bad news, my dear," he said. Then glancing round the office—Templeton had gone out—he slipped his arm about my waist.

"I'm obliged to leave England, dearest, now at once. I've had a wire from the hotel at Nice to say that my patient is dangerously ill. I can't leave him to the mercy of strangers; he's been a very good pal to me."

"But, Noel, what about the practice? To-day is the last moment. You must decide to-day. It would be a dreadful thing if it should slip through your fingers." I paused, a mist in my eyes. If the practise were secured it would mean that Noel and I could get married almost immediately. If not, there would be months, perhaps years of weary waiting, years in which he might get tired of a girl with red hair and green eyes.

"It's a most unfortunate thing that you should have to leave to-day, Mr. Masterman," said Templeton, when the case was explained. "Of course you're bound to go; still, it's unfortunate."

"Can't you conclude the purchase in my absence?" said Noel. "I can sign any papers that are necessary, giving you authority to act on my behalf. As for the money, I've arranged for that already. My cousin has given me a cheque for a thousand pounds pending the settlement of my uncle's property."

"It's hardly according to form," said Mr. Templeton, "I'd rather you signed the agreement yourself. Still, as the matter's urgent I'd better do as you request. The money is to be paid to-morrow morning, Mr. Masterman. You enter into possession of the house and practice any time within the next three months."

"Quite so, quite so," said Noel. "I'm quite satisfied that it's worth the money, and I shall be glad if you'll see the business through for me. Here is the cheque," he pushed the paper towards the senior partner. "If you'll give me a receipt for the amount and draw up the document that empowers you to act for me, I shall be obliged."

Slowly and carefully Mr. Templeton wrote out the receipt and handed it to Noel.

"There's a lawyer a few doors down the passage," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll engage him to draw up the paper. It's as well to do things according to rule and regulation."

The senior partner disappeared, returning with his friend the solicitor.

"If you'll put your name, Mr. Masterman, at the foot of this paper, I shall be able to act on your behalf."

Noel took the paper and carelessly scrawled his signature.

"Have you read it, sir?" asked Templeton.

My lover nodded.

"It's precious full of legal terms," he said, laughing, "any one would think I was a landed proprietor by the fashion in which you allude to my 'estate'."

"Mere phraseology," said Templeton, "a thousand pounds is not to be despised."

The solicitor, having witnessed the signing of the all-important document withdrew. Mr. Templeton considerately followed his example.

"Good-bye, sweetheart," said my dear one. "I shall be back again soon, and then we shall be together always."

A last kiss, a last pressure of the hand, and he was gone!

Before we met again many things, dark, strange and terrible had come to pass.

Shortly after Noel's departure, Mr. Templeton went out and I was left alone in the office.

"I may not be back till late in the afternoon, Miss Gillespie," he said. "Don't trouble to wait for me. You can leave as soon as you're through with those letters."

I thanked him and set to work with a will. My correspondence took longer than I had anticipated, however, and it was just on five before I had finished.

With a sigh of relief I covered up the typewriter and put on my hat and coat. At the last moment I remembered that I had left a book of Noel's in a small room opening out of the office. I call it a room, but in reality it was little more than a large cupboard. One could hardly turn round without knocking the walls, and it was impossible to move unless the door was closed. I had some trouble in finding the book; it had got stowed away on the top shelf. Just as I came across it, somebody entered the outer office. I glanced round the crack of the door and saw Mr. Templeton, followed by Rigby Starr.

"Well," said the latter in a quick, impatient voice, "how have things gone?"

"Up to the present perfectly. Look!" As he spoke the senior partner laid a packet on the table.

"Bank notes, eh?" said Rigby, seizing on the crisp bits of paper. "Two, four, six—why, you have got the whole thousand, Templeton?"

The other nodded.

"A thousand, aye, and twenty times that sum to come. The scheme has gone without a hitch. Noel Masterman called here this morning on his way to Nice. He was wired for by his friend."

"What a lucky thing the telegram arrived. Came in the nick of time."

The other nodded.

"Yes, it has saved us some trouble; as it is he'll be there safely out of the way for some weeks. He left me his cheque for the purchase of the practice, and what practically amounts to a power of attorney, authorising me to deal with his estate. Just imagine, Rigby—his estate!"

There was a triumph in his voice, a suggestion of evil in his laugh that alarmed me. My heart beat heavily, my breath came hard and short. I strained my ears to catch what followed.

"It's a great coup," said Rigby. "I suppose," he glanced half fearfully at Templeton. "I suppose matters will go smoothly to the finish?"

"That's all right, we can trust Shackell to finish the job." He laughed as he spoke, and for the first time I realised that his mouth was cruel. The thin lips curved away from the pointed yellow teeth, the eyes glistened. I crouched close to the door and listened ever with apprehension.

"At the moment, then," said Rigby, "we are waiting——"

Templeton raised his hand.

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"Listen!" he said.

Down the long corridor there sounded footsteps, hurried, eager. Nearer and nearer came the tread, and as the feet approached, the fear that clutched my heart grew keener, stronger. All the vague dread, the apprehension of the last few weeks were centred in that instant, on the man that even now stood at the door—a messenger of evil tidings.

"Shackell!" cried Rigby with a start. The boyish face seemed suddenly grown old, the pink and white complexion changed to the leaden hue of fear. "What news?" he stammered.

"Sit down." The senior partner thrust his back into his chair. "Well, what has happened?" and he faced the tall, square-shouldered giant with resolution.

"I've done the job," said Shackell slowly.

"He's dead?" Rigby's eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"As a door nail."

"You're quite sure?"

With an oath he turned upon the boy.

"Confound you, leave me alone," he snarled. "I tell you that Herbert Masterman is dead."

Herbert Masterman! For a moment my brain refused to grasp the news. Only last night I had seen him, spoken to him. I recalled his voice, his laugh, the words that he had said. It was not true, it could not be true. A darkness came before my eyes, a horrible tightness clutched my throat. If I could scream! Dear Heaven, if only I could scream!

"How did you do it?" Rigby's voice trembled, he was not such a hardened criminal as the other.

Shackell leant back and stretched his arms with a sigh of satisfaction.

"As we arranged," he answered. "Templeton and I discussed the thing last week. There's a well staircase at Eaton Square built of stone. The flight of stairs that leads to Sir Herbert's suite of rooms is a long one, some twenty stairs from top to bottom. It happened that the carpets were taken up to-day for cleaning purposes, so that the stone was left exposed. As usual I left the house at four o'clock this afternoon, returning by the back entrance some ten minutes later. Sir Herbert was still in his room. I fastened a wire across the stairs, slender and strong, and quite invisible to the baronet, who suffers from short sight. Then I retired into my bedroom, next to Sir Herbert's. I heard him cross the landing, run down the stairs, and then"—Harrington Shackell paused—"Sir Herbert caught his foot, stumbled and fell with a crash, the whole length of the stairs, striking his head against the stones. When they picked him up he was—done for."

"The wire?" said Rigby, moistening his dry lips, "did you remove the wire?"

"I'm not a fool," was the reply. "I'm not likely to risk my neck. I whipped the wire out of sight, slipped upstairs and out through the attic window on to the leads. From there I climbed into the next house, an empty one. I left there an hour ago, and came here by a devious route."

"I suppose there's no chance of your being recognised as Sir Herbert's valet?"

"Not the ghost of one. The only person who ever noticed the likeness was that red-haired fool of Templeton's. She'll have to be got out of the way very shortly," he added grimly.

"I'll look after that," said the senior partner. "She's been very useful up to the present."

"By Jove," cried Shackell suddenly, "the papers have got hold of it already. They're crying the news!"

Hastening across the room he flung the window open wide.

"Terrible death of a Baronet! Sir Herbert Masterman killed!" The harsh voice of the newsboy echoed through the place.

Terrible death of a Baronet—the words beat upon my brain. The horror that had filled me gave place to a sudden sense of personal danger. At any moment those men might discover my whereabouts. They might hear me, see me, and then—— I closed my eyes and tried vainly to regain my self-control. If they knew I was there—within a few feet of them, my fate was sealed.

I must have lost consciousness for a while for the next thing I remember hearing was my lover's name.

"From what you say then, Templeton, Noel Masterman—or to give him his right title, Sir Noel, is disposed of for some time?"

"Yes. His friend is seriously ill, too ill to be left. I shall wire him the news of his cousin's death to-night and offer to act in his absence. If he accepts my offer, well and good. If not——" The senior partner smiled. "Martin will see to him," he said softly.

The remembrance of the letter I had seen weeks back addressed to that same Martin flashed across my mind. There had been a plot—a vile plot against Noel from the first. And I—I had aided and abetted it!

"Meanwhile I shall commence operations at once. This document"—he touched the paper Noel had signed—"empowers me to deal with the estate. It is drawn up by a solicitor, who witnessed the signature, and will hold good in any court of law. The position, therefore, is this. Either by fair means or otherwise Masterman will be kept out of England for some time to come. When he returns"—his thin lips curved in a hideous smile—"he will find his fortune vanished and the firm of Templeton & Co. dissolved."

The words roused me from the apathy of terror, benumbing my faculties, deadening my brain. In a flash I realised the danger that threatened Noel. Templeton & Co. were scoundrels, criminals, who would stop at nothing to achieve their ends. They had used me as a tool, a cat's paw, taking advantage of my ignorance and inexperience, they had employed me to cloak their infamy. For a moment I thought I would rush out and raise an alarm, but reflection warned me of the uselessness of such a course. Who would believe my statement? To all appearance Messrs. Templeton & Co. were respectable traders. The charge of murder would be laughed at, the suggestion of conspiracy waived aside.

And yet something must be done at once with the paper, the fatal paper Noel had signed, for my lover's future was practically at their disposal. True, I might warn him, but, and there lay the difficulty, I must first leave the office. Even supposing I got away, they would still retain possession of the document and the bank notes. I might remain hidden safely until they left the office. Then I could ring the bell, the caretaker of the premises would release me, and I could take steps to protect my lover. But if I failed to prove the trio guilty Noel's fortune might disappear; Noel himself be murdered.

It came home to me that the one chance of defeating the gang lay in my *taking the paper with me!*

The very thought sent me sick and dizzy. It was useless and worse than useless to pit my puny strength against these three determined men. Suppose I made good my escape with the paper and the notes; by a wide stretch of fancy I fancied myself safely outside the door. Even then I should be hunted down and killed without mercy—like a rat. I could not appeal to the police—I should have to explain how the notes came into my possession. I could not hope to match Templeton & Co. in cunning.

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And yet slowly but surely the conviction was borne in upon me that I must seize the paper from the table and make a sudden dash for the door. Once outside in the corridor I could make plans. Meantime I dare not let the opportunity escape.

I fought against the voice that told me that I must do the thing. I looked shudderingly through the crack towards the partners and read merciless brutality on the faces of all three.

Templeton, cunning and cold, had brains that would outmatch the cleverest. Shackell—I could not look at him. I saw in fancy the fair head, the kindly face of the man whom he had murdered.

Rigby, though the youngest of the band, I feared and loathed more than all. Under that soft smile, that winning face, there lay a desire for torture. The others swindled, murdered for gain. Rigby took pleasure in the pain that he inflicted—the pleasure of a coward.

For a while they chatted over the events of the day, apportioned the money the insurance company would have to pay as a result of Herbert's murder, discussed the arrangements for the future, divided beforehand Noel's fortune and estate. And I had to listen to them, had to quiet myself, keep back the scream of terror that choked me, the impulse to flee that beat against my resolution and my will.

At last Templeton rose, and lighting a cigar suggested they should adjourn. Now, if ever, was my chance to seize the papers, now if ever was the opportunity to thwart their cruel design. Shackell and Starr seated at the table, had their backs towards me. Templeton on the other side, leaning over to them, did not observe the gradual opening of the door—the door that was between them and the "red-haired fool!" The papers—the bank notes for a thousand pounds and the document that gave the senior partner power over Noel's estate—lay at the corner of the table, at Templeton's right. If I could creep across the room and reach the table unobserved I might——

Shackell broke into a laugh at some murmured joke of Rigby's. I crouched back shivering behind the door. I could not do it, I could not run the risk!

And yet with Noel's fortune, perhaps his life at stake, I dared not hesitate. With the desperation of despair I crept out of my hiding-place and made my way across the room. Nearer and nearer to the table, so close that I hear Shackell's heavy breath, feel the vibration of his laugh.

If he should turn round, if Templeton should look up—I felt in fancy cruel fingers at my throat, strangling my breath, choking my very life.

Closer, by slow degrees, past Shackell, by the back of Rigby's chair, until the papers, the precious papers, came within touch of my hands, within reach of my fingers.

I dare not consider, I dare not hesitate. Blindly I put out my hand, snatched the notes, clutched the document.

An oath from Templeton, a shriek from me, and then, throwing over chairs and table in my mad flight, I rushed across the room, the panting breath of my pursuers close behind.

A stick deftly thrown struck my head and blinded my eyes with pain. Another second and they would be upon me. Would the door never open, the handle never turn? A last convulsive effort and I had opened the door, banged it in the enemy's face, locked it on the other side.

And then, clasping the papers to my heart, down the long corridor I rushed, and out into the street—a fugitive!

(*Next week tells of how Sara leaves London to avoid her pursuers, and hides in Bedford, see "Your Editor Chats," on page 495.*)

"The Gamble of Life,"
Arthur Applin's Powerful
New Serial Story, starts in
FRIDAY'S "PEARSON'S WEEKLY."
ONE PENNY. EVERYWHERE.

THE POWER OF HEREDITY.

Showing What Can be Done by Love.

Archie was a clerk on £100 a year. He was a good sort, but weak, and his major weakness was a habit of putting money on the wrong horse, a dangerous amusement on £100 a year.

Archie was an orphan. He had been brought up by a maiden aunt, who, on Sundays, with a Bible in her lap, would frequently relate to him the story of his father's ruin, terminating her lecture with a homily on the evils of gambling, and a quotation on the power of heredity. These sermons were both bitter and narrow-minded.

When Archie earned sufficient to exist, he rebelled, and, flying from his aunt and her lectures, sought refuge at lodgings of his own, in a back alley, where Sunday papers were in order, and there he spent his day of rest in gleaning sporting tips.

Now Archie, like the majority of his confrères, got a yearly holiday, when he went to the seaside, but the wrong horse ran away with the money, until a year came when the holiday was perforce curtailed to a week-end. An eventful week-end, however, which ruled the fate of Archie.

It was a glorious, windy day, typical of the watering-place. The beach buzzed with excited trippers, great waves pounded and crunched the shingle, niggers howled coon songs and tummed on their banjos, children with spades and buckets chirped and chattered, the silly nursemaid giggled at the donkey boy, modest spinsters wrestled with their skirts, the ice-cream man shouted down the Punch-and-Judy show, and dogs and gulls joined in the general hubbub, to the droning accompaniment of "Nice day for a sail, sir; Nice boat, good lady." Archie was bored, he flopped on a seat by the sands.

The noise jarred on his nerves. The wind whirled dirty papers past. They reminded him of bills. He threw a pebble at a stout and well-fed dog, which rushed vaguely into a stouter and better fed woman, and upset her.

Archie smiled, then he moralised: "A fellow can't help his weakness, any more than that dog could help charging that woman. It sounds very grand to say 'Fight 'em,' a fellow simply can't, especially when that weakness is his dad's only legacy. I agree with this philosophy 'Heredity is stronger than any influence.' Yes, that sounds like a copy-book; in fact, it's good enough for Huxley or Darwin, or that sort of clever Johnny. The world at large ought to hear it. By Jove! I'll write it in the sand with my stick."

He did so, then went back to the boarding house for tea.

On the way to the house, where the by-street joins the High Street, he saw a crowd collecting, and that vice which bubbles in all women and most men bubbled in Archie, so he became inquisitive.

An old man had swooned, a dirty, unkempt old creature, with a beer-flushed visage. The kind crowd had taken it for a fit, and with typical forethought formed a ring round him to exclude the air. Archie always prided himself on his power of resource, he loved emergencies, and at once became the man of the moment. He elbowed his way through the onlookers, and called loudly for breathing space and brandy. A flask was forthcoming and the effect was electrical. The old man opened his eyes, and seeing the flask, grabbed it. He readily drank the contents; then was assisted to his feet. Archie lingered when the others had dispersed. He gave the old man twopence, which he pocketed with thanks and a hiccough.

After tea, Archie was still bored, but returned to the seat by the sands. There was someone else sitting there, so he took the other end.

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The tide had risen; the trippers seemed less noisy, their mouths, no doubt, too full of shrimps to admit of loud conversation.

Archie looked seawards, successive hoots from an excursion steamer attracted him, the steamer looked so angry, and the little fishing boats ahead, so unconcerned.

He watched the steamer manœuvre between them, then looked down at his epigram in the sand, "Heredity is stronger than any influence save"—he never wrote "save"—"save love." He repeated it aloud. "How on earth—" but a rippling laugh interrupted him from the end of the seat, and he turned to see a dainty little girl in a white muslin dress, hat in lap, and fair hair waving in the wind.

"Bless my soul," ejaculated Archie, then they both blushed and turned away.

The moment was awkward. A stronger and bolder man would have seized the opportunity, but Archie made full-stops with his stick in the sand. He had made an oblate spheroid of full stops round his boot, before Providence came to his rescue. A puff of wind, decreed by the Fates, gently lifted the hat from the girl's lap, and away it went, whisked and trundled, over and over the sands, with dogs, children, and Archie in hot pursuit. The girl smiled—knowingly, perhaps.

Archie raced the black retriever, and beat him on the post, but the black retriever had slobbered on the bow, so Archie returned, a hero, indeed, wiping it with his handkerchief.

It was only a cheap hat, 1s. 11¾d. at a recent sale, a hat of the shape that contorts to suit the fashion and a woman's will, but Archie returned with it in safety, carrying it with a care that did credit to a Bond Street milliner, or a mother with her darling mite.

"Thanks," said the girl, as she pushed the pins in, "it nearly went into the sea."

Archie felt more comfortable. He almost wished it in the sea, for he was a good swimmer. Then he sat down, closer than before, and they discussed the place, the weather, and many mundane things, and finally they laughed at the epigram in the sand.

It was dusk when Archie said "Good-night," and by then he had told the whole story of heredity, and she had listened without laughter. They left the epigram in the sand, but neither forgot it.

Next morning he returned to the same seat, a happy, eager, Archie. It was very early, and the gulls and the sun welcomed him, possibly they took his presence for granted. There was the epigram untouched, so Archie sat down, and re-read it twenty times, dwelling more and more on the last two words.

But what was that! A piece of crumpled paper stuck in the letter "e"—a bill, ugh! He had forgotten bills, how dare paper trespass on his holy ground. He picked it up, it was crisp, with a familiar, and yet unfamiliar crispness. Ye gods and little fishes! It was a five pound note.

Archie felt like a thief in the night, nevertheless thrust it into his pocket. Someone was hailing, so with a shamefaced look he turned to find the old man who had had a fit the day before.

"Hullo, joker! Looking for diamonds; found any?"

"Ha! no—er, not exactly. How are you?"

"Tidy enough, thankee, tidy enough for Ascot and the Gold Cup."

"You are a sporting man—a bookie, perhaps," said Archie.

"Aye, I was once, and as 'cute and as straight as the Turf breeds, but I'm poor now, with a big drag on my purse-strings."

"Big family; eh?"

"Bless you, sonnie, no; nothing so troublesome."

"What then?"

"A thirst; a very expensive thirst."

Archie smiled. The old man was proud of his thirst.

"Well, lad, I like you," he continued, "you gave me tuppence yestercen, give me another and I'll return you a billionfold."

Archie smiled again, and gave it to him. The old man's voice came low but more raspy, he moved close to Archie and bent over his ear.

"Got any money?"

"Er—a very little."

"Then pawn your clothes, your life, your soul, my son, and put it all on Rosemary for the Gold Cup. It's a straight 'un!" cried the old man, and with a slow emphasis he added, as he tapped Archie's shoulder and hobbled off, "from a straight chap."

Archie stood in a dream. The old man moved slowly on, jingling his coppers. Then Archie shook himself, and called:

"Can't stop," came the reply, "must get to Ascot."

Archie stared at the sand, the letters there were rising and hitting him. "Go to Ascot," he cried, sinking back on the seat, "Rosemary or the other; I suppose I must choose now and for ever."

An hour later he was walking on the esplanade, the five-pound note felt less crisp, the battle had waned, only muffled and irregular firing drummed in his ear. A white muslin dress turned the corner.

Ah, what would that money buy, a Bond Street hat, a necklace, brooch, or any other glittering gem dear to woman's eyes. "Let Rosemary go hang!" said Archie, as he strode boldly forth to meet the dress.

He returned to hard work on the Monday, leaving a glad heart and a promise behind him. He had told the girl of his lucky find, had sworn that it was hers to spend, but she was immovable. "No," she had said, "you are to keep it, and not until I tell you, are you to spend it. One year from to-day we will meet at this very seat, and until then, Archie, you will not hear from me."

* * * *

The year had passed, Archie was returning to the seaside. How sweet the world looked, the birds so happy, the trees so green, even the train drummed contentedly as it bore him nearer, nearer. How hard it had been, and yet in the end, how easy. No bills, no worries, and the same crisp five-pound note.

He turned to the esplanade, his lips were dry and refused to whistle, his heart throbbed like a dynamo.

"I wonder if she really meant it," how many thousand times had he said that in the last year. The answer came back "yes." A white muslin dress by the old seat, and laughing eyes, dimmed, perhaps, with tears. *It was she!*

"So you have really come," she said softly. He was no longer bashful, he took her up in his arms with an honest hug. The niggers' lullaby died with a gasp, the five-pound note got terribly crushed, but Archie did not heed.

"God bless you, little woman," he said huskily, "I have kept my promise."

They sat on the old seat and gazed at the sea.

"Archie," she whispered, "I have other five-pound notes, but they are yours now, dear, ours, Archie. God grant, like this one, they may bring blessings."

And only then did he understand.

"But how on earth," he exclaimed a little later, "did you think that I should find it in the sand?"

She laughed merrily. "Ah, Mr. Philosopher, that needs no telling, when a woman's instinct *knows* that heredity is weaker than love."

Lucy Phair.

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'Twixt the Cup and the Lip.

The Romance of a Fisherman's Bride.

"One more day, darling, and then the union I have so long desired will be effected, and you will be my wife."

The speaker was a tall, bronzed, brown-bearded fisherman, with clear, frank, blue eyes, and a brow that bore evidence of greater intellectuality than the majority of his class. Yet he was but a fisherman, for, though his capabilities were above his station, he loved the sea and the simple life of the fisher-folk, and was contented. The girl whom he addressed was as sweet a type of innocent maidenhood as could be seen on all the broad coast of Sussex—with sunny curls that seemed to court disorder and broke away from the fetters which bound them, with deep, dark violet eyes, that looked into one's own with all the shy fearlessness of innocence, and ripe red lips, to whose sweetness the man at her side could have testified. For he had won her, and, when the golden sun had risen and set and risen again, she was to be his wife. It was dark now, and they sat together on the green slope of a great cliff that overlooked the dark-blue sea.

"The night seems born for happiness," he said, taking the girl's hand in his. "But the weather may change—the waves may rise and the wind roar—but happiness—our happiness—the happiness that comes of perfect love—cannot change."

Muriel Warne looked radiantly up into her lover's face.

"I hope not, dear," she said softly. "But life is not without its cares. Sometimes it seems to me we are in danger of becoming too placid, and need something to wake us up. Trouble is not an unqualified bane. If it teaches us nothing more, the lesson of patience is at least worth learning. And I am not patient. If anything goes wrong, it irritates me, and I generally do something on impulse, which later reason tells me is foolish."

Norman Hurst smiled.

"That is the way we all learn," he said gently. "Experience is the best teacher man ever had, but her lessons are generally the most stern and unrelenting."

"And therefore the longer remembered," replied Muriel.

"Quite so," he said gravely. "But I hope neither you nor I may be judged to be deserving of such lessons."

"I don't know," said Muriel thoughtfully. "I think I am. I am proud and impulsive, and have never known what it is to be thwarted in my life. I could not bear humiliation of any kind—even the humiliation of injury."

"Surely," said the man fondly, "there is none who would injure *you!* Evil is not a stranger to men's hearts, but evil cannot harm you, for innocence is its own safeguard."

"Innocence—yes," replied the girl. "But not when self-will, impatience, and pride of heart distort the judgment, and make one do the things which simple innocence would condemn.

Norman laughed.

"We are becoming quite morbid!" he said. "Let us take a walk along the cliff. The moon is rising and the night is gloriously beautiful."

He leapt to his feet as he spoke and proffered his hand to the girl. Together they went along the margin of the dark cliff, and the darkness soon swallowed them up.

As they disappeared, a man lifted himself from behind a great rock close to where the two had sat. His face was dark, and a scowl made it appear almost malevolent.

"So I am to be the Angel of Destiny, and teach these people patience and fortitude and humility," he said with a sneer. "Quite a new character for me. Not such a bad one either, since the reward will be mine too. So that is how you feel, my lady—'even the humiliation of injury,' eh?—well, so much the better for me! I think I can see my way through this business, and, if the lesson be hard to learn, it will, as you say, be the longer remembered."

He looked once in the direction which the lovers had taken, and then strode rapidly away.

* * * * *

Another night had fallen on the little south-coast fishing village, and the lights twinkled in the many casement windows of the pretty cottages of its inhabitants. But Norman Hurst's assertion that the weather might change had been already verified. The day had been unusually hot, and a storm was even now gathering far out over the sea. Great black clouds were scudding across the murky sky, through which the vivid flash of lightning could be seen by the watchers on the beach. The sea, too, was rising fast, and great, white-crested billows were breaking on the strand. The fishing-boats were hurrying into the bay for shelter from the storm, and the night grew darker and darker.

Within the cottage where she lived, Muriel Warne sat, with her hands folded in her lap, happily thinking of the morrow. She had not seen her lover since the morning, for he had, so he had told her, many things to do in the preparation of their future home. So she would not see him before she met him at the altar.

There was a knock at the door, and she went herself to open it. A tall man stood outside, and he lifted his cap respectfully.

"May I come in?" he said. "There's going to be a storm."

For a moment the girl hesitated. But it would be rude to refuse.

"Yes," she said, as she stepped aside to allow him to enter. "The night looks very threatening, and you will be caught in the rain before you reach home."

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He came in, and Muriel, shutting the door, preceded him into the room, where she had been sitting. A coldly, critical physiognomist would have pronounced Ernest Malcolm a handsome man. Yet, at first sight, few would have shared that opinion. Flawless as were his features, there was an unpleasant shiftiness about the dark eyes and a cruel compressing of the thin lips that repelled one, and stamped the man as untrustworthy. Yet his manner, to Muriel Warne, at any rate, left nothing to be desired. Courteous and polite to a degree, he had so far conquered the instinctive dislike which the girl felt towards him, that she had even come to regard him, in some measure, as her friend. To-night, however, she would have preferred to be alone—alone, to think of the morrow. Once Ernest Malcolm had asked her to be his wife. Her refusal had taken him by surprise, and he had demanded to know its cause. And then she had told him that she loved Norman Hurst and had promised to be his wife, and the man had almost frightened her, so livid and distorted was his face as he heard the news. And then he had turned and gone away without a word.

"How dreadful he looked!" she had said to herself. But the knowledge that she is loved is sweet to a woman, even though she cannot reciprocate it, and Muriel felt sorry for the man and was kinder to him than before.

And now he sat in the little room, with the bright light of the lamp between them, and talked to her with his low, well-modulated voice, until, in spite of her previous preoccupation, she grew interested and talked too. Presently he rose and held out his hand.

"I have come to say good-bye to Miss Warne," he said quietly.

The girl rose also.

"You are not going away?" she asked in surprise.

The man hesitated and gave vent to a little forced laugh.

"I don't know," he said. "I may do, but I am not sure yet. At any rate, it is, I believe, the last time I may address you as Miss Warne."

A deep flush overspread the girl's cheeks as she bowed her head in shy assent. The man's face darkened at the sight, but his voice never changed.

"I trust," he said, with an appearance of deep earnestness, "that the life which is before you may bring you all the happiness you deserve."

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"That is very kind of you," she said, looking up. "And—and generous," she added, with a blush, as she remembered his defeat.

He took her hand in his, and for a moment was silent. Then there came a loud knocking at the outer door, and the girl started back.

"Who can it be?" she said, and went out into the hall.

A boy was standing outside, and the rain was beginning to fall.

"Is Mr. Malcolm here?" he asked. "I've been looking for him everywhere. I'm to give him this letter." And he held it out to Muriel and looked questioningly up into her face. "Aren't you Miss Warne?" he asked, a sudden light coming into his eyes.

Muriel nodded.

"Then there's a letter for you, too. The same gentleman gave me them both." And he handed the girl the second letter. "Good night, miss. It's terrible wet." And he ran off into the darkness and rain.

Muriel went back into the little room and silently handed her visitor the letter addressed to him. It seemed very strange. Both the envelopes bore the handwriting of her lover, Norman Hurst, and some indefinable fear came into the girl's heart. Simultaneously they tore open their envelopes, and, a moment later, an exclamation burst from Ernest Malcolm's lips. Looking across at Muriel, he saw that her face had become deathly white, while her eyes seemed riveted to the letter she held in her hand. For this is what she read:

"DEAR MISS WARNE,—*I know only too well how greatly surprised, and even indignant, you will be when you get this letter. The truth is, I have been living a double life of late—pretending to be what I am not, and never can be, an honest man—for the sake of winning you. But the utter wickedness of the thing has come home to me before it is too late, and I have determined—cost what it will—to relinquish that which is now within my grasp, and go away. For three years I have been an inveterate gambler, and ruin has only been averted by the help of a friend who has many a time stood between me and exposure. Nor is this all, for there are other things which I cannot even mention. Try to forget me. I am not worthy of you, and, did you but know all, you would recoil from me with loathing, and realise, even more than you now do, the degradation to which my kisses—the kisses of a gambler and a libertine—have subjected you. Finally, then, good-bye. You will never see my face again.*—Yours regretfully,

"NORMAN HURST."

She was recalled to herself by the voice of Ernest Malcolm.

"Miss Warne," he said, in a strangely broken voice. "I am afraid my visit to-night has been ill-timed. At least,

"Go through with it," he said. "You never needed a husband more than you do now. Try *me*, Muriel."

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you will do me the justice of believing that this"—he touched the letter he held in his hand—"was not foreseen. May God comfort you in this, your first great trouble." And he held out his hand.

"Oh, I can't believe it," said Muriel, with a little catch in her throat. "There must be some horrible mistake. And yet——"

"I wish I could support you in that belief," said the man. "But——" And he paused and drew a deep breath.

Presently Muriel lifted her eyes. The look in her face was changing from grief to indignation. The humiliation of her position was asserting herself, and anger blazed up in her cheeks.

"It is his own handwriting," she said resentfully. "There's seems no question about it. Oh, how could he so liumiliate me!"

There was a long pause. Then the man said:

"What are you going to do—about—to-morrow?"

Muriel started.

"To-morrow?" she said. "Oh, I had forgotten *that!*"

"Your invitations are out and everything is arranged for the wedding," reminded the man in a low, concentrated voice, while he watched the girl's face attentively. "You will have to explain."

"Oh, I can't!" said Muriel vehemently. "Everyone would laugh at me. I can't, and I won't!" And the violet eyes flashed with angry determination.

"Then go through with it," said the man, coolly.

Muriel looked up in amazement.

"Go through with it?" she repeated, in bewilderment.

Ernest Malcolm took a step towards her and caught both her hands in his.

"Yes," he said firmly. "Go through with it. Show the world that, if one man holds your love so lightly—if one man jilts you and casts you off—there is another, who will count himself honoured and ennobled by a union with you. Do not look so frightened, dear. You never needed a husband more than you do at this moment. And I will see to it that no breath of slander is whispered against you. Try me. Muriel!" And he tried to draw her towards him. But she held back.

"Wait," she said. "Let me think."

For fully ten minutes they stood thus, and then the girl lifted her head.

"I will," she said, with sudden resolution. "But you must get a special license, before twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"I will see to that," said the man. "Now I will bid you good-night, for I know you would prefer to be alone. To-morrow then, at twelve. Remember, you have promised!" And he went out of the house and into the darkness.

A little way off he stopped, heedless of the storm that bellowed overhead, and uttered a low, mirthless laugh.

"Beautiful!" he said. "I am qualifying for an actor or—— But we must get the ceremony over first." And he resumed his walk through the driving rain and returned to his home.

* * * * *

About an hour before the storm broke over the sea, Norman Hurst, who was walking along the beach, was accosted by the self-same boy who, later on, was the bearer of the two letters to Muriel and Ernest Malcolm. Touching his cap, the boy put a letter into his hand and vanished. Norman tore open the envelope, and, by the light of a ship's lantern hanging to one of the luggers on the beach, read the following epistle:

"DEAREST NORMAN,—*A very extraordinary thing has happened to-day, and I must see you at once. There are reasons, however, why you should not come to the house—reasons which I will presently explain. Please meet me under the last eastern groyne. The spot is lonely, and we shall be free from observation. You will find me there already. Will explain all later. Almost—your true wife,* "MURIEL."

Norman Hurst turned the letter over. He looked puzzled and bewildered.

"It seems very queer," he muttered to himself. "But it is Muriel's handwriting, safe enough. What can she want?"

The concluding phrase caught his eye, and a smile of wondrous tenderness crept into his handsome face.

"Ah," he said softly—"almost! Yes, it is not far off now. But I must be off, or she will grow tired of waiting." A great gust of wind swept fiercely over the sea, and he looked alarmedly up at the darkening sky. "By Jove," he muttered, "it is going to be a wild sort of night!"

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, he started, and, within a quarter of an hour, was within hail of the last groyne. The spot was very dark and lonely, and he marvelled within himself that Muriel should have chosen such a place. But he plodded on over the rough shingle, and turned down under the lee of the great black groyne. Down he went, almost to the margin of the sea, but he could discern nothing of Muriel. A boat lay beached close to the groyne, but it appeared empty, and he turned away, intending to retrace his way along the sheltered side of the great sea barrier.

But at that instant he felt his arms caught in a powerful grip from behind, and, before he could collect himself, he was thrown violently to the ground and pinioned, hand and foot, with stout, strong cords. Dazed and bewildered without even the chance to fight for his liberty, he was dragged into the boat, and his adversaries, who were two in number dipped their oars in the rising water and pulled vigorously out to sea. Then, for the first time, Norman Hurst saw that he was in a trap, and vaguely realised that the attack upon himself was in some mysterious way connected with Muriel Warne, and he began to struggle with all the strength that was in his muscular frame. He tore at his bonds with the ferocity of a tiger, but not a strand relaxed. His adversaries had done their work well. Then he turned to the men.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded sternly. "And who, and what, are you? Are you so ashamed of your faces that you hide them beneath your mufflers?"

The men laughed.

"You'll know us soon enough," said one. "*The Merry Trawler* lies out in the 'roads' yonder, and you have got to keep us company for a little while—only a matter of four-and-twenty hours though, so there isn't much to grumble about."

"*The Merry Trawler!*" said Norman, sitting upright in the boat in unfeigned astonishment. "Ernest Malcolm's boat! Then you are——"

"We're his crew," replied the man, "We've left the boy aboard, and, by the look of the weather, we shall have to hurry, or he'll go down with the lugger before we can lower the sails."

"But what is the meaning of it all?" persisted Norman, knitting his brows in sheer bewilderment.

"Well," said the man thoughtfully, "Cap'n didn't tell us to keep our mouths shut, and you can't upset his plans now. The fact is, he's got a kind o' hankering arter Miss Warne—Skipper Warne's daughter—and, as he can't get her the straight way, he's trying a roundabout one. He's

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been learnin' your handwritings lately, and he's no fool at it, I can tell ye. So, to-night, he writes you a letter in Miss Warne's handwritin', and Miss Warne another in your'n, and so——"

"Wrote Miss Warne a letter in my handwriting!" said Norman in amazement. "But what purpose would that answer?"

The men laughed and looked at him humorously.

"Well, we don't know exactly what he said in it," resumed the man who had spoken hitherto. "Something about drinkin' and gamblin' and other things that's worse, and tellin' her you was mad with remorse and had run away."

Norman Hurst uttered a cry of rage and tore anew at the cords which bound him. But all his efforts were in vain, and he sank down exhausted into the bottom of the boat. Presently he lifted his head.

"And where is Malcolm?" he asked.

The man grinned and nudged his companion.

"Havin' a nice little chat with the lady, o' course," he said.

Norman groaned and lapsed into silence. And, the next instant, they ran alongside the fishing-lugger, and his two gaolers helped him on board.

They were not a moment too soon. Even as it was, the rigging snapped and the sails split, and the long timbers creaked and groaned in the hull of the straining lugger. And then the cable that held them at anchor broke under the strain, and the boat lifted her head high in the water and went tearing along with the wind behind her. Flash after flash of vivid light blazed out in the dark heavens, and peal upon peal of deafening thunder roared over the angry sea. Escape was useless now, and the crew, well knowing this, and needing all their energies to keep the boat from foundering, released his bonds and begged him to lend a hand.

Norman Hurst burst into their midst. With a glad cry, Muriel leapt into his arms.

Norman Hurst was known, all along that coast, as a cool and wise commander of such a craft as this, and, as the storm increased in violence, they implored him to take control of the boat. This he willingly and even gladly did, for he saw that the men, however capable as a crew, were powerless to navigate the lugger in such a sea. And he hoped, too, that he might be able to put the boat into port before they had run far along the coast. But, try as he might, he found this task hopeless. The great cliffs towered up along the shore, and he knew he dared not go too near. So port after port was passed, and all he could do was to keep the violently-pitching lugger above water, and hope for the morrow. Sea after sea dashed upon their decks, and the wind shrieked madly through the spars and the remaining rigging. Fear was in the faces of the two men, and, regarding the storm as a punishment for their share in the plot of their captain, they came, like the curs they were, to ask Norman's forgiveness. But he bade them sternly go back to their posts. So passed all that night, and death was very near them.

And then the morning dawned. But the sea still ran high, and it was not until nine o'clock that Norman, worn out with fatigue and hardship, ran the almost water-logged lugger into a little harbour, some forty miles from home.

* * * * *

It was twelve o'clock, and the streets of the little fishing village were unusually gay. Animated groups stood at the street corners and round the old wooden capstans on the beach, and conversed excitedly together. And there was some reason for their excitement. For the past six months they had understood that Captain Warne's daughter was going to be married to the stalwart handsome, young fisherman. Norman Hurst. And now, on the very dawn of her wedding-day, a rumour had reached them that she had quarrelled with her lover, had sent him about his business, and was determined to go through with the ceremony, substituting in his place the man they all admired but nobody trusted—Ernest Malcolm.

There was quite a crowd round the porch of the little church where the wedding was to be solemnised. Eager faces peered in at the open doors and down the road in expectation of the carriages. And soon they came in sight. But the cheer which they had intended for the bride of Norman Hurst found no place on their lips now. Muriel, dressed very prettily in veil and wreath, alighted from the carriage and went into the church, which was already thronged with curious onlookers. She was very pale, and leant on the arm of her father, as if for support. She seemed to reel as she neared the altar, and, as Ernest Malcolm had not yet arrived, the officiating priest placed the vestry at her disposal. This offer she gladly accepted, and sank into a chair as soon as it was reached.

No notice had as yet been given to the priest that Ernest Malcolm was to be the bridegroom. He had heard the general rumour, but paid no heed to it. The banns had been thrice read out for Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne, and for that ceremony he was prepared. And the girl waited—waited almost in dread—vaguely hoping that Ernest Malcolm would not come, or, if he came, that he would bring the news of his failure to procure the special license which was to take the place of the one now in the priest's hands and make her his wife. All night long she had lain awake, thinking over the step she was about to take. And the more she thought, the more did she regret that rash promise, given in her pride of heart and against her better judgment. And all because

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she had confessedly been too great a coward to face the curious eyes of a multitude. But she had promised now, and to her a promise, even such an one as this, seemed sacred and binding.

Presently there was a stir in the body of the church, and the clergyman opened the door of the vestry. Ernest Malcolm stepped briskly inside and handed the priest a special license. The latter examined it gravely and turned to Muriel.

"Am I to understand," he said slowly, "that this is your will? Remember, there is no retreat when once you have taken your stand."

The girl looked dully up in his face.

"I have promised," she said.

"That is nothing to me," he said quietly. "It is to me you have to answer now—and—to a Higher Power!"

Muriel started.

"To a Higher Power! To God!" she said. "Then I cannot—I dare not do this thing! I was wicked—wicked, ever to have promised. Better a thousand times that I should endure to be humbled, than that I should give my heart, my love, to one man, and myself to another! Oh, set me free from this promise, I entreat you!" And she turned appealingly to Malcolm, who stood, with his arms folded, eyeing her disdainfully.

"And I?" he said mockingly. "It would seem that my humiliation occupies no place in your calculations. A convenient conscience, surely!"

The girl winced, and cowered before the cruel light that had come into his dark eyes. At that instant, a horse's hoofs were heard galloping outside, and the face of Ernest Malcolm turned pale. A moment later, and they heard a stir in the church and the voices of men and women in eager and excited conversation. The priest again opened the door of the vestry, and Norman Hurst, pale and dishevelled from exposure to wind and storm, burst into their midst. With a little glad cry, Muriel leaped into his arms.

"Oh, tell me," she said wildly—"tell me it is all a mistake!"

"Could you ever have doubted me?" he said reproachfully.

"But the letter?" pleaded the girl.

"Yes, I know," said Norman soothingly. "We have been the victims of a foul and dastardly plot."

Remembering the man to whom he owed a heavy and terrible reckoning, he turned suddenly. But Ernest Malcolm had vanished.

"Well," said Norman, "let him go. He will not trouble us more."

And then he turned to the mystified priest and good old Captain Warne, and explained to them all that had happened the preceding night. The congregation assembled in the little church grew very impatient at the delay. But at last the little group filed out of the vestry and approached the altar. Seeing their old favourite in the place of Ernest Malcolm, and momentarily forgetful of the sacredness of the place, they gave vent to a loud cheer. The worthy old priest raised his hand, and silence fell on all present. And then he read the words that bound Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne together for all time, and, though the years have sped by since then, no shadow has ever come to cloud their happiness or diminish the love they bear, the one to the other. And Ernest Malcolm, whose dark face was never again seen in the little fishing-village, experienced the truth of that old adage:

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!"

Walter Mowbray.

A Girl to be Proud of.

Telling of the Rivalry between a Conceited Cad and a True Lover.

"I MEAN to marry a girl I can be proud of!"

Charlie Annesley looked at the speaker with a half twinkle in his eye.

"That sounds a bit priggish," said he.

"I don't know what the word means," said John Talbot-Winterson. He was very insistent upon the double name, and there were two things that invariably upset his dignity. One was to call him Jack, and the other was to omit the hyphen. But he was a very dignified person indeed.

"Mabel Masters is all very well," he went on to say, lighting a fresh cigarette carelessly.

"Mabel is the best girl I ever knew," exclaimed his friend, flaming up, "and you're not good enough to tie her shoe-lace."

John Talbot-Winterson smiled superciliously.

"I always thought," he said, "that you were love-sick in that quarter, Charlie. Now I know it."

"Bosh!" ejaculated his friend; but he coloured a little all the same.

"What can she do? She doesn't paint, ride, golf, play, or sing. She's an absolute nonentity."

"If you were not such an impossible man to pick a quarrel with," said Charlie, "I should certainly do so. I often feel, old man, that it would give me the greatest pleasure in life to kick you!"

Mr. Winterson smiled imperturbably. He might, or perhaps he might not, have known that there were many others who would have been delighted to kick him for his insufferable conceit.

"My dear Charlie," he remarked placidly, "life is too short to quarrel with any but one's enemies, and I don't believe I have one in the world. And I don't mind telling you that Mabel would accept me to-morrow, if I proposed to her."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. But I don't intend to."

"A month ago you were madly in love with her."

"Dear boy, a month to a man of my age is a very long time."

Charlie Annesley clenched his fists and ground his teeth. Often and often he wondered why he still both called and considered this man his friend. They had not a single taste in common, beyond that of—a month ago—admiring the same girl. But even in this matter their method of showing their admiration differed as widely as the Poles. John Talbot-Winterson patronised her, while Annesley, even more than he would admit, perhaps more than he knew, loved and worshipped her. He saw qualities in her that Winterson, with all his knowledge of the world, was absolutely blind to.

"She is rich," he remarked.

"Her father is," said Charlie curtly. There was a curious twinge at his heart as he spoke. Perhaps it was jealousy, for

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Talbot-Winterson was handsome and well connected, and he himself was plain and a nobody. Winterson was what is known as an accomplished man. He did a lot of things indifferently well, but in a manner calculated to, and which did, win him the admiration of the fairer sex. Charlie Annesley could do nothing. And he knew that in the world in which Mabel Masters moved Winterson was a fixed planet, while he was a very minor star indeed.

He had heard Miss Masters speak of Winterson. To her, no doubt, his conceit would appear cleverness, his priggish affectation the result of birth and good breeding. He knew she admired him, for she had told him so, in feminine unconsciousness that the words had been as so many daggers in poor Annesley's heart. What chance had he against so bright and shining a light as his friend? He was not exactly jealous of him, but there was that twinge of pain there all the same.

"Rather nice," said Winterson, with a languid air. "I half think I shall change my mind."

Annesley grunted. Some men would have sneered, but Charlie was not of that kind. He was almost too easy in disposition, especially where Mr. Talbot-Winterson was concerned. "Once a friend, always a friend," was his motto. A man with a little more determination would have kicked such a "friend" as Winterson long ago, and have resolved to have nothing more to do with him, and would have kept his resolve into the bargain.

When Winterson went, Charlie Annesley went back to his studio and began to paint furiously. But after a time he threw down palette and brush and lit another pipe in disgust.

"What right have I to think of her?" he said to himself, savagely, "a poor nobody of an artist in a shabby velvet coat and slippers down at heel. There's Winterson—beg his pardon, Talbot-Winterson—with his two thousand a year. And he says she is not a girl to be proud of! Oh, he's an ass—a full-blooded, concert-pitch, consummate ass! On his own showing, he knows everything, and yet he cannot see that she is a girl that even a duke could be proud of! She would make a most delicious duchess, and if I were a duke I'd make her one. If she'd have me!" said Charlie ruefully.

"I won't smoke any more. I'll go round, and—and get those sketches I left there last week!"

It was the moth and the candle, of course. Poor Charlie Annesley could no more keep away from the Masters' house in Westbourne Square than the foolish fluttering insect can avoid the glare of the light. He had only known Mabel Masters a little while, so was scarcely aware as yet of his own folly. But it was beginning to dawn upon him that she was dangerously attractive, and there was that twinge of the heart too. So Charlie Annesley went blindly on to his fate.

Miss Masters was at home, said the maidservant, and in a few moments she swept into the room, a tall, dark girl, with a shapely head well set on her shoulders, and a graceful carriage. She held out her hand unaffectedly to Annesley with a charming smile of welcome.

"Oh, what roses!" she exclaimed, at the sight of those to bring which Charlie had spent the price of a dinner at Frascati's. The very fact of his being tempted to do so ought to have told him of his danger.

"How good of you," she said simply, as she took them from him, with a smile that dazzled him. "I shall wear some of them to-night. We are going to the theatre with Mr. Talbot-Winterson."

Again that twinge of the heart.

"I hope you will enjoy yourself," he said; but he could not help thinking that it was hard lines that the girl he loved should wear his roses to a theatre with his rival beside her. The sting of this thought made him shorten his visit considerably. He felt he wanted to go away alone and think. Was he jealous of John Talbot-Winterson? He began to think he was.

Presently other visitors were announced, and he slipped quietly away with an adieu to Miss Masters. Mabel had fastened one of his roses at her throat, where her rounded chin just touched it, and this gave him a strange thrill of delight, and told him more of his own heart than he had known before.

"A girl to be proud of! Why," as Charlie Annesley said to himself as he walked down the street, "I am proud that she should wear my rose. I am proud of her!"

Then he suddenly stood stock still in the middle of the pavement, much to the astonishment of a passing small boy.

"I believe," he said, "I am falling in love with her!"

The thought troubled him. What chance would he have against his friend Winterson? Not the ghost of one. That lucky possessor of all the talents was rich, and Mabel was a woman who could never marry a poor man. Oh, the thing was an utter impossibility! But the discovery that he loved her troubled him as much as anything in the thirty odd years of his life had ever done, and he could not help thinking every now and again that evening of Mabel and—his roses.

* * * * *

It was just a month later when Talbot-Winterson dashed—so far as such a very refined and well-bred person could be said to dash—into Annesley's studio. There was, for a wonder, animation on his usually stolid face.

"Congratulate me, Charles," he said. It was, perhaps, typical of the speaker that he was the one man in London who ever called him Charles.

"Upon what?"

"My engagement."

"To——"

The name faltered upon Annesley's lips, but the other never noticed the slight hesitation.

"Yes. To Mabel. She is charming, and I really believe she loves me."

This was more than bearable. Annesley turned upon the speaker fiercely.

"You conceited ass!" he exclaimed, with more vehemence than he had ever shown in his life, "That's not the question! Do you love her?"

He almost demanded the reply, in the tone of an old-time highwayman asking for "your money or your life!" Even the usually imperturbable Talbot-Winterson was taken aback.

"My dear Charles——" he began.

"Do you love her?" his friend said once more. "A month ago you avowed her to be uninteresting, you asserted in this very room that she was not a girl you could be proud of."

"A month ago," said Talbot-Winterson, "was—well—was a month ago."

If ever Charlie Annesley came near to kicking, to say nothing of more seriously assaulting a man who professed to be his friend, it was at this identical moment, but he recovered his self-control with a great effort.

"I congratulate you," he said. That there happened to be an accent, almost so slight as to be imperceptible, on the "you," entirely escaped the notice of Mr. Talbot-Winterson. He simply smiled.

"Thanks," he said languidly. "I think we shall be awfully happy. I feel I deserve her after the unbounded attentions I have paid her during the last month or so."

"You conceited ass!" said Charlie. But it did not ruffle Mr. Talbot-Winterson one atom. His skin was too thick to notice the personality. Annesley picked up his brush and went on working with a furious feeling at his heart which only work could appease. His friend came to look over his shoulder, after he had in his affected, dilettante fashion, lit a fresh cigarette.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, as he saw the picture upon the easel, "it is Mabel!"

"Well!" said Charlie, as he turned, brush in hand.

"Have you—ah—her permission?"

"Yes, I have."

"And don't you think that under the—ah—present circumstances, you—ah—require mine?"

Nothing would have given Charlie Annesley greater pleasure than to have knocked the speaker down. He would have been sorry for it a minute after, but it would have done him so much good.

"Why?" was all he said

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"Well, of course you know. But all the same, I shall buy the picture."

"Will you?" said Annesley.

"I must. What do you want for it when finished—to my satisfaction, of course."

"To your satisfaction! Yours! What do you know about painting, you——"

"My dear Charles, don't get angry. I know nothing about painting, but I intend to purchase that picture when finished."

Charlie Annesley tore the canvas from the easel, and picking up a palette knife, slashed it into unrecognisable strips. He flung them in the grate. "There," he ejaculated, "it never will be finished."

For once in his life John Talbot-Winterson betrayed astonishment. Had he been less wrapped up in his self-conceit it might have occurred to him that Annesley, too, might admire—even be in love with the girl to whom he was engaged. But such a thing never came into his head.

"I must say," he began in his most dignified style. Annesley interrupted him.

"That will do!" he said. "If you say more we shall quarrel. There is the way out. You know it. You had better go."

And Mr. John Talbot-Winterson went.

* * * * *

When he had gone, and Annesley heard the front door close behind him, the painter threw down palette and brush, and sank into the nearest chair.

"That!" he murmured, with his head in his hands. "That! To think of—to imagine *that* having the right to kiss her dear hand when I, who worship her, should be afraid to put my lips to the hem of her gown. They are engaged, and he has the right to kiss her hand, perhaps her gracious lips—and I——"

It was probably the most bitter hour that had ever come into Charlie Annesley's life. Draw the veil over it. For even though one may love hopelessly, one never is quite without some faint lingering spark of hope. And poor Annesley was praying that he might never again see the face of the girl he had learnt to love so well.

In less than a week he had packed up, and had left London on a two months' sketching tour which he had had for some time in contemplation. It was the wisest thing to do. Something told him that if he met Mabel again he might say that which he might regret. So he left London and his love.

Wandering about the country he tried to forget the girl he could have been so proud of. Winterson had won her, he said to himself—pray that he, too, would be proud of her in the years to come.

Of set purpose he selected the wildest and most inaccessible regions he could find, places where London dailies less than a fortnight old were a rarity, and post offices unknown. He grew brown and was comparatively happy. But he did not forget. He filled page after page with sketches, tramped mile after mile over moor and wold. But he did not forget.

Happening to bivouac, so to speak, at a somewhat larger village than usual one night, he came across an old copy of a daily paper. Idly glancing through it a paragraph he came upon struck him like a blow.

"The suicide of Mr. John Masters. This particularly distressing event, which took place last week, was, it has transpired, caused by financial embarrassment. It will be remembered that Mr. Masters' dead body, shot through the brain, was found on Hampstead Heath. All rumours of foul play have now been proved erroneous."

Mabel's father! Charlie Annesley looked at the date. It was a fortnight ago. Then he had been dead three weeks. Oh, how his heart ached for the girl he loved. But then he remembered that she had Winterson to comfort her, only somehow he could not quite picture John Talbot-Winterson in the *rôle* of comforter. The part was one for which he would be totally unfitted.

The paragraph had the effect of shortening Annesley's tour considerably. In some vague way he thought that he might be of use to the widow and daughter. Anyhow, it would be a comfort to himself to be in London where they were, and he could learn more particulars of the affair from Winterson. Wherefore he turned his face to civilisation and the Metropolis once more.

Almost the first thing he did on arriving was to go to the Masters' house in Westbourne Square. Here he met with rebuff number one. It was empty, and a board announced its immediate sale by auction. Annesley made a note of the solicitors, and went to see them at once.

Rebuff number two. The solicitors only told him they were acting on behalf of the creditors, to whom Mrs. Masters had made over everything she possessed, except an annuity of fifty pounds a year which had been settled upon herself. Her address? Yes, they knew it, but at Mrs. Masters' express desire, it was not to be given to anyone.

"Not even to a friend?" said Annesley.

"To no one," was the reply.

This was a *cul-de-sac* indeed. There was nothing to be done but turn back. Then he bethought himself of Talbot-Winterson, and hurried off to his chambers. Rebuff number three—Winterson was away for a week. Annesley turned away disheartened. The enforced inaction irritated him. Of course Winterson would know where the Masters' were, thought he.

Fifty pounds a year! From luxury to poverty. And Mabel, with her queenly figure, her grace and beauty—how would she bear it? Bravely, Annesley knew, and with pride; and then he smiled, because he again recollected that she had Winterson.

"She won't want me or my sympathy!" he thought, bitterly. He tried to remember some mutual friends who might know of their whereabouts, but it was early autumn, and everyone was out of town. There was nothing to do but wait.

Slowly though it passed, that week came to an end at length, and Annesley again presented himself at Winterson's chambers. That gentleman, languid and affected as ever, received him with a sort of supercilious cordiality that annoyed Annesley. Something—love of Mabel Masters, perhaps—had opened his easy-going eyes, and he was beginning to see through the veneer that only partially covered his friend's character.

"Thought you were lost!" drawled Winterson.

"No, I'm all right. But what about the Masters'? Where are they? What a dreadful thing to happen!"

"Very! I don't know where they are."

"You don't?"

"Of course not. How should I?"

"But you were engaged to her?"

"I was."

"Are you not now?"

"Hardly. How could you expect a man of my position to marry the penniless daughter of a bankrupt suicide?"

"Then you broke it off?"

"I did," said Winterson. "Most decidedly."

"Then," exclaimed Charlie Annesley, "you are not only a coward but a blackguard! I've done with you. Don't speak to me; you're no longer a friend of mine. You're not even an acquaintance; we are strangers. I don't know why we were ever friends or how I have borne with you so long!"

"Very well," said Winterson coolly.

"I'll find her," cried Annesley, with a look of supreme contempt for the man before him. "I'll find her, and if she'll accept me, I will marry her to-morrow. You—you call yourself a man! You're a *thing!* I never want to see your face again. No, thanks. My hands are fairly clean. Anyway, I have too much respect for them, and too much contempt for you to touch yours!"

And Charlie Annesley flung himself out of the room furiously. When he contrived to cool down sufficiently to reason with himself, he realised that Talbot-Winterson had after all acted only after his lights. Had he—Annesley—only thought, he would have known that what Winterson had done was the very thing he would do. But Charlie Annesley had been too loyal to his friend—now friend no

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longer—to believe or think for a moment that he could behave so despicably.

He dismissed him from his thoughts and set to work to find Mabel Masters. He tried to think what she would be most likely to do. Would she try and earn her own living? But how? Charlie could not picture her as a clerk in the City; a typine. Even the stage, that refuge for so many suddenly plunged into poverty he could not bring himself to think of. He thought of almost everything; and nothing in his most wild flight of imagination came anywhere near the truth!

Before long old friends of the Masters came back to town, but none of them knew anything about them. It seemed to Annesley they had apparently disappeared from off the face of the earth. But, as he reasoned, it was only probable that Mrs. Masters had changed her name, and the chance of his happening to meet them in busy London was a very remote one. Still, he took to wandering about London suburbs in the vague hope that he might be favoured by luck. He was often deceived by a fancied resemblance, but up to one day in Spring, after a lapse of over six months, luck was not on his side.

That day in his life Annesley will never forget. He had wandered rather aimlessly to High Street, Kensington, thinking of Mabel Masters. Suddenly his heart stood still. His dreams had taken to themselves visible shape! There she was, as bright and beautiful as ever. Before he had time to realise that he had found her at last she had disappeared, swallowed up by the doorway of a pretty-looking milliner's shop. Annesley noted the name over the door. It was "Madame Vera." So he waited, with a beating heart. Five minutes, ten minutes, quarter of an hour. Then he summoned up his courage and entered. The shop was empty.

"The lady who entered a quarter of an hour ago?" said the attendant; "but there has been no customer in for longer than that."

Charlie explained.

"The lady was in black? Ah, but, no—that was not a customer. It was only Madame!"

"Madame?" echoed Annesley, not a gleam of the truth dawning on him.

"Surely—Madame Vera."

"Ask her if she will see me!" he exclaimed excitedly. But hearing a voice, Madame Vera had come out of the showroom and came forward to speak to him. It was Mabel Masters.

"So I have found you at last!" he said, in a voice tense with joy.

"I almost wish you had not," she murmured.

"But I have been seeking for you all over London, and I find you here!"

"Yes; this is mine. Let me tell you. When the crash came we—my mother and I—were left with only a little capital settled upon her. I could do nothing, I thought. But I hit upon one thing. I, even when rich, had always been able to make my own hats. It was a hobby, an amusement. Why not, I thought, turn a hobby to profitable account? But it was a struggle at first. Still, I have turned the corner."

"I honour you more than I can say," said Charlie, in a voice full of deep emotion; "and I thank God for letting me find you. May I come and see you?"

"My mother will be pleased, I know."

"And you?"

But Madame Vera disregarded this direct question.

"We have a tiny villa at Chiswick," she said softly. "Does it not surprise you to find me a working woman, after my butterfly life of a year ago! I am very happy, though," with a little catch in her voice, "and I can keep my dear mother in comfort."

"I can only feel two things," said Annesley; "that you are a girl to be proud of, and—that I love you!"

He bent over her outstretched hand, then lifting his eyes and read her reply shining in hers. Then he went out into the crowded High Street with a tumult of hope and joy surging through his heart

Clifton Bingham.

Your Editor Chats.

You have in your hands now, my dear readers, the number containing the beginning of our new series, "The Pursuit of Sara." Most probably you will have read every line of the absorbing instalment before you peruse these words, and that being the case, I feel confident that you are eager to ascertain what our heroine does after she leaves the offices of Messrs. Templeton and Co. Of course you cannot expect me to let you into the secret too much, so I will simply say that she makes haste to leave the turmoil of the Metropolis behind her, and, taking with her the precious documents which she is so pluckily guarding, flees to Bedford. Thence her pursuers, furious at being temporarily baffled by a girl, follow her, and——. But I am letting my enthusiasm run away with me, and if I am not careful, shall be telling you the whole of her adventures straight off. Therefore, all I can do is to advise you to possess your souls in patience, and to warn you not to forget to order next week's issue from your newsagent. In it you will find, graphically described, the story of her doings at Bedford.

Ere you have read many instalments of this vivid narrative you are bound to come to the conclusion that Sara is a girl of uncommon pluck, possessing a great quantity of that superb commodity, "British grit." You will, naturally, give me credit for inducing the young lady to publish her revelations, but I must own, that I, in my turn, am indebted to another. In the many years of my editorial career, I do not think that I have "discovered" a heroine in quite so romantic a way as I did Miss Gillespie, as she elects to be called during the progress of her story. Briefly, the facts are these. In the late summer I paid a visit to Bristol, and on my return occupied a carriage alone with a handsome, young gentleman. As a matter of course and sociability, we struck up a conversation, and presently exchanged confidences. I mentioned that I was an editor of a paper devoted to stories of love, and with a knowing smile, he said, "Love? There is nothing like the love of a true woman." I concurred with him, and he went on, "No, and no love romance has yet been written to compare with the one I know!" "What do you mean?" I asked, immediately interested. "I relate to the love romance of the best woman in the world, the woman who is now my wife!" And that's how first I came to learn of Miss Sara Gillespie who was; afterwards I got the gentleman to introduce me, and—the rest is apparent.

"The Snare of Gold," which has turned out to be one of the most popular serials we have ever had, comes to a dramatic termination next week. The interest in the plot has been sustained from start to finish, and I understand that many of my readers will regret its necessary conclusion. However, it will make way for a successor that will appeal to all of you who have a taste for exciting, as distinct from sensational, literature. The story will be entitled "A Criminal Millionaire," and is sufficient to show you that good things may be confidently expected. Mr. George Griffith, who is the author of this work, is another guarantee that the tale will be a strong one.

Your Editor.

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THE GIRL FROM LEON'S.

How a Pretty Waitress Found a Husband.

FIND me the city clerk, male or female, who does not know Leon's, the great refreshment contractors. Their restaurants abound in almost every part of London, and during the mid-day hours of twelve and two, are generally full to overflowing.

There you will see the young gentleman who that same evening will speak in languid tones of Prince's or Frascati's. There it is that you sit and study the remarkable list of Leon's restaurants, whilst you patiently wait for the Goddess in the Cap to finish her *tête-à-tête* with the young man with freckles and pince-nez. Should you endeavour to hurry her by ringing a bell or tapping on the table, you will doubtless regret it. She will favour you with a sublimely indifferent glance, whilst the young man will stare at you in an injured manner. Then you become conscious that this must be Mr. Leon, and the young lady, perhaps, Miss Leon; and, with a very red face, you ignominiously retire behind a newspaper.

Such is not always the case though, and if it had been, this story might not have been written. Why, I can point out scores of instances where people have been served in les than ten minutes from the time of giving their order.

Stuart Wray was in the habit of visiting the Leon's restaurant in the Strand every day, about two o'clock in the afternoon. After having dined elsewhere he would visit this particular restaurant for a cigarette and a cup of coffee, and to meet various acquaintances.

Naturally he came to know the waitresses, and would occasionally chat with them; for there were not many customers between the hours of 2.15 and four o'clock, when the tea rush starts.

It is the custom of this estimable firm of caterers to change their waitresses periodically; they do not, however, extend this plan to their bill of fare. Thus Stuart found that as soon as a girl got accustomed to bringing his coffee and particular brand of cigarette without being asked for it, she was moved to another branch. But this regrettable state of affairs did not deter him from his visits to the restaurant.

One of the men who accompanied him to Leon's of an afternoon was Guy Harding, his own particular chum.

"By Jingo, Guy!" said Stuart Wray, as they entered the smoking-room one afternoon. "What a fine girl that new waitress is."

He intimated an exceedingly pretty girl, of slender build, who was at that moment carrying a tray of crockery to be consigned to the rear regions.

"Where's our waitress?" he went on, as they sat waiting at a table.

"Shifted, I expect," grumbled Guy Harding. "Just when she knew my cigarette."

They waited for some moments until presently the aforesaid pretty waitress hurried up, her face very red. A more experienced girl had pointed out the two men patiently waiting at one of her tables.

"I am really awfully sorry," she began. "I did not see you waiting. Can I get you anything?"

Stuart glanced up in surprise, for the sweetness of her voice quite matched the beauty of her face. They gave their orders and the girl left them

"I say, Stuart, she's a lady," said Guy Harding.

"So I perceived, but still there is no reason why a waitress should not be a lady, is there?"

"I suppose not."

"Did you see her hands?" went on Stuart. "I should not think they have seen any rough work before. I wonder what made her become a waitress."

Here the object of their conversation brought the coffee and cigarettes. She paused, as though wishful to say something, and then, in a burst of confidence, she turned to Stuart, and said:

"I do not know how to do this; would you tell me if you pay for the cigarettes now, or whether I put them on the bill?"

The question somewhat surprised Stuart, and a momentary smile flitted across his face.

"You need not laugh at me," she pouted.

"Really, I was not laughing at you," Stuart hastened to assure her. "Yes, we pay for the cigarettes now."

"And double if you kiss them," broke in Frank Verden, who had come down since.

The girl flushed to the roots of her hair, and throwing an indignant glance at the speaker, went off without another word.

"Confound it all, Verden, that's a trifle too thick; you ought to apologise."

A roar of laughter greeted Stuart's remark, causing the other customers to glance round. Amongst those who looked at them was their waitress, and she flashed a look of thanks to Stuart, for it was easy for her to divine the cause of his angry expression and the shout of laughter.

He stayed down there a trifle longer than the others, for his office was within a few yards of the restaurant.

Suddenly he was conscious of the waitress clearing away the dirty cups from the table.

"It was awfully good of you," she said, with a smile, "to stick up for me against your friend."

"How did you know?" he replied, almost at a loss what to say.

"It was very easy to see. There are not many men down here who make rude remarks, are there?" she asked naively.

The quaintness of the question once more caused him to try to conceal a smile.

"Why, you are always laughing at me," she said in a disconsolate tone. "Am I so very funny?"

"Please forgive me," he cried. "I expect you *will* find a few of that sort down here."

"I suppose there are black sheep in every flock," she answered with a sigh.

"Oh, come," he said, as he rose to go. "You can hardly call them black sheep."

She ushered him out as though she were a hostess.

His thoughts were full of her for the rest of the day. She was strangely well educated for a waitress, and her manner was that of a well-bred girl. Clearly she had not long been in her present position. But he gave up puzzling over the matter from sheer lack of knowledge wherewith to conjecture.

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Some time went by, but this waitress was not changed as was the usual custom. Gladys, as the other waitresses called her, seemed a fixture, and Stuart Wray had quite come to look forward to the few minutes chat which they generally managed to have after his friends had departed.

* * * * * *

It was an evening in May. The weather had quite belied its ordinary reputation by being particularly fine.

Twilight had set in as Stuart Wray slowly strolled down one of the secluded paths of Hyde Park. He had been working rather late at the office, and a desire for a walk through the Park, before he left town, had seized him.

Presently he sat down, and filled his pipe. There was a strange sense of peace in his surroundings. The dark trees rustling in the cool breeze; the distant hum of the City with its weird glare in the sky; the waters of the Serpentine glistening in the moonlight.

Occasionally lovers passed down that quiet way, and a number of people gazed curiously at that solitary figure keeping a lonely tryst; for there are many who cannot understand the silent communion with Nature which a highly-strung organisation can hold.

Suddenly Stuart Wray sprang to his feet, and gazed after the retreating form of a girl.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It's Gladys!"

Then almost before he knew what he was doing, he found himself hurrying after her.

He touched her on the shoulder. Quickly she swung round, and faced him who accosted her.

"Why," she cried, with a glad little smile. "It's you."

They shook hands, and moved slowly along side by side.

"Supposing your friends saw you," she suddenly said.

"Well, supposing?" was his reply.

"Do you not mind being seen with a waitress?"

"Why should I?" he questioned. "If she does not mind."

"But then our positions in life are somewhat different."

"Maybe," he replied. "But Fortune is to blame for that. She is a fickle Goddess, and many that deserve never receive."

"That is a pretty way of paying a compliment."

"I never pay compliments," he said. "I only speak the truth."

There was silence for some time. The matter still seemed to trouble her, and presently she said:

"But what would people say, who knew you, if they saw you with a waitress?"

He gazed down into her face for a moment, and then indicating the masses of cloud that continually obscured the moon, he cried:

"There is your public opinion illustrated; always on the move, always shifty. Bah! I care no more for what people say than——" He paused, unable to find anything sufficiently contemptible to express his opinion.

"I wish I were a man," his companion interposed.

"Why?" he questioned abruptly.

"Because that is how I feel. But I am a woman, and I must bow before the decree of Society."

"Society," he echoed, in a scornful tone.

Together they strolled on, always talking; each finding the other more interesting as the time went on, until suddenly Stuart glanced at his watch.

"Why," he cried. "It's gone eleven."

His companion glanced up in dismay.

"Eleven o'clock! Good gracious! What will they think?"

It was on his tongue to ask who "they" were, but he wisely refrained. They hurried out of the park, and at the corner she insisted on him leaving her. In vain he protested, she was obdurate, and at last he boarded an omnibus for King's Cross.

Her name he had learnt was Gladys Tremlyn. It occurred to him that her education was almost equal to his own. More than ever, then, did he wonder what had brought her to take up the position of a waitress in Leon's.

"Are you not surprised to see me?" she said.

He haunted Hyde Park for some nights after this, but did not see her again. He hardly liked to ask her outright to meet him, until about a week after, when events forced him to.

"I am leaving here to-morrow," she said to him, as they stood chatting in Leon's.

"You are really?" he said.

"Yes, really."

"Going to another branch?"

"No," she answered. "I am leaving Leon's altogether."

There was a queer, tight grip at his heart, and a quick throbbing of his nerves, but he mastered himself in a moment."

"I am sorry to hear that," was his reply, and then suddenly becoming bold, he said: "I may see you in the park occasionally?"

"Well, it is a public place, isn't it?" she answered, but noticing the pained expression on his face, she became compassionate, and said: "I shall be in Hyde Park this evening."

"Will you really?" he cried, and his face became bright again.

"Hush! You will have all the people looking at us if you speak so loudly."

"I am so sorry!" he whispered.

"Yes, I will be admiring the statue of Achilles at eight p.m.

"A very laudable occupation," he said gravely. "I, too, will admire Achilles at eight o'clock this evening."

That was the first of several walks they had in the vicinity of Hyde Park at eventime. He remembered how he trembled on one occasion when she caught his arm as a drunken man passed. It would have been a sorry thing for the morality of London had his subsequent wish been granted, for he devoutly hoped that each passer-by would be the worse for liquor.

All this time he had learnt very little of her life. He knew she had gone to live with an aunt at Chiswick, but she would never let him come to see her home. True it was that she had spoken once of having been well off, but he knew very

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little about her otherwise. But, as he told himself, that did not matter. He knew that he loved her, and knew her sufficiently well to be certain that nothing but good could appertain to her.

Then came one Saturday, a red-letter day in every sense of the idiom. He took her to Maidenhead, and they spent the day on the river. Several times the passionate words of love rushed to his lips, but he resisted the impulse to speak.

"She cannot be averse to me," he argued, "or she would not come out with me as she does. But then again, there is a deal of difference between liking a man as a friend and loving him." Then he would contemplate the bowl of his pipe with much gravity, and assure himself that it was a very serious matter.

This sort of thing occurred very often, until Gladys came to notice the effect it had upon him, and to comment on how bad he was looking. Never once, though, did she associate his worried appearance with herself.

Then the climax came, as it will come to all things. And, naturally, it is just on that climax that this story turns.

Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh had a very nice house standing in its own grounds at Hampstead. Mr. Vane Woodbeigh worked very hard to earn money, and Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh worked equally hard to spend it.

It had occurred to her that a "perfectly cha-arming" idea would be to have an open-air evening *fête* and concert in her grounds to which all the nobility and gentry that she was acquainted with were to be asked.

One of the chief guests was the Hon. George Kevill, a member of Parliament for a portion of Hampstead. It will be useless for you to look up a Parliamentary list, for I have carefully disguised his name.

To do Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh credit, or, more probably, the gardener, I must say that the grounds did look "cha-arming." Festoons of fairy lamps and illuminated lanterns hung everywhere, transforming the grounds into a miniature fairyland.

Stuart Wray's father and mother were amongst the guests, and he had accompanied them. To his intense astonishment almost the first person he saw in the grounds was none other than Gladys Tremlyn.

He caught his breath and let it whistle out between his lips in abject amazement. Whatever could she be doing there? She was very tastefully dressed, too. Ah! she had come down to sing. That must be it. She had mentioned to him once that she sang a great deal.

Quitting his parents' side with a hasty excuse he hurried after her. She was walking rather quickly towards a very unfrequented part of the grounds. Presently he caught her up in a sort of grove where none of the other visitors were. Suddenly she turned and faced him.

"I thought you would follow me," she said. "That is why I came here. Are you not surprised to see me?"

"Surprised hardly expresses it," he answered. "I suppose you have come down to sing?"

"Yes, that is it!" she cried eagerly. "Of course they do not know here that I have been a waitress at Leon's, and you——"

"No, I will not mention it," he broke in. "Why should I?"

As a matter of fact she was going to say: "And that was your father and mother that I saw you with, I suppose," but she accepted his interpretation of her remark with a little grimace unseen by him.

"You know I am glad to see you here," he went on. "I was not looking forward to this affair very much."

"Why, there are plenty of nice girls here," she replied, as she gazed up right into his eyes.

That smile maddened him for the moment, and his very soul was fired within him. Then, in the deep shade of the dark elms, and with her sweet face to inspire him, he put his hand on her shoulder and whispered:

"Gladys, I love you, dear!"

That was all he said. There seemed a lot more word somewhere but they would not come. All he could do was to repeat those words, in a passionate tone, again, and again:

"Gladys, I love you, dear."

There was no reply, but she slightly moved so that his arm incircled her neck, and then she shyly reached her hand up and pulled his head towards her. Their lips met, and they forgot all else in the ecstasy of their love.

"Gladys, are you here?" a voice suddenly cried.

Hastily they sprang apart, but the deep gloom of the trees prevented prying eyes from unnecessary observation.

"They want me—I must go!" she whispered hurriedly, and then aloud she cried:

"Yes; I am coming now."

"They are waiting for your song," came the answer.

And she went.

When he had assured himself that he was fully awake and quite sane, Stuart followed. He reached the lawn just as Gladys commenced the first words of "The Garden of Sleep."

He hung on every word of that delicious melody, sympathetically and beautifully rendered by Gladys' exquisite voice, till suddenly his shoulder was touched by someone. Turning, he beheld his father.

"Know who that is, Stuart?"

He gave a guilty start, and did not reply. Taking his silence as a negative answer, his father went on:

"That is Gladys Dewhurst, the great novelist. Is she not young to have achieved so much?"

"What!" Stuart almost screamed the word. Someone said "Hush!" and then Stuart drew his father away from observation.

"That Gladys Dewhurst?" he said. "Gladys Tremlyn is her name. What do you mean?"

"Oh, Tremlyn is her other name, is it? I knew it was Gladys T. Dewhurst."

"Good Heavens!"

Mr. Wray gazed at his son in astonishment. What had he said to produce this effect? Stuart was quite pale, and a strange light burnt in his eyes.

"Are you sure?" he said huskily.

"Yes, quite. She is a niece of the Hon. George Kevill, the M.P."

Muttering some excuse, Stuart hastily left his father, and walked blindly on with his thoughts all in a maze. Presently he found himself in that self-same arbour from which he had so happily emerged but a few minutes before.

"Gladys!" he muttered aloud. "Gladys!"

"Yes, Stuart?" a soft voice replied.

He turned and found her facing him. She started at the strange look on his face.

"Why did you not tell me?" he said.

"Then you know," she replied, her eyes downcast. "I was just going to tell you when they came for me."

"It's all over now!" he groaned.

"Stuart!" she cried, taking his hand as she spoke. "Stuart, why are you so upset? It does not matter at all; I saw you liked me a long time ago, and I—er—I liked you. Then I thought I would prove you by remaining as you had first known me to see if you would keep true. And you came out of the fire scathless."

He was still silent, and a troubled, anxious expression was on his face.

"I was at Leon's to write a series of articles on the life of a waitress, Stuart. Ah, dear, forgive me for my deception."

She placed her arms around his neck, and pulled his face towards her. He kissed her, and then put her gently away from him.

"I cannot marry you now, dear," he said. "You are fitted for a more brilliant life than I can offer you."

"I could have no more brilliant prospect in life," she replied, speaking slowly and tenderly, "than my life as Mrs. Stuart Wray. I love you, Stuart, and will never release you from your promise."

He gazed at her eagerly, the light in her eyes conquered him, and he took her in his arms.

E. Newton Bungey.

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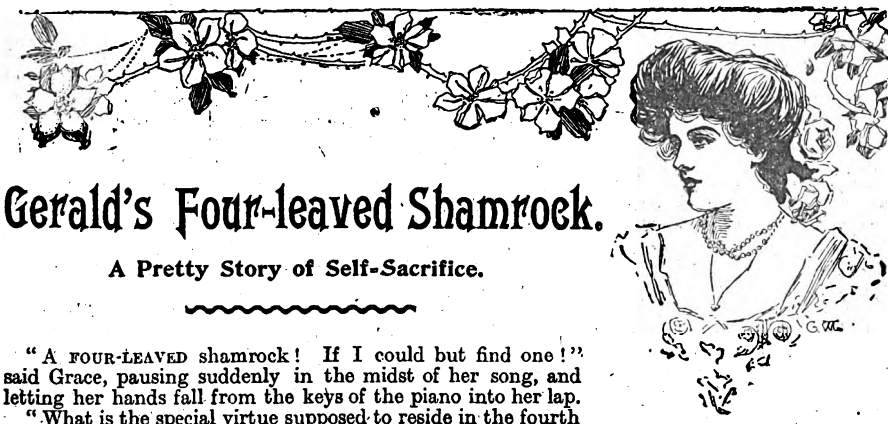

Gerald's Four-leaved Shamrock.

A Pretty Story of Self-Sacrifice.

"A FOUR-LEAVED shamrock! If I could but find one!" said Grace, pausing suddenly in the midst of her song, and letting her hands fall from the keys of the piano into her lap.

"What is the special virtue supposed to reside in the fourth leaflet of a shamrock?"

"Do you not know that a four-leaved shamrock is a fairy talisman, giving its possessor an influence for good over all with whom he comes in contact? He can heal feuds, re-unite parted friends—in fact, be everyone's good genius. I think I shall look for one, Laurence."

"To what use would you apply your magic powers?"

"I would make your uncle relent, of course."

"I am afraid that nothing short of a fairy spell will accomplish that, Grace; reason has no effect whatsoever upon him."

"Have you been administering much of that article lately?"

"I spent more than an hour this morning in trying to make him see that after five years of hard work I have a right to a fixed salary, be it much or little. (We would be content with a little, would we not, Grace?) He will not admit my *right* to anything, but says that if I marry to please him, he will take me into partnership at once. As I do not, however, intend to gratify him in this respect, his liberal offers are not of much use."

"Did he name any particular person whom he wished you to marry?"

"Yes; Miss Blake, of Killora. It seems that he and old Blake have been talking the matter over after the manners of the farmers, and have come to an understanding concerning the number of cows and pigs, or their equivalents, to be contributed on each side."

"Alice Blake is a pretty girl and a nice girl, Laurence."

"She is almost the prettiest girl I know, but for all that I don't mean to marry her. Nor do I think the arrangement would suit her much better than it does me. If I am not much mistaken, she, too, has plans of her own. But while my uncle has the notion in his head, we sha'n't be able to make him look at things from our point of view. Try to find the four-leaved shamrock, Grace, and conjure up a little commonsense for my uncle. A very little would do. I must go now; will you come as far as the gate with me?"

And the two lovers sauntered out into the twilight and reiterated their last words at the garden-gate, leaving the pretty little drawing-room to its sole other occupant, Grace's cousin Gerald, a slender, fair-haired lad of about fourteen, who was lying listlessly on a low couch in the bow window.

Grace and Laurence had been playfellows for so many years that no one but the uncle of the latter felt any surprise when they appeared in the character of lovers.

Mr. Latouche, however, was thunderstruck at the announcement of his nephew's attachment to Grace Neville, and declared, in language of which he afterwards felt somewhat ashamed, that should Laurence persist in his determination to marry the daughter of a beggarly half-pay captain, he might bid farewell to his present home and future prospects at Glenallan Mills.

Laurence was quite dependent on his uncle, with whom he had lived from childhood; he had always been treated as a son of the house, and on his return from school, had begun to assist his uncle in the management of his flax mills.

He was resolved to marry Grace, and he had already begun to make inquiries as to the probability of his being able to utilise the experience gained at Glenallan Mills in obtaining a salaried post in some similar concern.

While Grace and Laurence were loitering in the garden Gerald was pondering over the only portion of the foregoing conversation intelligible to himself—Grace's jesting wish for the four-leaved shamrock.

Poor Gerald was but half-witted; his brain had been injured by a fall in babyhood, and had never properly developed. He was still a child in mind, with all a child's belief in the marvellous—a belief which Grace was chary of discouraging, from an instinctive feeling that his imagination was his highest gift, which, once weakened or destroyed, would never be replaced by reasoning powers.

She was very fond of him, and devoted much time and trouble to the work of training him, and drawing out what little intellect he possessed; while he, on his part, repaid her care with a passionate devotion, obeying her slightest wish, and following her about like a shadow.

He was also fond of Laurence, a ride on whose horse constituted his greatest pleasure; and, though quite unconscious of the reason, he understood, in his own dim way, that Laurence's uncle was angry, and that Grace was grieved.

Anger was a terrible thing to poor Gerald, who dreaded stern looks and harsh words as other lads dread blows.

Why, he wondered, did Grace want the four-leaved shamrock. An unwonted fit of shy reserve prevented his asking for an explanation when Grace returned, but he puzzled over the question at intervals during the night, and the wish for a solution of the difficulty guided his wandering steps the next morning to his old nurse's cabin, which stood on a green hillside, some three miles from his home.

The old woman was sitting on her door-step knitting, and basking in the sunshine. She looked up joyfully as Gerald approached.

"Master Gerald, wherever have you been?"

"I don't know, nurse," answered Gerald. "I must have been busy, I think."

"Busy," said old Joan; "poor lamb, sure it's you that'll never know what being busy means; all the better for you, maybe. Sit down there, an' I'll get you a drink of milk."

Gerald stretched himself at full length upon the grass, and began to drink the milk which Joan brought him in a little china mug sacred to his own use.

"How is Miss Grace?" asked Joan.

"I don't know," answered Gerald; "she is unhappy, I think. Her eyes were full of tears when she came in from the garden last night. She thought I did not see them, but I did. Nurse, what is a four-leaved shamrock?"

"A four-leaved shamrock, alanna? Why, a shamrock that has four little leaves instead of three."

"I know that. I mean, what is the use of it?"

"Well, people say it's a fairy charm that brings luck to the owner. Who was talking to you about it, Master Gerald?"

"Grace was singing about it last night, and she said that she wished she could find one. It had something to do with Laurence's uncle, I think."

"Ah, yes," said Joan. "I suppose Miss Grace thinks that if she had one, she could make things up between Master Laurence an' his uncle."

"And could she?"

"Who knows but she might? By all accounts there is wonderful power in a four-leaved shamrock."

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"I wonder if I could find one," said Gerald.

"Perhaps you might. Sure it's to the likes of you that the good people often send their gifts. Look for it anyway, alanna. 'Tis a pity to have Miss Grace fretting."

Henceforth poor Gerald's one dream was to find the four-leaved shamrock, which was to avert the anger of Laurence's terrible uncle and make Grace happy.

Accordingly he wandered about, day after day, telling no one of his purpose, haunting every meadow and every copse where shamrocks grew, seeking the magic quatrefoil destined to work such spells.

Such freaks of nature, however, though they do occur, are very rare, and Gerald's quest was for long a fruitless one. He had at first avoided the neighbourhood of Glenallan Mills from an unconquerable dread of meeting the terrible Mr. Latouche, whose stern face and iron-grey hair appeared to poor Gerald the embodiment of all that was aweful.

At length, after days and weeks of patient search in other places, he so far overcame his repugnance as to go—in the early morning—to a large meadow through which the mill-stream flowed, and where the most luxuriant tufts of shamrock in all the country round were said to grow.

It was too early yet for the mill to be at work. The immense wheel was at rest, and a slender thread of rippling water flowed quietly on, giving no token of the force pent in by the sluices, and only awaiting a liberating hand to come rushing down and give life and motion to the slumbering mill.

As he neared the stream, which had steep, grassy banks, gay with many flowers, the great bell commenced ringing, and the workmen were trooping into the courtyard. He should abandon his search for that morning, since he would not risk a meeting with Mr. Latouche.

He was turning reluctantly away, when he perceived the object of his search—a leaf actually composed of *four* divisions, at the end of a long, trailing stem.

He lay flat down on the grass above, and grasping the herbage firmly with one hand, he stretched the other towards the prize. As he did so, the sudden barking of a dog, accompanied by a loud shout, startled him, and, losing his hold, he slipped down the steep bank into the stream below.

At the same moment the gates of the mill-dam were opened, and the pent-up waters, released from their prison, came seething and foaming down, seizing on poor Gerald's helpless form, and bearing him swiftly towards the certain destruction of the pitiless wheel.

The shout which had scared him was Laurence's, and the bark that of the latter's Newfoundland dog, Carlo. As the boy disappeared from view, Laurence ran forward, urging on his dog with voice and gesture, so that when he reached the bank he found Carlo already struggling with the stream.

To take off his coat and plunge in was the work of a moment. The dog's efforts had somewhat retarded poor Gerald's fate, and Laurence was thus enabled to seize him just as he was being drawn under the wheel.

A few long moments of desperate struggle, and Laurence found himself once more upon the bank, beside the apparently lifeless form of the lad whom he had saved, and whom he now, for the first time, recognised.

A little crowd of men had by this time gathered round him, one of whom, under his directions, carried poor Gerald into the house, and laid him on a sofa in the dining-room.

Mr. Latouche and his sister were summoned, and every effort was made to restore the boy to consciousness. When, after a long time, he opened his eyes, his first word was—

"Grace!"

"Do you want her, Gerald?" asked Laurence, bending over him.

"Yes," said Gerald. "I have found it for her at last."

"Found what?"

"The four-leaved shamrock."

And, opening his hand, he showed the little leaf which he had all through managed to keep safely inclosed within his palm.

"The four-leaved shamrock?"

"Don't you remember? Grace wanted it. She said that if she had one she could make your uncle forgive you."

"I remember," said Laurence, with a pang at his heart.

"What does he mean?" asked Mr. Latouche.

"I am afraid he must have overheard some jesting nonsense of ours about a four-leaved shamrock. You know it is said to be a talisman. May I bring Grace here, sir?"

"Certainly, if the poor child wishes for her. Take the pony-carriage."

Laurence hurried away, and in a little time the doctor, who had been sent for, came. He said that Gerald had received some injury, causing internal hemorrhage, and that his life was a question of minutes rather than of hours.

After a little time he opened his eyes and asked again for Grace.

"She will be here very soon now," answered Mr. Latouche.

He was standing a little behind the sofa, and Gerald was quite unconscious that the gentle tones to which he now listened were those of Laurence's terrible uncle.

"I am so afraid of being asleep when she comes," said Gerald. "I want to give her the four-leaved shamrock. She will be so glad to get it; she need not be afraid of Laurence's cross uncle any more."

"Does Laurence say that his uncle is cross?" asked Mr. Latouche, his face changing.

"No," said Gerald; "Laurence is very fond of him, and Grace says that he is good and that it is foolish of me to be so much afraid of him; but I think she is afraid herself, for she never will walk near the mills for fear of meeting him."

The sound of wheels was now heard, and a moment later Grace entered with Laurence.

She went straight over to the sofa and knelt beside it. When Gerald saw her, his whole face lighted up with joy.

"See, Gracie," he whispered, showing his prize, "I have found the four-leaved shamrock!"

"Oh, Gerald!" sobbed Grace, "I shall never forgive myself if my foolish talk has led to this."

"Don't cry about me," said Gerald. "I am not really hurt. Put your arm round me—so. Now I can go to sleep comfortably. You need not be afraid of Laurence's uncle any more."

"I would rather never have seen Laurence again than this should have happened," she cried passionately.

"Right," said Mr. Latouche, in answer to Laurence's look of dismay; "she is all the better worth winning for not being ready to fling old ties to the winds for the sake of her lover. How fond of her that poor boy seems!"

When Gerald next opened his eyes, Mr. Latouche, moved by a sudden impulse, bent over him.

"Gerald," he said, "I can promise you that your cousin need never again be afraid of Laurence's uncle."

"I know," said Gerald dreamily, "she will always be happy now."

"As happy as Laurence and I can make her."

Gerald smiled and closed his eyes.

After a time, Laurence, seeing how it was, took him from Grace's arms, and laid him back upon the sofa.

"It is best as it is, Grace," he whispered; "his life as he grew older could scarcely have been a happy one. Up to this you have made it so."

* * * * *

The four-leaved shamrock, inclosed within a golden circlet of Gerald's hair, hangs in a locket from Grace's watch-chain. Either by means of this, or of some other talisman in her possession, she has cast such a spell over Mr. Latouche, that not even Laurence himself is more devoted to her than is the stern uncle, to propitiate whom poor Gerald lost his life.

Rose Clifford.

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Compulsory.

CLARENCE: "How did Charley come to say he loved you?" Bessie: "Father asked him if he did?"

Brotherly Love.

TOM: "Do you think my cousin Julia would marry me if I asked her?" Jack: "Well, I have always considered her a sensible sort of girl—still, she might."

Thought He Was at Home.

"I TOLD George's uncle to consider himself at home in our house." "Well?" "Well, it wasn't five minutes afterwards that he began to grumble about the cooking."

Another Awful Catch.

"I READ an account of how a girl fell over forty feet without killing herself." "Good gracious! How did she do it?" "Tried to get out of a tramcar with exactly twenty men in it.'

Better Left Unsaid.

HE: "What a lovely fan you have, Edith." She: "Yes, my papa gave it me. It came from Paris, and is hand-painted." He: "Indeed? And how nicely it matches your complexion!"

Love Will Find an Excuse.

BERTHA: "I fancy it's going to be a match between Maude and Arthur." Constance: "You don't say so!" Bertha: "Yes, Maude to-day spoke of his stuttering as a slight hesitancy in the enunciation of words."

She Had Her Hopes.

MISS ASCUM: "Wasn't that Mr. Bonds I saw you walking with last evening?" Miss Coy: "Yes." Miss Ascum: "He's a landed freeholder of the county, isn't he?" Miss Coy (blushing): "Well—er—he isn't quite landed yet."

She Saved Him Joyfully.

GLADYS: "That rich young Foodledum said if I didn't marry him he should die." Ethel: "Of course you accepted him?" Gladys: "Of course. I couldn't bear to think of the poor fellow dying like that; it's such a disgrace to die rich nowadays, you know."

A Jealous Maiden.

SHE: "Harry, you said something last evening that made me feel so bad." He: "What was it, dearest?" She: "You said I was one of the sweetest girls in all the world." He: "And aren't you, darling?" She: "You said 'one of the sweetest.' Oh, Harry, to think that I should live to know that I have to share your love with another!"

A Woman's Bargain.

MRS. ENPECK: "I think, Henry, that our daughter has made a very satisfactory marriage, and that she will succeed very well in the management of her husband." Henry Enpeck: "Why do you think so?" Mrs. Enpeck: "I overheard her talking to him this morning, and she got him to agree to a proposition like this: 'If you will do as I want, I promise to do the same.'"

Johnny Was a Flirt.

SCHOOLMISTRESS (in grammar lesson): "'I didn't have no fun at the seaside.' How would you correct this, Johnny?" Johnny: "Get a sweetheart."

Easily Satisfied.

MISS YOUNGUN: "What kind of a man would you like for a husband?" Miss Oldun: "Oh, either a bachelor or a widower. I'm not particular which."

Perhaps He Was Glad.

MOTHER (at a ball); "Are you enjoying yourself, dear?" Daughter: "I'm not." "What is the matter?" "I've refused George six dances running, and he does not seem a bit miserable."

Tit For Tat.

ELDERLY LADY: "All right, sir, I shall sue you for breach of promise." Young Man: "You'd better not attempt it. If you do I'll bring an action for slander against you for saying I proposed to you."

The Pursuit of Knowledge.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: "Have you seen anything of Harry?" Major Golightly: "I heard him say something about going in pursuit of knowledge." Mrs. Golightly: "Ah, that means he is looking for the governess!"

That Terrible Boy Again.

"I DECLARE," said Bella sweetly, "your thoughts run exactly in unison with mine, Augustus. I had those very words in my mouth." "Yes, and I saw him put 'em there, too," said little Tommy, who had seen the kissing going on.

What Could She Expect?

MRS. HIRAM OFTEN: "Here, Bridget, see how dusty it is under the bed." Bridget: "Yes'm." "Haven't I impressed upon you that you must sweep under the beds?" "Av course, ma'am, an' how could the dust get there if I hadn't swept it under?"

Father Was Stern and Mabel Was Wild.

"MABEL," said little Jennie to her big sister at breakfast, "did you tell papa?" "Tell papa what?" asked Jennie. "Why you told Mr. Buster last night if he did it again you'd tell papa—and he did it again. I saw him!" And then papa looked at Mabel over his glasses.

Tricks of the Trade.

EMPLOYER: "You are having a decided flirtation with the girl who has charge of our telephone wire?" Truthful Clerk (with cold chills running up and down his spine, and with visions of instant dismissal): "Y-e-e-s, sir; but please, sir——" Employer: "Well, keep it up. She will give more attention to our calls if you do."

A Change in the Title.

MAUD (smilingly): "So you saw the profound bow I got from handsome Harry Brown? He's just graduated from an agricultural college with high honours as a veterinary surgeon." Ethel: "Yes, so Gladys told me. It's a secret, but she's engaged to be married to him." Maud (with sudden asperity): "Pooh! A cow doctor!"

Bread From a Stone.

"OH, we had the loveliest arrangement at our church bazaar last week! Every woman contributed to the missionary cause five shillings which she earned herself by hard work." "How did you get yours?" "From my husband." "I shouldn't call that earning it yourself by hard work." "You don't know my husband."

He Was Not Poetical.

"ALGERNON is very interesting," said the stockbroker's daughter. "What does he talk about?" inquired her father. "Why, he's ever so well posted in Shakespearian quotations." "Young woman," said the financier sternly, "don't you let him deceive you. Don't you let him make sport of your ignorance. There isn't any such stock on the market. I ought to know, for I've been on the Exchange long enough."

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..THE..

SUCCESS OF FIORNELLA.

A Tale of Magnificent Love.

"Oh, is it you, Arnold? Come in. This is such a happy day for me! Think; the play is finished!"

"But you, Roland, how is it with you? Is it one of your good days? But why do I ask? You are looking as if you had never known what illness was. Your cheek is red, your eyes sparkle. What has wrought this transformation? Finishing this play of yours? Oh, to feel an ecstasy like that!"

It was a small room in a quiet part of the town. There were flower pots in the windows, and the odour of the blossoms mingled faintly with the vague heaviness of a sick-room atmosphere. The furniture was neat; there were adornments of the sort that told of a feminine hand.

The sun sent a straggling ray of light through the white curtains, lighting up the face that looked out from the depths of the pillows. It was a boyish face, with a strangely beautiful mouth and curling lashes, veiling the eyes that were now so lit with ecstasy. Roland Stamford had lain upon that sick-bed for nine months, full of pain and hopelessness, yet now much of that anguish was forgotten, swallowed up in this beautiful joy, this complete, heavenly thrill.

Remember he had just completed his lifework! His play was written.

As for the visitor, whose name was Arnold Dilston, he was as unlike Roland as possible. He was in evident good health; prosperity shone from him everywhere; his good looks were marred by nothing of care or disease. His step was light, his voice cheery. He brought an atmosphere of youth and vigour into the dull atmosphere of this drooping life. When one is twenty-five, has perfect health, and an income that is large enough to allow a life of idleness, with only oneself to care for in the world, happiness is a near companion.

Arnold had taken a chair by the bed. He was watching the queer tricks of the sunlight across the white counterpane. A light breeze was coming in at the window, swaying the curtains gently.

"And now," he said—"and now that your play is finished, you will, will you not, tell us something of it?"

"Oh, yes. I would not speak before, you see, because I might never have completed it, and then what use would the hope have been! But now that it is done!" He said this last as if the words were very sweet to him.

"What is it, then, this play of yours? A comedy, a new *School for Scandal?* A——"

"No, no, Arnold, this is a tragedy. And such a plot! Oh, it is really beautiful. You cannot fancy; you must read it; surely you will read it?"

"Of course, Roland. But—a tragedy! To-day at the very end, in the twentieth century! It is quite hopeless!"

"If it had only been a comedy. They are all gone, you know, the people who look to the theatre for poetry, for inspiring words, and mental profit. We go only to be amused. Why have you forgotten this?"

"I do not seem to have thought of anything like that at all. I knew only one thing; this glorious thing was in me, and I had to deliver it to the world. And now what is the next thing. It must go to a manager and be read, I suppose——"

"Or not read." Arnold only whispered this in his thoughts. His lips said: "Yes, the managerial eye must scan these lines, and then—Well, I hope for the best. What is the best? Why, acceptance, and the announcement of the play's being put in rehearsal for early performance. And then; the test of publicity. Success. Wealth. But—it is a tragedy."

"Why do you say that so sadly? If you knew the stuff this tragedy is made of——! Besides, there is Jermayne."

"Yes, there is Jermayne. Have you written a part for her?"

"Not a part merely; it is the whole play. She is to be the all in all, the predominant character! Oh, my beautiful sister; how gloriously, how sweetly you will play this part. It will bring you fame! Oh, Jermayne has read the play. She loves her part already; she realises it."

"But her present contract? She is so successful at the Trafalgar Theatre."

"Her present contract expires soon; then—ah, yes, then—she shall play Fiornella. It is true that she has a delightful position in Weekman's Company; and yet—there is but little fortune for her. Whereas—as *Fiornella!* Oh, think! There will be nothing sweeter in all the world than Jermayne as Fiornella! If I can only live until that day!"

He closed his eyes in a transport of imagery. Then he went on:

"And you, Arnold, will you take this precious child of mine, this "Fiornella," and take it to the managerial eye? You know some of those people, do you not? You will do this for me? Besides—there is Jermayne."

"Yes," said Arnold, as he took the neatly-wrapped sheets of manuscript, and got up, pushing his chair back gently, "I will do my best, my very best. I hope for the pleasantest things."

"Besides—there is Jermayne——"

Arnold's eyes grew very tender; and he bade good-bye.

* * * * *

"And so they have all refused it?" It was Jermayne speaking; Jermayne, the beloved sister of *Fiornella's* author. She looked at Arnold wistfully, hoping that he might acknowledge that there was someone still untried, some channel open.

Arnold nodded, with pain in his eyes.

"All, all. There is no one else, absolutely no one."

"Oh, it will kill him! It will kill him! My poor brother, poor Roland!"

Her eyes grew dim and she looked into space.

"Is there no way at all, no other way?"

"Yes, there is another way. And Roland shall live, if it depends on *Fiornella.* You see, if the expenses are all guaranteed—almost any manager will take the piece. He risks nothing. The backer risks all that. Well—I will back it. I have a thousand pounds. That will put the piece on the boards. After that—who knows? It may be a great epoch-making triumph. I may," he spoke as if he really believed it, "make a fortune. And you—a splendid fame. And Roland—why, the mere joy of it will be enough for him."

"Oh, but you must not do this. Think, your fortune cast upon one die. If the piece fails——"

"I am a beggar." Arnold smiled as if that prospect were sweetly pleasant. "No, no, it is a very commonplace matter. It is just as if I were buying railway stocks. I may win, or I may not. No one knows. To-morrow I might have speculated it all away on stocks and shares. Instead, I shall stage *Fiornella.*"

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He spoke, this splendid young man, as if he had always had the Stock Exchange fever in his bones. Whereas he had never——But what would a young man not do for a girl like Jermayne?

"Yes," he went on eagerly, "Roland shall get well from very joy. You shall play Fiornella, and *Fiornella* shall succeed! See, I stake my word upon it. Now, go and tell Roland that Weekman has decided to put *Fiornella* in rehearsal, and that he agrees to the stipulation about you playing the title-rôle. It is a lie that the angels will forgive you. Good-bye, Fiornella."

Jermayne's eyes got very dim.

"Oh," she said chokingly, "how shall we ever——"

But Arnold lightly kissed her fingers and left her.

* * * * *

The curtain went down on the closing scene of *Fiornella*, but the tumult of applause would not down. It never lulled at all, until Jermayne, flushed still from her great *finale*, appeared and bowed, looking like a sweet and gracious queen. And then the storm broke out anew, and there were cries, mingling finally into one compact call, of "Author, author!"

Has there ever been a more touching scene, I wonder, than that of Roland Stamford, lying at full-length in an invalid's chair, being wheeled to the centre of the stage by that beautiful Fiornella? The crimson on his cheeks was very sharply defined against his whiteness, and he looked beautiful—beautiful as Death. He spoke at last, and the silence out in front was almost an agony.

"You are very kind," he said; "I thank you. This—is what I have lived for."

Then his head sank down, and faintness came upon him. *Fiornella* was a success! A magnificent triumph! Who, with that thunderous applause still ringing in his ears, could doubt it. And yet, as each auditor went away, he looked at the other, guiltily, and as if he were ashamed.

As for Roland, when he was safe in his home again, he held quite a reception about his little bed. There were many great men there, men whose names we read of in the personal columns of the papers. And, of course, Weekman was there, and Arnold, and Jermayne. Roland looked, oh, so happy! He talked brightly, brilliantly; the young genius was at his best. The others listened and laughed, and made the boy forget his illness and everything but success. Only, from time to time, they exchanged furtive glances. And when they went away, each, as he shook hands with Roland, and then with Arnold, looked as if he had done something unworthy.

"Oh," said Roland, when he was alone with Jermayne and Arnold, "this is beautiful! Life, how glorious you are. Oh, you doubters! Did I not tell you of this, long ago? And see—it has come to pass!" He turned, smiling, to his pillows, and passed into slumber.

The doubters looked at each other, and the laughter died away from their faces.

* * * * *

It was ten days after the night of *Fiornella's* success. In Roland's little room it was quite still. Outside the sun was going down in salmon-hued splendour. In the outer room were Arnold and Jermayne, and sadness was upon both their faces.

The door of Roland's room opened gently and the doctor issued.

"Well?" said Jermayne.

"Can he live?" asked Arnold.

"He cannot live two hours." The doctor spoke softly, fearing to wound. But there was no hope in his decision. He left nothing, nothing to cling to. "I have done my best," he went on, "but he is ebbing away. There is nothing to be done." He passed out, leaving Jermayne and Arnold to their sadness.

And so it had all availed nothing! Every day the reports from the theatre had been brought to the invalid's couch, the criticisms had been read to him. The doctor had told them that the only hope was in keeping him cheerful and happy. Well, they had done that, at all cost, and now——

Arnold thought a little bitterly of the uselessness of it all. What a magnificent effort it had been! How well the mockery had been kept up! Only to keep Roland in happy content with success, that had been the end of all; that had succeeded, but——

"As literature," Arnold was reflecting, "*Fiornella* was beautiful, majestic. As a drama it was impossible, because of its very beauty and strength. We can't stand genius on the stage; we are grown domestic, even in art, and we worship the commonplace. *Fiornella* was anything but commonplace, and, therefore, predestined to fail. But there are ways and means known to the wily men of the "profession" by which a failure may appear, for a little while, to be a success. The magic wand is composed of bank-notes. Judicious 'paper,' a clever press agent, and a potent wand; these will keep any play afloat for awhile. It is so easy to get a 'house' on a first night! And newspaper columns may be bought at no unattainable figures. Critics are amenable to good wine. But—it certainly takes money. It—has—taken money."

Still musing in bitterness, Arnold went into the next room. Jermayne was there before him, at Roland's side. Roland was already growing unconscious. How beautiful he looked. His eyes rested upon Jermayne and Arnold.

"Ah," he murmured," "you must bid me good-bye, you two, I am going—away. But I am quite happy to go, now that *Fiornella* is making a name for me. Oh, the sweetness of that success. Yes, I think, up above, I shall have a theatre, and they shall always play *Fiornella*. Though, of course, we must wait until you come, Jermayne. And I hope that will be a long way off. I can wait a very long time for you. Well, I must say good-bye. I hear the call-boy.

"It will soon be my—cue, and I will have to—go on—up above. Give me your hands—both of you. So." He laid Jermayne's right within Arnold's right, and smiled up at them both. "It is so, is it not? I have always wanted that, also, and I have got it. How good God is! I have everything—everything to make me the most happy creature. And now—will you—both—kiss me?"

They stooped down and touched their lips lightly to his. Then, in another instant, a slight trembling came over Roland's form, a faint sigh came from between his lips, and—it was the end. But there remained upon his face such a smile, such a look of perfect peace and happiness, as made you feel that death was very gentle with him and loved him, as all had always done.

All the bitterness had gone from Arnold.

"To have seen that perfect happiness," he said, half to himself, half to Jermayne, "was worth twice as much."

Jermayne looked up through her tears.

"Is it all—gone?" she asked, very softly, as if the dead might yet hear.

"Every penny of it."

He spoke cheerfully, as if he were rid of that paltry wealth.

"And you are a beggar?"

"H'm—yes. But——"

"Well?"

"I have you." He drew her to him, and kissed her tear-wet eyes. "Besides," he went on proudly, "we are both young. We have youth and love, and happiness is with us." His eyes rested upon Roland's smile.

Percival Pollard.

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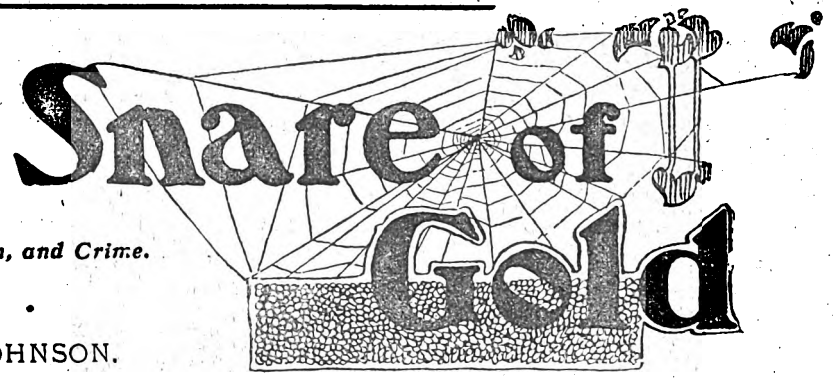
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •
HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who was betrothed to Eric, who now scorns her love.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.
Ronald is Arrested.

"I SEE you've met before," Lady Alastair said in a delighted tone, for she was the essence of amiability. "I am so glad, I'll leave you together," and so saying, she sailed away to bring other interesting young men in touch with other interesting young women.

"You are not vexed with Lady Alastair?" said Ronald, "Because she did not know, and, of course, if you would rather not speak to me I will leave you without another word."

She looked up piteously into his eyes.

"No, no!" she said, "only I should like to speak to you alone," and she looked around as though in despair at the smiling, chattering throng near them.

He led her to the marble staircase and across a domed, mosaic-paved staircase head towards one of the conservatories, where mostly pink and white azaleas bloomed. And she seated herself in a wicker chair in the ambush of branching palms and greenery.

"I want to tell you," she said, as he seated himself beside her, "how sorry I was, how angry with myself for leaving you without a word. It seemed so unjust because, whether your brother was right or wrong in what he said, you had always been so brave and kind to me, and——" she looked down at the jewels on her wrist, "we had always been such friends."

"I am glad you have said what you have said, because it gives me the opportunity and the right to speak," he replied. "The accusation of that man—I never more will call him brother—was a foul, false slander. It is true that prior to my father's death an unjust and cruel suspicion fell upon me. Only yesterday I discovered his machinations.

"Madeleine, my good name and fame are dear to me. I dropped the name that is mine by birth until such time as I could clear it. For a time I had no means to clear it, for I could not believe, still less prove that any man, let alone my own blood brother, could contrive a scheme so diabolical and dastardly as that which Eric Geldart laid against me."

"Brother against brother," murmured Madeleine, horror in her eyes.

"Yes, brother against brother. He plotted my ruin for the one reason that he might shield himself and his own offences behind the rampart of suspicion that he heaped on me. That and one other motive swayed him; the lust for gold, the hunger for my birthright as well as his own, and the mad, hateful design of gaining all my father's fortune, banishing me from that father's confidence, from his heart—ah! at the cost of breaking that heart, or, as it proved, of sacrificing that useful, honourable life."

"Harvey! Harvey!" she cried, calling him by the name she had known and loved him by.

"It is true, true what I have told you. Soon it will be proved. But I have something more to say, Madeleine. Even in my darkest hour, when there seemed no rift in the black cloud of suspicion that loomed over me, one dread was worst of all, one yearning most intense—the dread that you should hear and think me guilty, the hope, the soul-felt hope, that you should know me and declare me to be true."

"Then," she cried, "God grant that you may rend asunder and destroy the mantle of suspicion that has shrouded you, but whether you succeed in that or no, this from my heart I do declare: 'I believe you innocent, and I—I—I love you!'"

He caught her in his arms, rained kisses on her face. Locked in each other's embrace they were oblivious to all the world, oblivious to an approaching form, oblivious to the presence of one who stood regarding them like a Mephistopheles raging at the bliss in which he had no part.

And Eric Geldart, seeing what he saw, hearing what he heard, banished from his black heart all semblance of pity or remorse, all thought of ties of blood or kindred, forgot that once the brother there and he had slept, infants in their cot, folded in each other's arms, the same mother's kiss upon their brow, the same mother's prayer murmured over them, remembered only that the man there stood between him and his heart's desire, and that he might win the love he craved and keep the gold he craved and the fame and reputation which were as the breath of his nostrils. The man there must be crushed and broken, once for all.

Turning from their rapturous embrace, the lovers faced

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him, but this time intensifying not relaxing their clasp of each other's arms, and with scorn and defiance in their eyes.

"I must apologise," Eric sneered. "for interrupting a scene so charming and so interesting; a rehearsal, I presume, for Lady Alastair's forthcoming amateur theatricals—Romeo and Juliet, or Paolo and Francesca?"

"I care no more, sir, for your sneers than for your slanders," said Ronald sternly, "your presence is an intrusion!"

And Madeleine echoed simply: "Yes, an unwelcome intrusion!"

"An intrusion—yes!" he hissed between his set teeth, while his eyes flashed like lightning under the thunder of his brows; "but there may be other intrusions than mine, and they, too, may be unwelcomed. Yes! yes! this way—this way!" and as he turned he called to two stern-looking men who were peering to right and left, followed by the affrighted Lady Alastair and a handful of her guests wide-eyed.

They strode hastily to the conservatory.

"Who is this?" said one close black-bearded man; then indicating Eric, "Is this the man?"

And Lady Alastair said:

"Oh! no! no! no! I am sure it is all a terrible mistake; you have no right to come here, no reason to come here—that is Mr. Eric Geldart—not Mr. Ronald Geldart!"

"But, my lady, the other?"

"Why that," she cried with triumphant indignation—"that is Mr. Harvey Bligh, the novelist; is it not so, Mr. Geldart?"

And Eric answered, hurling an accusing hand towards his brother and speaking to the stern, strong executants of the law:

"That is my brother, Ronald Harvey Geldart, author, poet, whatsoever else he may be, my brother and—a thief!"

A murmur rose from the trembling and now augmented throng, who looked on thrilled and petrified with horror.

"A thief!" whispered one. And another in a whisper answered: "Yes, and something else!"

And he of the black beard, advancing, said:

"Are you Ronald Harvey Geldart?"

"I am," was the unflinching answer.

"And I am Inspector Donnelly of Scotland Yard, and it it my duty, Mr. Ronald Geldart, to arrest you on the charge of the wilful murder of Clare Armitage, and I have to warn you that anything you may say is liable to be used in evidence against you." And in another moment Ronald Geldart stood between the two stern officers of the law, who, each with a hand upon his wrist, led him from out those marble halls, speechless himself with horror and amidst a silent horror of all who saw and heard.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jack is Made Happy.

"Good morning, Miss Phyllis!" and Mr. Scrimshaw's Remington promptly ceased its chatter as was its way when Mr. Scrimshaw's typine was about to commence hers.

It was Mr. Widdicombe who interrupted the operations of the young lady operator, in fact these interruptions had of late become frequent owing to various causes.

The *Meteor* was increasing in circulation and importance, and there was more urgent and frequent need for its business manager to confer with its actual, though unsuspected, proprietor.

Again, the attendance of that proprietor in Crosby Square had of late been more urgently and continuously required. Not by the exigencies of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, the affairs of which indeed Mr. Scrimshaw delegated more and more to his cashiers and managers, devoting a daily, increasing portion of his time and energy to conferences with the strange old man in the dreary office upstairs, and the bustling, hurry-scurry of various dealings, transactions and operations following such conferences.

The staff of the Cosmopolitan were mystified. They knew that business, important and lucrative, appertained to the association of their handsomely-furnished and appointed offices and the somewhat squalid and dreary floor above, knew that it was not for nothing that huge budgets of accounts, almost cabalistic in form and contents, were sent down to them to be copied, and that in other cases balance-sheets relating to the most ordinary operations were directed to be filed upstairs.

Clearly the governor was working a big scheme, and Old Mystery, whom daily the staff of the Cosmopolitan treated with more respect and deference, was in the swim.

Certainly Mr. Widdicombe made these frequent visits to Crosby Square without complaint, and when occasionally Scrimshaw incidentally excused himself, on the ground of pressure of business, from attendance at the *Meteor* offices, the business director of that paper would remark cheerfully:

"Don't mention it, Scrimshaw, we're getting along much better without you—we'd rather not be troubled, I mean to say we'd rather not trouble you, knowing the demands upon your time made by your Parliamentary duties, to say nothing of the necessity of your being here in the City with all this alternate boom and panic in the air."

There was another reason, one that Mr. Widdicombe never mentioned. Fortune had of late smiled on him more consistently than ever he remembered.

His emoluments from the *Meteor* made the hard times of the past seem like a dream. In addition, Scrimshaw, from time to time, had, in his off-handed manner, given Cousin Jack, his old-time befriender, hints and tips of which the latter had availed himself to his substantial benefit.

And yet, strange to say, Jack Widdicombe of late felt lonelier than ever. Indeed, he dated that sense of loneliness back to the moment when he first set eyes on Phyllis Daventry, and strove in a manner, strangely shy and off-handed for a man of the world, to impress the fact upon her.

Did Phyllis catch his meaning? It is difficult to say; certainly she more and more affected not to, which inclines me from observation to believe she did.

Idylls are not all dependent on environment. Of what avail the flowing meads, the rippling streams, the summer zephyrs and the skipping lambs without a Chloe and a Strophon?

But set you down your Strephon and your Chloe in the very vortex of the City's maelstrom, with nothing more pastoral near than the bulls and bears and stags of the Stock Exchange, no verdure closer than in Drapers' Gardens, the Fountain Court of the Bank of England, or the plane tree in Cheapside; rob your Strephon of his crook, replace the silk stockings and the satin-bow-tied breeches he wears in China ornaments by a frock coat and chimney-pot silk hat, give him a silk umbrella for a crook and let your Chloe's curls be crowned, not by a garland of wild flowers, but by a picture hat, and for a smock array her in a blouse and skirt, yet shall Strephon whisper the oldest and the dearest of all stories, and all shall be Arcadian.

"Don't you get tired of type-writing?" asked Jack incidentally.

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis, "it's my work, and it's better than governessing or envelope-addressing or sewing-machining, and I'm not clever, you know, like girls who write or girls who go on the stage."

"Aren't you, by Jove!" said Jack stubbornly, and gazing angrily at a hand mirror which happened to be present, there being a daughter of Eve within the radius of a hundred yards, and which insultingly threw back at him the reflection of streaks, mocking streaks, of white above his temples. "I'd sooner listen to you than I'd read or hear any of them."

"Oh, Mr. Widdicombe, and what message did you say for Mr. Scrimshaw? I'm rather afraid it isn't much use your waiting."

"And why?"

"I doubt if he'll be back this afternoon."

"I don't see that that matters much, if I may only wait."

"If it isn't wasting your valuable time, Mr. Widdicombe," said Phyllis demurely.

"I don't think my time could be better employed; certainly not more enjoyably. Allow me," for a sheet of paper fluttered

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from Misss Daventry's table; and gallant Jack Widdicombe stooped to restore it, then he stared at it, ejaculating, "By Jove! that's strange!"

"What, Mr. Widdicombe?"

"That handwriting. May I look, I don't want to read the contents."

"Oh, certainly, if you like, it doesn't matter; they're Greek and Chinese combined to everybody except Mr. Scrimshaw and the gentleman who wrote them. I can't understand their interesting you."

"They don't, the contents, but the hand, it's as like the writing of a man I once knew as if it were his own—the same quaint tails to the g's and y's and the same twiddley little s's."

"How strange; perhaps it is."

"That can't be; the man I mean is dead."

"Then they are not the same," said Phyllis, "for this one is very much alive."

"What's his name?"

"Strange to say, I don't know, but he's a dear old gentleman and I like him very much. He belongs to the office upstairs with the Taga-Taga Wool Agency on the door. We call him Old—I mean Mr. Mystery, and Mr. Scrimshaw gives him odd jobs to do now and then—little matters that he wishes to keep outside the office, though, as a matter of fact, of late he has kept him quite busy. He seems to have quite taken to him."

"So do you," said Mr. Widdicombe in an injured tone. And Phyllis answered:

"Oh, certainly, he's such a dear old gentleman."

"I'm glad he's old," said Jack, "though, for the matter of that, I'm not getting younger," and he passed his hands ruefully through the iron grey hair thinning so rapidly at the temples.

"Oh, Mr. Widdicome, you're in the prime of life!" and the delighted Jack replied:

"Do you think so? Well, really, when you come to think of it you're not far out." For it is noticeable that men, as a rule, go on considering themselves in the prime of life from thirty-five to sixty. "But, ah!" he sighed, "I'm a great deal older than you."

"Yes," said Phyllis, going on tapping, "but then men are much younger in their ways than women all the way through."

"Do you think so? It has often occurred to me. For instance, for a man of thirty a girl of twenty would be the most natural thing in the world, and lots of men at forty marry girls of twenty."

"Oh, yes!" said Phyllis, typing furiously.

"By-the-bye, if it isn't a rude question, how old are you, Miss Phyllis?"

"I'm twenty-five," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Really, you don't look it," said Cousin Jack, who would have said that whatever she had said. "Well, I say, Miss Phyllis, if a man of thirty is young and a man of forty is not too old for a girl of twenty, why—why——" He paused, the better to elaborate his rule of three sum, "for a young lady of twenty-five a man of forty-five would be just about the age.

"What age?" asked Phyllis, with amazing innocence, and Jack exclaimed:

"The age to ask you, Miss Phyllis, if—if—you'll save a poor fellow from developing into what he's on the verge of—a lonely, dreary, weary, selfish old bachelor. I know I'm not much to look at. I'm neither clever nor rich, also I'm past my prime, and there are dozens of smarter men, younger men, who'd give the world for a smile from such a pretty girl as you, but I love you very, very dearly, and I'll be good and true to you all my days."

He seized her hand—he was seated beside her. Her lips trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

A hundred thoughts flashed through her mind, she thought of herself as she was, happy in herself, happy in her work, but fatherless, motherless, without brother or sister, and at times feeling very, very lonely, thought of herself as she pictured what she was to be, a prim little old maid going home to a prim little sitting-room of an evening, with the prim tabby cat singing on the prim hearthrug, and the spring-time coming and going and the autumn bringing more dead leaves.

And then—and then—there flitted for a moment in her mental vision a handsome, grave face, a well-set figure, a voice that woke music in her heart, and then—and then, she put that picture by—for ever. And there in the City's heart the little idyll was enacted, and Cousin Jack, somewhat late in life, plucked and laid upon his heart the flower of womanhood that was to make his whole life fragrant.

And through the open window there floated from below a harmony of strings—a harp, a violin, a 'cello. Bustling City men paused just a moment, and a few drones there in the City hive loitered awhile to listen to the wandering minstrels who played on and on, little deeming they were furnishing the incidental music to a real life drama that had reached its happiest situation.

Cousin Jack, with a light heart and the footstep of a schoolboy, all but cannonned with his patron when descending the stairs.

"Do you want to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, out with it."

"Only just to ask if you can spare your typewriting young lady.'"

"What for, and for how long?"

"Permanently."

"No, you be hanged! the *Meteor* office is quite distinct from the Cosmopolitan Trust, and mustn't steal its staff."

"But she isn't for the *Meteor*, and I don't want her to typewrite any more; I want her for a semi-detached villa in the neighbourhood of Streatham, and I want her for my wife."

"By Jove!" said Scrimshaw, "who'd have thought it? This sort of thing disorganises business. Tut! Tut! I expect those accounts she's copying will be chock full of errors. Well, never mind, old chap, give us your hand, I couldn't wish her or you a better bit of luck. By-the-bye, Jack, I'll give you a tip that will set you up in housekeeping; put a hundred in Esperanza Reefs."

"What are they?" said Cousin Jack, opening his paper.

"Not quite sure; here, you fellow, give me the *Times*."

Mr. Springle obeyed. Cousin Jack opened the paper, took note of the last quotation of the stock in question, was refolding it casually, his eye caught the leaded line, TERRIBLE DISCOVERY IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS. A WOMAN MURDERED. And then a name—a familiar name—"Clare Armitage of Belsize Gardens! Good God!" he cried. "Scrimshaw, read!"

"Yes," said the other, "ghastly affair, wasn't it? Did you know her?"

"Yes, yes! Knew her parents too; they died when she was quite a child. My cousin, old George Geldart, who's dead too, now, brought her up in his household. I think she thought young Eric meant to marry her, and I expect he, as was his way with most people, treated her very badly. But, poor soul, who can have done this awful deed?"

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Phyllis Finds her Father.

On the morning following Frederick Stanyer's return, he and his agent sat in the little room on the second floor in Crosby Square, again conferring.

The conversation mainly turned on market matters, and, not unnaturally, drifted on to liars.

"Talking of liars," said Stanyer, "I met about the biggest specimen just after my arrival out. They were talking about a man of your name, the youngster who made a hit in Parliament, and there was a man in the club just out from home who made himself out to be a sort of walking guide to the Peerage and the County Families, and

(*Continued on page* 509.)

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In connection with the recent statistics published relating to the appalling increase of tuberculosis (lung diseases of all descriptions), consumption, and asthma, Professor Richard Haynel, Director of the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, Burgess Hill, near Brighton, recently waited upon us and gave us some interesting and wonderful information with regard to his treatment for the above-mentioned diseases. The Professor has asked us to inform our readers that he will forward any sufferer mentioning our paper, full and minute details of how "To Cure Yourself," and a copy of his great work on the subject, which deals exhaustively with the Weidhaas Home Treatment, absolutely free of charge. The book sets forth in a very simple language the easiest, most rational, and really marvellous methods for effecting a cure, no matter how long the dreaded disease may have been running its evil way.

Professor Haynel has devoted over twenty-five years consistent study to the question of securing and restoring health to sufferers from consumption, asthma, chest and stomachic complaints. The treatment he advocates has been thoroughly tested during that period, and the number of cases in which it has proved to be remarkably efficacious runs into many thousands. The Professor gave us several instances of remarkable cures, vouched for by letters received from patients, and the following genuine testimonial shown to us, amongst others, is only one record out of hundreds of similar cases of asthma cured to stay cured.

"To the Director of the Weidhaas Institute.—Dear Sir,—It is with grateful and sincere thanks that I testify to the remarkable success of your treatment. For the last seventeen years I have suffered very severely with my chest, and during the winter of '98 I was so ill and weak that I had no hopes of recovery. My cough and expectoration were incessant, and many a night I could not lie down. I was short of breath. My shoulders were bent, and my voice was almost a whisper, whilst I had a severe pain under the shoulder blades. I tried many remedies, so-called, but none cured until I went in for a course of your treatment. Now the pain is all gone, I can walk without feeling tired, and I am never prostrated. In fact, I am in excellent health. I shall do my best to recommend your treatment.—Yours gratefully, Caroline Sadler, Perth, N.B. (Full address on application.)"

At this season of the year, when Bronchitis finds its way into nearly every family in the land, the experience of Mrs. Smith, of Tewkesbury, will be of great interest to our readers, It proves conclusively the undoubted value of a scientific application of hygienic methods in curing disease, "I suffered from chronic bronchitis, and did nothing but cough day and night, with a good deal of phlegm. My lungs were weak and I gradually got worse in spite of the efforts of a doctor. I often had to be assisted up and down stairs, had to struggle for breath and could eat nothing. Attacks would sometimes come on three times a day, and often lasted three weeks. I could never lie down, and dreaded night to come. I was becoming quite a skeleton, and then I decided to try your treatment. In about eleven months I felt quite a new person. Now my breathing is quite perfect, and I am able to do my ordinary housework, including washing, After three long weary years of such helplessness, I feel more than grateful."

Another wonderful cure effected in a long-standing case of consumption, is a further evidence of the efficacy of the Weidhaas Home Treatment. Mrs. Arnold, of Polegate (whose full name and address can be had on application to the Director of the Weidhaas Institute), writes: "'I have suffered several years from consumption, and the doctors gave me up. I was so ill that I was confined to bed, and I lost a half-pint of blood a day. I also suffered from a dry cough and night sweats, and whenever I attempted to do anything I had a fearful pain in my left side. In September, 1897, I was given up as incurable. I suffered dreadfully from bleeding of the lungs, and I could scarcely eat anything. I heard of your cure and made up my mind to try it just at the time when I was at my worst, for I had given up all hopes of ever being cured. After trying your treatment, in a few weeks I began to improve, my cough ceased and I did not suffer from the night sweats or bleeding of the lungs. I can now walk a considerable distance without feeling the least fatigue. I owe my entire cure to your marvellous treatment."

The Professor is quite prepared to back his own opinions and those of his patients to the extent of £1,000, and will pay this sum to any charitable institution we may name, if one testimonial published by the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute can be proved otherwise than genuine. We cannot impress upon our readers who suffer themselves (or whose friends are in distress through these terrible diseases) too much the importance of immediately putting themselves or their friends into communication with the Director of the Institute. You should at once write in full, giving such particulars as you feel justified in stating as to your symptoms and complaints, and you may rest assured that your case, no matter how complicated or serious, will have the prompt personal and individual attention of Professor Haynel.

Address in full, mentioning that we advised you to write—The Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, 80, Burgess Hill, near Brighton.

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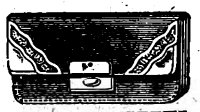

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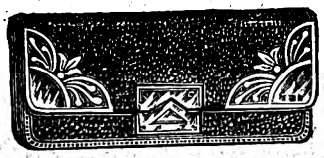

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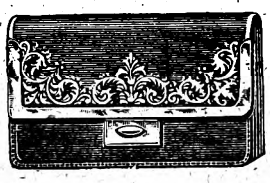

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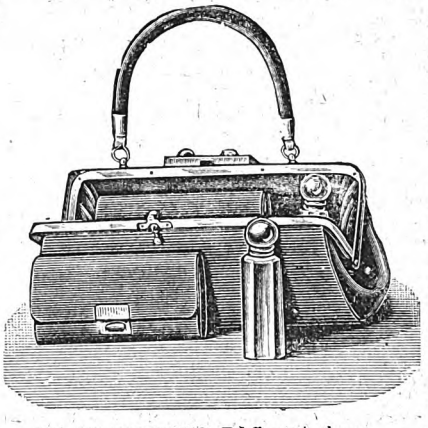

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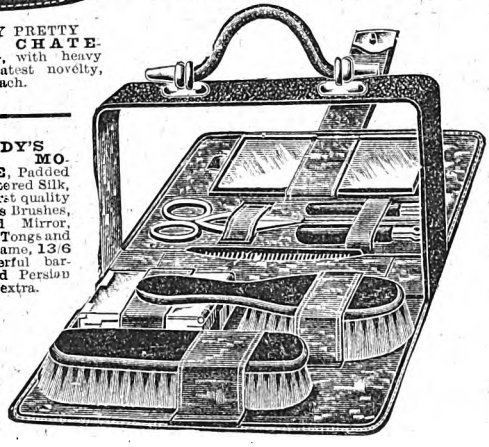

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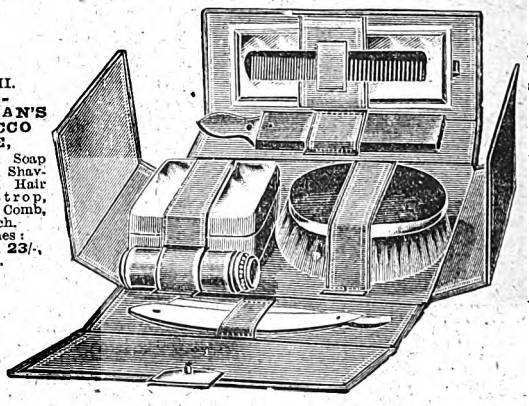

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'Who's Who' rolled into one, and amongst others he professed to know this Eric Geldart, M.P.

"I happened incidentally to mention that I as a lad was in the same office with a man of that name at Berridge and Smilax's in Mincing Lane, and this know-all answered like a shot, 'That's the man; that was Eric Geldart's father.' 'Well,' I said, 'it was very creditable in a young fellow to push his way right through to the front, having regard to his home circumstances,' and, by Jove! the man was down my throat in an instant.

"What was I referring to? Geldart's environment was just about as good a send-off as an ambitious man wanted. Well, I intimated that the man I knew had been rather unfortunate, and when last I met him he was considerably below his bottom dollar. 'Why, man,' says this talking encyclopædia, 'George Geldart was one of the warmest men on the Produce Market!' Said I, 'He may have been, though I should be very surprised to learn it, but when I met him two months ago he was on bed rock, as clean broke as any man could wish to be, and cleaner than most would care to be.'

"This chap curled up his lip and sneered visibly. 'I knew George Geldart very well indeed, dined very many times with him at his house in Bryanston Square, in fact, was there a day or two before he died.' 'Before he what?' said I. 'Died,' says he, and I answered, 'The man I mean is as alive as I am, or anyway he was an hour ago,' for a cablegram from you had been handed me half an hour previously. 'Then,' I added, 'I expect we're talking of different men, the one I mean was the son of Gabriel Geldart, the City alderman, who was in his time Lord Mayor.'

"'Exactly,' my informant replied, 'that was the Geldart I mean; his father articled him with Berridge and Smilax in Mincing Lane before he took him into his own firm. He was at Charterhouse with my own brother. I knew him well; also his two sons, one of whom went to the bad, and was cut adrift, the other is the present M.P. for Little Claverton. Why, I sent flowers to his funeral. My cousin, Dick Farningham, was one of his executors.'

"Well, I held my breath and let him ramble on. Like a good many professional liars, he got hold of one or two facts to weave in the woof of his invention. He described you fairly well, except that he made you out as a kind of type of sleek prosperity, the sort of man you might have been if you'd struck oil before I met you last time I was over here, instead of after.

"Man, he made you out a monument of sleek, snug prosperity and respectability, philanthropist, big donor to all the funds, a governor of this and a director of that, and, observing the direction of my eyes, he suddenly broke off and asked: 'What's the matter with the chandelier?' I said 'Nothing, it was the ceiling I was looking at, expecting it to fall in,' and I waltzed out on the balcony, for that man's lies absorbed all the atmosphere of that room. Hullo! Who's this?" For just then Phyllis Daventry entered the room with a bundle of papers and their typed transcription.

Stanyer followed her with a curious, wistful look in his eyes, then he whispered to Geldart, "Make her talk."

"I think you'll find those all in order," said Phyllis. "Mr. Scrimshaw is late, so I thought I'd bring them straight up to you."

"You're always very good and thoughtful," said Old Mystery. "By-the-bye, Scrimshaw tells me you are going to leave him."

"Yes," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Going to get an easier place?"

"No, Mr. Mystery, that is—well, I hope so, I mean to say," and Phyllis blushed violently. "I'm not going to another post at all, I'm—I'm going to be married and live at Upper Tooting."

"Are you really?" said Old Mystery. "Lucky Upper Tooting, how grey this dreary den will seem without your occasional visits. But who's the happy man?"

"It's Mr. Widdicombe, the *Meteor* manager," said Phyllis, a happier look than ever in her eyes.

Meantime the other man's eyes were fixed with a dilated gaze upon her hand.

"Jack Widdicombe!" exclaimed the old man. "Why my little lassie, he's nearly old enough to be your father. But that's no matter. Love laughs at years as well as locksmiths, and he'll be good and kind."

"Then you know him? I'm so glad! You must come and see us sometimes."

"I don't know, Miss Phyllis."

Stanyer clutched the table.

"But one thing I will do. See here," and he took from his pocket-book a bank-note for £500. "Money may be the root of evil, but sometimes out of evil cometh good. Even gold sometimes brings brightness, and perhaps an old man's gift may make a young woman's home a little happier. I'd like you to buy with this just what you like, and keep it to remember one who always found you gracious, and to whom your gentle words and winning ways brought peace and joy in sad and lonely days."

"Oh, Mr. Mystery!" said Phyllis, "how good you are, but this is quite a fortune, it takes away my breath! I almost wonder if I ought to accept it! It's more money than I ever thought to possess all my whole life; I don't know what to say."

"Tell me, what is your name, little girl, tell me your other name, Phyllis, and say where you got that ring!"

She turned, startled, almost alarmed by the excited tone of the stranger.

"Why, sir," she said, "this ring was my dear dead mother's. Oh! what's the matter?" for the man seemed all of a sudden turned to stone, his eyes dilated, his breath came and went in deep long spasms; he looked upon her like one transfixed.

"Your dear dead mother! Dead—dead!" he faltered; then, strong man as he was he let his head fall on his folded arms and gave way to his grief.

And in answer to the girl's inquiring gaze, Old Mystery said gently:

"This, Phyllis, is my real employer, and my friend, Mr. Frederick Stanyer."

"Stanyer!" exclaimed the girl. "Frederick Stanyer! Why—why that was my father's name!"

"Yes! yes!" said the stricken man, rising to his feet and throwing wide his arms. "Phyllis! Phyllis, at last, my dear, I've found you, come to my heart. I am your father!"

Old Mystery silently stole out of the room, leaving the reunited child and father locked in each other's arms.

He stood a moment irresolute on the staircase. How narrow as well as wide the world was! And then he heard hasty footsteps ascending the stairs and Scrimshaw, with a wild look in his face, bounded up to the landing, a newspaper in his hand.

"Old Mystery!" he cried, "look here, look here!"

And the old man, taking the paper in his trembling hand, read the headline:

THE LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS MURDER!
SENSATIONAL ARREST!

And his eye, roving down the column, caught the name of Clare Armitage.

Clare Armitage, and two other names—those of his own sons.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

It is doubtful if Eric Geldart, callous and remorseless as we know him to have been, would have been nerved to playing quite the desperate game he pursued but for one consideration, his infatuation for Madeleine Lorraine. And the fever of his passion increased with her coldnesss towards him.

Attractive and delightful as she was, there were plenty in both respects her equal whom the smart, already distinguished young politician might have won for the asking. But for these he had no eyes; it was his way, his heart once set upon an object that was hard to obtain, the more he desired it.

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Had Clare Armitage, whom at one time he thought he loved, been less easy to win he would have prized her more. She, loving him madly and blindly, had thrown herself into his arms, her swift surrender had killed his passion; and, when she stood between the man she loved so dearly and his ends, he took the life that he had blighted without remorse.

But his desire for Madeleine Lorraine had become the ruling passion of his life, therefore a double motive impelled him to his desperate course; the fearful charge against his brother not only tended to his own security, but removed a rival.

Not unnaturally an immense amount of sympathy was accorded him from all sides; even his political opponents deplored the hardships of a young man of such brilliant attainments and promise being subject to a reflected slur.

And when twelve good men and true were summoned by His Majesty's coroner to inquire into the matters touching the death of Clare Armitage, spinster, Eric Geldart, faultless in attire and appearance as his partisans declared him to be in character, faced those twelve good men and true and identified the victim without a trace of emotion.

Not even when he had looked upon that clear, cold, white, set face had he flinched. He looked upon his work, silent and unmoved, touched lightly the ice-cold brow, untroubled.

Yes! even when all of a sudden those around him noted what had not caught their eye before—a stain in the white cerements above the shoulder just where the first cruel blow had fallen. And those who saw marvelled it had not caught their eyes before, while others said the crimson was so vivid it might have been quite new.

The coroner accorded the distinguished witness all the courtesy and respect his position demanded, and the member for Little Claverton gave his evidence, seated beside the representative of the Crown.

Questioned as to whether the deceased to his knowledge had any enemies, he expressed a reluctance to answer that question. But the coroner pressed.

"Mr. Geldart," he said firmly though kindly, "I desire as far as possible in every way to spare your feelings, but in a matter of such serious import as this it is necessary to have, not only the truth and nothing but the truth, but the whole truth."

Then Eric answered that he could only call to mind one person with whom the deceased had been at variance, and when asked who that person was, a thrill of sensation and sympathy followed his reply: "It was my brother, Ronald Geldart."

And he told how when that brother had been charged by their late father with the misappropriation of a large sum of money, the testimony of the deceased had been the most damning against him; told, too, in examination how that brother had disappeared out of his family and social circle, had cut off his environment, and, when next encountered, was bearing an assumed name.

And meantime that brother, a police custodian on either side, watched every movement of Eric's face, listened to his every word. And then the coroner, addressing that self-same brother, asked:

"Ronald Harvey Geldart, you may, if you choose, give evidence concerning the matters touching this inquiry, only it is my duty to warn you that what you say may be used against you elsewhere."

"I have this to say," Ronald answered. "I met the deceased upon the night in question and I left her alive and well. So far from there being any animus between us she had that night made to me a confession of the share she had taken in as foul a conspiracy against me as ever was laid against a man." Here he faced his brother with a challenge in his eye, but even then there was no flinch in Eric's eyes.

"The story of that conspiracy," said Ronald, "is told in half a dozen words. She, herself under the persuasion, or rather, the coercion of that man—her betrayer—robbed my father, and lied, fixing the crime on me!"

And Eric Geldart, folding his arms, met the accusing gaze with one fully as defiant in its stony impassivity.

As with dogs, it sometimes is with men—give them a bad name you may almost as well hang them. And the jury in this respect did their best by, without leaving the box, returning a verdict of Wilful Murder against Ronald Harvey Geldart.

* * * * *

Lord Lynton lost all patience with his daughter.

"Why, bless my soul, girl!" he rasped out, "you've the chance of a thousand, the man's going up the ladder by leaps and bounds." And then, when the sensational news of the arrest of Harvey Bligh for the Lincoln's Inn Fields murder and the establishment of his identity with Ronald Geldart came out, Viscount Lynton pooh-poohed the idea of the matter affecting Eric.

"The world is too enlightened nowadays," he said, "to let a man suffer for the misdeeds or misfortunes of his kith or kin. Eric Geldart will maintain his position in Society, and his political career will be unchecked, even though his wretched brother goes to the scaffold."

"Oh, no! no! no!" answered Madeleine with a shudder. "They cannot bring this terrible charge home to him."

"That remains to be seen," said her father. "Certainly, as far as circumstantial evidence goes, many a man has been hanged on less."

"But," Madeleine persisted, "Ronald could never strike a woman, still less deal her that dastardly, murderous blow; his nature forbids even such a thought."

The Viscount scanned her curiously, startled at her fervour in the cause of the man accused.

"How do you know?" he asked. "I know that you were present at the arrest, unfortunately, and were, in fact, talking to the wretched fellow when the police arrived; though, happily, so far your name has been kept out of the papers. I was not aware that you were so very intimately acquainted with him, or indeed, that you had ever met him before. Eh?"

Madeleine hung her head.

"Come! Come, tell me, had you ever met him before, and when and where?" He tapped his foot impatiently.

"I have met Ronald Geldart very many times," she answered, now calmly looking him fairly in the face. "Twice he saved my life; once when the horses bolted——"

"What! Was he the fellow who stopped them and was knocked down by them for his pains. I thought that man disappeared without leaving a trace as to his identity."

"So he did; but we met again on the river." And then she told the story of the capsizing of her canoe and her rescue by Ronald.

"But why has all this been kept secret from me?" asked the Viscount, angrily and suspiciously. "Did you ever meet again between that time and the night of the arrest?"

"Yes, very many times."

"Unknown to me?"

"Yes, father. I should have told you, but you and I have lived our lives so very much apart that I hardly thought the matter would interest you."

"Whether it interested me or not, one thing is certain; it would concern me to learn that my daughter was driving and boating with a casual acquaintance of whom she knew little or nothing."

"Oh, but as Harvey Bligh, everybody knew him, answered Madeleine quickly.

"Anyway, I don't consider a scribbling fellow, even though he has acquired a certain kind of mushroom celebrity, a proper acquaintance, certainly not a proper companion for my daughter, and whatever reputation the fellow may have won under an assumed name, he's lost such as he had under the name that was his birthright; his father disinherited him for a thief."

"No! No!" cried Madeleine passionately, "that was a cruel, unjust suspicion, a foul slander it was the work of his life to refute, for he is truth itself."

(To be concluded next week.)

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THE DAILY EXPRESS 1D. ½

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A One Sided Love Affair.

"H. S." is acquainted with a girl who is very fond of him. He feels that he cannot return her love, as he is not fond enough of her. On several occasions she has been quite indifferent to him. The girl herself made the first advances in the acquaintance. How can "H. S." explain his position without causing trouble?

* * * * *

"H. S." should gradually drop his meetings with the girl, and try to cause her to forget him. As long as he continues seeing her, he will exercise a fascination which is difficult to drive away. Above all, he should avoid giving her the impression that he returns her love, as that way lies a broken heart.

Free Trade in Flirtations.

"LAST year," writes "G. S.," "I made the acquaintance of a nice boy, who showed me a good deal of attention. I have been for several walks with him, but am told he keeps up the acquaintance of other girls. Shall I speak to him about it, or let the matter drop?"

* * * * *

You must wait until he makes some kind of declaration of love for you, "G. S." before you can dictate to him as to what other girls he sees. He may be merely cultivating your friendship, and can scarcely be expected to drop his other friends on that account. It is not right for a girl to expect a young man, whom she only knows so slightly, to give himself entirely to her.

A Case of Cooling Off.

"A YEAR ago I made the acquaintance of a young lady," writes "CHANGEABLE," "of whom I grew very fond. She returned my affection. About two months after our meeting I grew cool to her, and lost my love. Later on I asked her to break off our friendship, which she agreed to do, without being very sorry. I was told, however, that she seemed very cut up about it. She also said she would be always willing to 'make it up again,' but that she could never love me as before. As I still have a certain liking for her would you advise me to attempt a reconciliation?"

* * * * *

I always advise reconciliations between parted friends, and do so in the case of "CHANGEABLE." As to whether or not you resume your intimate relations, must depend on how things turn out after your fresh meetings. If you find that you remain cool to each other, then you should agree that the intimacy had better stop. I suppose a man can be on friendly terms with a girl without committing himself to an engagement.

Is It Trespassing?

"R. A. W." writes: "I am in love with a young girl, but, unfortunately, she is already keeping company with a young fellow. As she does not see much of him, I am very often with her, and believe she would certainly go with me if it were not for him. Is it right for me to meet her in the present circumstances? If not, could you advise me what to do?"

* * * * *

Ask the girl herself whether the course is clear for you to meet her, and tell her you do not wish to do anything to disturb her relations with the other fellow. She should be the judge. If she is not actually engaged to him, she must have the right to say whether or not she prefers your society to his.

A Sweetheart's Family.

"GUSSIE'S" sweetheart belongs to a large family. He finds it very difficult to visit her home and to get a few words in private with her. There is always some younger sister or brother to talk to, and her father persists in boring "GUSSIE" with politics or stocks. How can he act under such circumstances?

* * * * *

It is pretty clear that "GUSSIE" is not going the right way to work to make a good impression on his sweetheart's family. It is a great blunder in courtship to make out that the girl alone is the only person in the family worthy of notice. This inclines the other members to put the couple down as tedious young turtle-doves. If "GUSSIE" wishes to be on good terms with the family he should be as nice as possible to young brothers and sisters. They are very good friends in need, as many a young man has found before now. He might, too, talk politics for awhile with her father without doing himself any harm. Fathers, above all, like to think their daughters are engaged to intelligent young men. Besides, "GUSSIE" should remember that any neglect or slight offered by him to his sweetheart's people would be very galling to her. When a girl has to choose between her sweetheart and her family, it is not always the former that wins the victory.

A Bloodthirsty Sweetheart.

"F. E. W. S." writes: "I am engaged to a girl, but she knows somebody else. When we have any little squabble, she throws the other fellow's name in my face. The other day I told her I should not pay any more money into her club, and that she must pay for her own dresses. She turned on me, punched me in the mouth and chest, and left scratches and bruises on my arm. Her father seems to have no control over her. I have asked her to return my engagement ring, but she refuses to do so until she has found someone more 'suitable.' Can I claim the ring back and break off the engagement without being sued for breach of promise?"

* * * * *

You seem to have got hold of a woman who could not possibly make a desirable wife. As you are engaged to her I cannot advise you to break off the match without her consent. But you can let the engagement slide, and drop all communications with her. As to her returning your ring, you cannot compel that, but it is to be hoped that, when she sees that you have done with her, she will do so. In the event of breach of promise proceedings, I do not think the girl would have a case, if what you tell me about her conduct is true. I hope she will succeed in finding someone more "suitable" for her gentle affections.

Cynthia.

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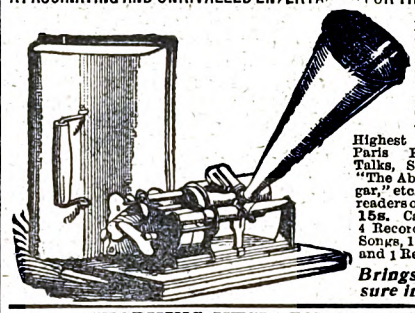

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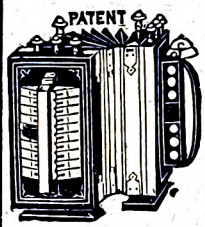

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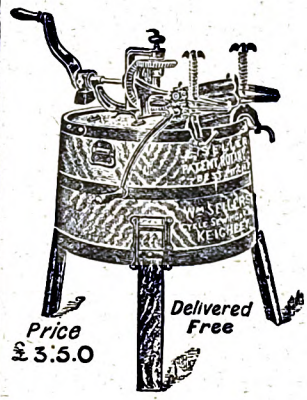

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 773.] Week Ending October 24th, 1903. [One Penny.

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, who is the relater of these experiences, found employment as a typine in the firm of Messrs. Templeton and Co., General Agents. The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. They treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman. The latter was by profession a doctor, but as he lacked the capital to start a practice in England, he had accepted the post of medical attendant to an old school friend, who was travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, and was at present in Nice. Noel had been brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, and had excellent prospects, but he incurred the displeasure of the Baronet when he fell in love with Miss Gillespie, and Sir Francis refused to have anything more to do with him. Mr. Templeton assured Sara that he thought Noel had been very hardly treated, and suggested that the best thing for him to do would be to return; and he would see whether he could not obtain a practice for him.

Then one day Noel entered the office unexpectedly, and told his love he had had a wire from his cousin Herbert, saying that Sir Francis was not expected to live long. He had hastened from Nice in order to get his uncle's forgiveness before his death. Sara and he then drove straight to the Baronet's house, only to find that he had already passed away, and that Herbert was now holder of the title. In his will Noel's uncle had bequeathed him a thousand pounds, and with this he intended to buy a practice to which Mr. Templeton had recommended him. One evening Noel and Sara paid a visit to Sir Herbert, and learnt from him that he had insured his life in favour of Templeton and Co. for fifteen thousand pounds. Just as they were leaving Sir Herbert's valet entered, and, with a cry of amazement, Sara asserted that he was Harrington Shackell, one of her employers.

The two men ridiculed the idea, and assured her that the likeness could be but a chance one; they explained that Shackell had a moustache, whereas the valet was clean shaven.

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With this explanation Miss Gillespie had to remain content. The following day Noel received a telegram summoning him back to Nice, and in order that he should be able to buy the practice in question, he gave the thousand pounds to Mr. Templeton, and signed a document authorising the firm to deal for him. By a piece of trickery, the senior partner converted this document into one authorising the firm to deal *with his whole estate.*

In the afternoon Sara overheard Templeton and Rigby Starr talking, and their words aroused her suspicions. She understands that Noel is heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of Sir Herbert having no children, and realises that, should Sir Herbert die, the firm has sole control of her lover's estate.

Just then Harrington Shackell entered, and she was shocked to hear him announce that Sir Herbert Masterman was dead—murdered by him, his valet! So, after all, her suspicion had been only too well grounded! Then, little by little, she heard the diabolical plot against her lover unfolded, and also the hint that she herself was in danger, as she was the only one the murderers had to fear, and they intended that they should run no risks whatever.

Then she resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document.

She crouched back behind the door.

The three plotters were all too engrossed in their schemes to notice her, so she crept carefully and slowly out of her hiding place, and across the room.

Gradually she came within reach of the precious papers.

She dared not hesitate.

Blindly she snatched the notes, clutched the document.

Then, when too late, the men espied her. With a shriek she rushed across the room, turning over chairs and tables in her flight. One of the villains threw a stick at her, and struck her.

In the nick of time she reaches the door and slams it in the face of her pursuers, locking it on the outside.

Then she fled. Down the long corridor she tore, and into the street.

You will read of what befell her at Bedford in the following pages.

Week by week Miss Gillespie will continue her narrative.

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THIS WEEK'S EPISODE.

In Peril at Bedford.

I HAVE no clear recollection of leaving the building in which the offices of Templeton & Co. were situated. I was so shaken by the suspense, the terror, of the last half hour, that I was able to obey one instinct only—that of flight. A hurried rush down crowded streets, jostled by the throng that filled the pavements pushed now to one side, now to another, I found myself at length at the Bank of England, one of a stream of pedestrians waiting for a 'bus.

As yet I had formed no plans of what to do, where to go, to avoid pursuit. My mind was concentrated on the packet of bank notes clutched firmly in my hand, together with the paper which gave Templeton the power to use my lover's fortune as he pleased. One thing was certain. I dared not return to my lodgings. That would be the first place likely to be searched and the last in which I must be found. I must seek out a spot remote from London, with people of whom I had not spoken at the office.

At this moment an omnibus for The Angel, Islington, drew up. My lodgings were in Brixton, it would, therefore, be quite safe to journey in the opposite direction, to the north of London. I scrambled to the top and secured a seat close to the driver. Then, but not till then, I found some measure of quiet and self-control. Rapidly I ran over a list of acquaintances likely to help me. I must secure a hiding-place where I could remain in safety until Noel should return to England. I racked my brain in vain for some long time until there flashed across my mind the recollection of a girl whom I had known at school. She was my senior by some years, and had secured an appointment as a teacher in the High School at Bedford. Her name was Ellen Hartley. As I remembered her she was a person of decided character and with plenty of commonsense. She would appreciate the difficulties of my position and assist me to remain in hiding till Noel returned.

I decided to start for Bedford that same night. To that end I changed my omnibus at The Angel for one going in the direction of St. Pancras Station. It was just on eight o'clock when I reached the Midland Terminus. The next train to Bedford did not start till 8.40. I had over half an hour to wait. Rapidly glancing round to see if I were followed, I made my way to the station telegraph office, and sent a wire to Noel at his hotel at Nice to this effect: "Imperative you return to England at once—most urgent. Reply to Bedford Post Office.—SARA."

This done I went to the refreshment room and forced myself to eat some excessively dry sandwiches for support upon my journey. I waited there until the last moment, hurrying through the barrier just as the train was going to start. A last look up the platform as we steamed out of the station revealed a tall figure running towards the gate waving a frantic appeal after the retreating train. For an awful moment I thought that it was Shackleton, and fell back into my seat sick with fear. If they should stop the train! I saw myself hauled out of the carriage, conveyed to the nearest police station charged with theft! I clutched the bank notes tightly and crouched back into my corner. Thank Heaven we were off. The platform out of sight, London fast receding, Templeton & Co.—behind.

The carriage was empty for nearly the whole way. At Luton, however, an old man and his daughter got in. They addressed some casual would-be friendly remarks to me, but I was too nervous to respond, and murmured some incoherent reply that must have conveyed the impression I was mentally deficient. There were no further stoppages until we arrived at Bedford. The train was late, it was past ten by the time we reached our destination.

I was worn out with stress of emotion, and felt terribly cold and wretched as I stumbled on to the platform. It was too late to attempt to find Ellen Hartley that night; I must defer my search for her until the next morning. Meanwhile I must obtain a lodging for the night. I was afraid to ask the porters if they could tell me of a hotel, for I wished to leave no clue by which I could be traced. I left the station and wandered through the ill-lit streets round about until I found myself in the Midland Road. The County Theatre, brightly illuminated, revealed the burly form of a policeman.

Taking heart of grace, I asked for the principal thoroughfare of the town.

"Keep straight on, and you'll come to the High Street," was the reply, so to the High Street I turned my steps.

It is a picturesque thoroughfare leading to the river at one end and a fine avenue of trees the other, but I had no opportunity of admiring its beauties that night. The shops for the most part were closed, but a confectioner, of the name of Norman, still showed a glimmer of gas in the window. I ventured inside the door.

"Could you recommend me a nice quiet hotel?" I faltered, and seemed to feel the girl's sharp eyes go through me.

"There's The Swan," she began, "but," she paused, her glance took in my pale face and drooping figure, noted my absence of luggage, and grew suspicious.

"Thanks very much," I murmured, and bolted back into the street. I found The Swan without much difficulty. A tall square building fronting the High Street, its side windows looked on the embankment of the river Ouse. The hall looked bright and cheery through the swing doors and spoke of comfort within. It was a large place and I felt doubtful as to the wisdom of staying there. And yet, what else could I do? Past ten o'clock in a strange town, beset by fears, tired in body and in mind, I felt I must at all costs secure a good night's rest.

I made my way down the long hall to the office. A pleasant-looking woman attended to my request for a room, and anticipating her inquiry for my luggage, I boldly stated that my bag had been left behind!

"The porter forgot to put it in the carriage," I said without blushing. "It will be sent after me to-morrow."

No further demur was made, and having registered my name as "Brown," the chambermaid led the way up several flights of stairs and along a corridor to room No. 29. I ordered some supper, and, drawing a comfortable chair before the open window, gazed out into the night.

There was a bright moon, and in the soft light the river, which the room overlooked, shone like silver. The tiny waves lapped the shore with a swish-swish infinitely soothing. The trees rustled gently in the wind; over the water, across the straggling branches was borne the echo of the church clock chiming some sweet, old-fashioned melody to mark the hour. It was "The Blue Bells of Scotland," and the refrain brought an ache to my heart, called up an unutterable longing for my boy. "It was oh in my heart that I wished him safe at home"!

Bedford Post Office, at which the reply to Sara's telegram was called for by one of her pursuers.

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I ate the cold beef brought for my refreshment, and then having locked the door and bolted the window, took the packet of bank notes from my dress, and sat down to consider what was best to do with them—and the all-important paper Noel had signed.

I had of my own money some five pounds in my purse, ample, as I then thought, to keep me until Noel came back. If I had known all that was to happen—the weary time that I should have to wait, the risk that I should have to run—before he came, I doubt if I should have had the courage to fight on. As it was I comforted myself with the belief that at most I should not have to wait longer than two days—perhaps a week, no more. And then a step down the corridor sent the blood rushing from my heart, and brought me shuddering to the door. Had they found me, was it the police come to arrest me as a thief, a thief who had stolen notes to the value of £1,000?

The steps passed on. I drew a sigh of relief, and once more bent my mind to the task in hand. It was folly to carry the notes about with me. If I were captured by one of the firm the prize would be ready to their hand. And yet, where could I deposit such an amount in safety? I dare not open a banking account, in all probability the numbers of the missing notes would be circulated throughout the country by the next day. I, and I alone could guard them. I decided to cut the notes in halves, keep ten halves myself, and deposit the remaining ten next morning in the cloak-room of the railway station. By this means if the enemy secured me they would still be at a loss for the money. The paper which Noel had signed—the power of attorney as Templeton had called it—was a different matter.

For a moment I considered the advisability of tearing it up. Without the paper, the firm would do nothing injurious to Noel, but then I remembered the document was the sole proof of my innocence. Without it I should stand condemned as a thief, who had stolen the notes in a most audacious manner. The possession of the paper justified my action and my flight. At all costs I must keep it. I slept with the previous document under my pillow and next morning stitched it in the bodice of my dress. Come what would it should not be taken from me while I lived.

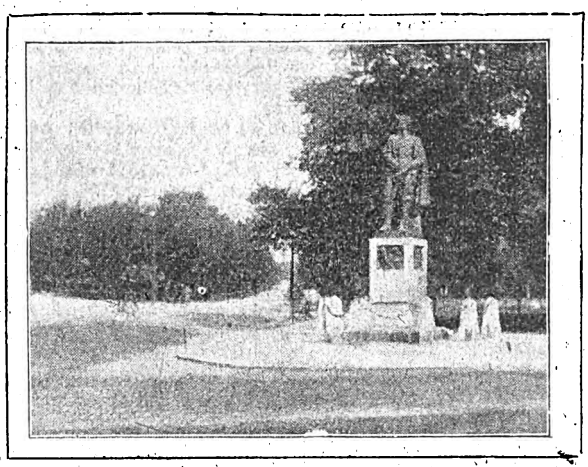
I fell asleep towards the morning, and woke to find the sunshine streaming across my face. It was an exquisite day, and, when after a comfortable breakfast I went out into the town, I felt, despite the forebodings of the previous night, despite the fears that even now assailed me, that in the end all would come right. The High Street looked its best that bright September morning. The shops with their air of quiet prosperity, the old-world atmosphere, that clings like a perfume to the quaint town—which even the electric light cannot bring up to date—combined to raise my spirits.

I found my way to the station and deposited the little packet of notes, or rather half notes, at the cloak-room, and gave the man implicit instructions not to deliver it to anyone but myself even if they produced the necessary ticket. From the station I retraced my steps to a shop in Silver Street that combined a sale of chemicals with that of bags and fancy goods.

I purchased a small portmanteau, and crossing the road, completed my shopping at "Dust's" in High Street, and had the bag and its contents sent to my hotel.

By this time it was close on ten o'clock. It would be too early, I decided, to go to the post-office and inquire for Noel's telegram. It was better not to call there until I felt certain the wire had arrived. If Templeton and Co. had traced me to Bedford, the post-office would be one of the first places at which they would inquire. Unfortunately my red hair would make my identification an easy matter. If I had only known my over-caution was to prove my ruin. With the trick in my hands I gave the game away!

It came upon me as a shock when I arrived at the High School to find it closed. I had forgotten it was the vacation, though unconsciously I had noted the absence of the troops of the bright-faced boys and girls which Ellen had declared were always to be seen about the town. The playground



Bunyan's Statue, Bedford, where Sara first saw the nurse who deceived her.

was deserted, the big iron gates locked; silence reigned supreme.

As I turned to leave, the name and address of the caretaker caught my attention:

GEORGE FRYATT,
Rosslyn,
Hartingdon Street.

As an official of the establishment he would doubtless know the address of the teachers, and he could tell me where Ellen would be found. With some difficulty I found Hartingdon Street, and after a long search among two-storeyed dwellings of small size but pretentious names, unearthed *Rosslyn*. Mr. Fryatt was a broad-shouldered, easy-tempered person, with a heavy moustache, not nearly so high and mighty as the name of his habitation. He could give me no information, moreover, as to Ellen's whereabouts. Miss Hartley was no longer at the High School, and so far as he knew, not in Bedford. The news came upon me as a thunderclap; dazed and despairing, I turned towards the High Street once again. I glanced at the shops, butcher, baker, grocer—surely some of them must know the name of Hartley. Ellen had lived some time in Bedford, with her mother, the widow of an officer. It was impossible all trace of her could be lost. Nevertheless, I pursued my questions in vain, and cross-examined stationers, boot-makers, and milliners, to no purpose, until with a flash of inspiration I entered the stores at the corner of Dame Alice Street, rejoicing in the name of Dudeney and Johnston.

"They had served Miss Hartley and her mother for some time, in fact up to the end of June. Their house was at the top of De Pary's Avenue, on the left-hand side going to the park. One of the prettiest houses in the row, with carefully kept flower-garden, impossible to mistake it."

Thanking the assistant for his information I hastened to follow his direction. As I came out of the stores, the sun, shining on the Avenue, lit up the statue of John Bunyan with a sudden radiance. Preoccupied as I was, the beauty of the figure against its background of leafy trees came home to me. With face upturned to the sky the great Pilgrim stood, "pleading with men," urging with eyes and hand.

I wondered as I gazed if Bunyan had ever felt so much afraid and perplexed as I. The powers and principalities of Darkness arrayed against me could never have seemed so terrible to him. And yet he had been to gaol, here in this town. And at the thought and all that it suggested, I shivered, despite the sunshine.

Others beside me seemed attracted by the statue that morning. A young fair-haired woman, dressed as a hospital nurse, was reading the inscription on the pedestal. At her side stood a slim, dark fellow with a good-looking, eager face.

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I fancied they were lovers, and remembered Noel, with a thrill of envy. The next minute the pretty smiling face had darkened, something her companion said seemed to distress her, she flushed, then put her handkerchief to her eyes, and moved into the shadow.

Poor girl! I thought, and took an instinctive dislike to the young man for vexing her. Later I changed my opinion.

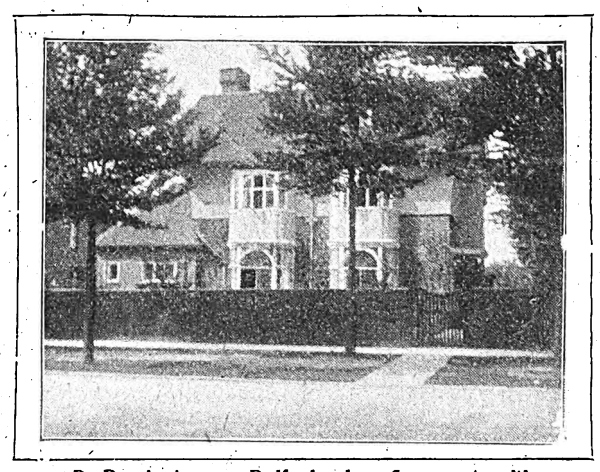
My mind was full of Noel as I walked up the Avenue, and I seemed to reach the house, described to me as Ellen's, very quickly. The garden was bright with flowers, the windows daintily curtained. It was a pleasant place, and my pulse quickened at the thought that I might find in it a haven.

Up the broad, gravelled path to a prettily-porched door where a maid-servant answered my summons.

"Miss Hartley? She left here some months ago. I couldn't tell you her address at all, I did hear she'd gone abroad."

That and that alone was all the information she could give me! The friend on whom I had relied for help was gone. The refuge I had hoped to gain was lost. I loathed the sunshine; as I walked down the garden path the roses were hateful to me, the brightness of the morning hurt me.

For the first time I realised how hopeless was the struggle on which I had embarked. How could I, a young, inexperienced girl, hope to defeat three of the boldest and most unscrupulous criminals of the day? If only Noel would wire to me—I glanced wistfully down the Avenue towards the post-office. No, it was still too early to inquire for the telegram. It was not yet half-past ten, he would only just have arrived in Nice. I must wait a little longer.



De Pary's Avenue, Bedford, where Sara meets with a bitter disappointment.

From the Avenue I found my way into the Park. The gates stood invitingly open, I caught a glimpse of cool, green trees, and longing for a place in which to sit and rest I crossed the Park and walked over the grass, to where, against a leafy clump of crab-apple a seat was placed invitingly. The shouts of the boys and girls sounded in the distance, the cries of the children at play faded to a pleasant hum. I leant back and closed my eyes, and for a little while I must have slept.

When I awoke, someone was sitting beside me. It was the nurse whom I had seen by Bunyan's statue. She was even prettier than I had thought, with dainty pink and white complexion, and soft, fair hair, parted on a low broad brow. She was no longer crying, but there was a wistful look on her face, and the sensitive lips quivered.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked impulsively. "I mean, can I do anything to help you? You must forgive my asking, but——"

"It's very good of you to care," she answered in a husky sort of voice, "and I'm grateful to you for speaking. You see"—she turned towards me with a sudden appeal—"it's dreadful to be all alone when one's in trouble. I don't know a soul in this place. There's not a person here to care whether I live or die. I'm nursing a cross-grained old woman, who grudges me a moment away from her bedside. And, and"—here the handkerchief came into requisition and the pretty face was distorted with sobs. "I've had dreadful news," she, gasped, "my sweetheart's ill, and I can't go to him. My brother told me this morning. He came over from Elstow to let me know."

"Where is your sweetheart?" I asked, full of sympathy.

"In London, he's down with diphtheria. The people he's living with wired to my brother who came to tell me. You see, I'm so poor I daren't throw up my nursing engagement, and Dick is as badly off as I am."

It seemed a sorry story, and such comfort as I could give unavailing. However, I recounted all the instances I could recall of people who had recovered from the complaint, and my stories seemed to have a reviving effect. She talked more brightly, her cheeks grew pink, her eyes sparkled, and once or twice she laughed in a quick, excited sort of fashion, that struck me as peculiar.

"It's done me good to see you," she said at last, "I feel ever so much more hopeful about Dick. You don't look very well yourself, dear, are you in pain? I notice you keep pressing your hand to your heart."

I flushed crimson and wished my new-found friend had not been so observant. The notes were concealed in my bodice and in nervous apprehension at their loss my hand stole now and again to my side to reassure myself of their safety.

"It's nothing much, thank you," I answered, and rose to take my departure.

"Sha'n't I see you again, dear?" she asked. "I'm off duty this evening; I wish you'd meet me and go for a walk. It's beautiful by the river. I'll be at the Suspension Bridge some time between eight and nine. I shall hope to see you. Anyway," she pressed my hand warmly, "I sha'n't forget your kindness. Good-bye."

I left her on the seat, her slim figure outlined against the green of the crab-apple trees behind. The echo of her laugh came after me; mocking, scornful, it reminded me of somebody, though whom I could not think. It gave me a creepy sensation to hear her. There was something—unpleasant, almost evil in the sound. And yet who could associate evil with so pretty a creature? She was so simple, so innocent. She had not asked my name nor displayed any curiosity concerning me; only that one question, why did I press my hand to my heart? And that was surely explained by the fact of her profession.

From the park I went to the post-office.

I arrived in Dame Alice Street flushed and out of breath. Trembling with agitation I could hardly control my voice as I put the all important question:

"Is there a telegram addressed to 'Gillespie'?"

The clerk, a short, clean-shaven man with a sharp face and peering eyes glanced at me suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"My name is Gillespie—Sara Gillespie," I answered.

"Have you any proof of that?"

"Proof?" I gazed at him, it was so foolish, so ridiculous a thing to be asked for a proof that I was—myself.

"Come," he said brusquely, "I've no time to waste. Have you any letters or documents to show you are the person you state yourself to be?"

The blood rushed to my cheeks.

"I only came here last night," I stammered, "but—but—I can tell you from whom the telegram is coming. It is from Nice, from a gentleman named Noel Masterman. It is of the utmost importance. It is life and death. I swear that I am Sara Gillespie. For Heaven's sake give me the telegram." And I stretched out my hand imploringly.

At the very moment when I had uttered my name, a woman

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standing at my side uttered an exclamation. I turned and recognised her as the manageress of The Swan.

"I thought you said your name was Brown," she said coldly. "You registered it as Brown, at all events."

"I thought as much," said the clerk. "Look here," he leant across the counter, bringing his face level with my own, "I don't want to get you into trouble, but unless you are careful, I sha'n't be able to avoid it. The telegram you speak of was given to a young lady some half hour ago. She told me that another person was likely to call and claim it, and that I was to be careful not to give that person any information. To be plain, she said you were an impostor, and——" He glanced at the woman next to me, "it's pretty clear you are. The lady gave proof she was the rightful owner of the telegram, that she was the Gillespie referred to in the address. Now," he motioned towards the door, "you'd better go before you make matters any worse. Make haste, Miss—Brown," and he laughed derisively.

For a moment the full significance of what he said did not come home to me. I stared at him stupidly, blankly. Then, as the hideousness of what had happened became clear, I broke into pleading, protestations, threats. I clambered wildly for my rights, sobbed out Heaven knows what prayers, what revilings, until, worn out with emotion and realising at last the futility of all requests, I left the office and wandered weeping and half distraught about the town.

How they stared at me, the people in the High Street! Elderly gentlemen with the unmistakable air of Army officers surveyed me sternly, pretty young girls, gazing in the fascinating hat and bonnet shops, regarded me askance. I did not heed them, I paid no regard to looks and comments, but hurried on, my brain surging with hate, my blood on fire for revenge.

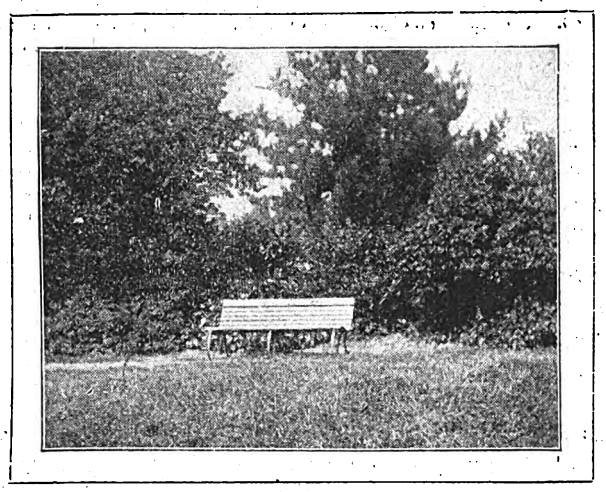
What could I do, what was there left for me to do? Templeton & Co. had outwitted me.

I lost a precious hour before reason suggested the only possible method of repairing a mistake The firm had obtained possession of Noel's wire and had doubtless replied to it. There was a bare chance that by sending another telegram I might counteract the effect of the bogus one already dispatched. Buoyed up with fresh hope, I hastened to the Midland Station, and dispatched a message to my lover from the railway office. I urged him to take no notice of any other wires he might receive, but to come back at once. The address I furnished this time was that of a stationer in the Midland Road, named Sawyer. I had already interviewed him and obtained his promise to receive all communications addressed to "Sara" at the cost of a penny each.

This done I felt a little calmer, and by the time I had been for a long tramp, my nerves were once more under control. I felt weak and hungry, and remembering a certain Oriental café I had noticed by the post office, I made for Dame Alice Street, and passed through its hospitable portals.

A large pleasant room with Japanese screens and curtains which formed convenient alcoves for small tea parties of three and four, the place was crammed with people. The food was dainty, and the waitress, a pretty, dark-haired damsel with bright eyes and shining teeth, soft footed, and tactful. She moved my table into a quiet corner, and asked me nicely if I were tired. Just a few words, but in my soreness of heart and bitterness of spirit, they comforted me. I shall always think of the dark-haired waitress at the Oriental café with kindness.

High Street, Bedford. The Swan Hotel, where Sara stayed, is on the right.



The seat in the park where Sara slept, worn out with fatigue and worry.

Tea over, I hastened back to Sawyers, and inquired if my anxiously expected wire had come.

"Not yet," was the answer, and the same reply greeted my further application an hour later.

Tired to death I felt unable longer to keep up. My limbs would not support me, I felt that if I did not rest I should utterly collapse. With the courage of despair I went back to The Swan, though after the scene at the post office, I half-feared they would demur. Nothing was said, however, and I went up to my room and flung myself on the bed, craving for rest.

Here at least I was safe, the door was locked, the key in my hand. Templeton and Co. could not break in upon me. The next time I went down the street, one of the firm might capture me, but for the present I was secure. And yet the apprehension that even now one of them might be watching The Swan on my account prevented me from rest. The feeling was so strong upon me that I started to my feet, and, opening the window, looked down on the embankment.

The river lay cool and pleasant in the fading light of the afternoon. There were a few loiterers upon the landing-stage watching the boats come in, and a trap drawn by a powerful-looking grey was drawn up just opposite my window. The driver bending down was speaking to someone in the street. Then a stout man in a black suit clambered into the vehicle. There was something familiar about the cut of his frock coat, and I caught a gleam of shirt front that sent my heart into my throat.

The next moment fear became certainty. The man turned in his seat and glanced towards the window—glanced at me! And in that glance I recognised the senior partner, Richard Templeton. I drew back from the window and half fainting fell on my knees upon the floor.

He had seen me, I felt sure of that. Was he going to take me now, send for the police at once to arrest me? Or would he wait awhile? Sooner or later he would put out his smooth, white hand and clutch me in its cruel grasp. When? That was the question. How long before—before? My lips moved convulsively.

"He shall not take me!" I murmured, "he shall not take me."

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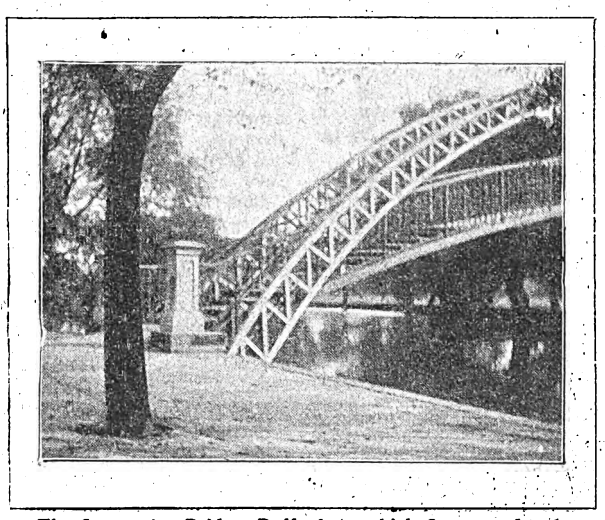
I rose to my feet and gazed from the window. Had Templeton been there, God knows what rash and awful thing I might have done. I was mad at the moment, and with terror and suspense. But I searched the river front in vain for his portly figure. He had gone—for the moment I was saved.

But only for the moment. He might return at any instant and find me in The Swan. The instinct of flight was strong upon me. I would leave Bedford, and take refuge in one of the big Midland cities. I would go now, at once. Even as I reached the door I remembered that I dare not go until I had an answer to my telegram. I must know where Noel was, what he meant to do. It was time now to call again at the shop in the Midland Road and ask for the wire. I glanced up and down the corridor, craned my head over the broad staircase. The sound of voices, the jingle of plates and glasses, rose from the hall. It was the dinner hour. At that moment perhaps my enemies were in the dining-room waiting for me.

I cautiously descended the stairs, pausing in the middle of the flight. A tall, broad-shouldered figure standing with his back towards me at the bar, filled me with fresh fear. It was Templeton himself!

For a moment I stood irresolute. If he turned and saw me—the game was up. If I retraced my steps and sought again the refuge of my room, it did but delay the evil hour. Some time or other I must leave my shelter, and fall into his hands. My brain worked quickly. I saw and seized the one chance of escape.

With a quick drawn breath, I sped lightly down the few remaining stairs, and slowly, cautiously walked down the long hall to the swing doors which led to liberty. I did not hurry, the least sign of haste I felt would betray me. The lights of the town twinkled in the distance. It seemed as though I never should reach those two glass doors. The last few steps my courage failed. I ran the short distance yet remaining, ran from the place, and never stopped until I reached the Midland Road.



The Suspension Bridge, Bedford, to which Sara was lured.

"No wire?" I asked, my voice trembling with agitation. "Are you sure, please look again, you may have made a mistake? It is so—so terribly important."

"There's no telegram or letter either," said the man, "perhaps it will come later."

Perhaps! If not, what was there left for me to do? I had escaped Templeton once, but I might never have such luck again. My only hope of avoiding capture at his hands was to leave Bedford then and there, and yet by doing this, I cut off all communication with Noel. I could not leave until I had heard from him. If I could find a safe place in which to hide, I would run the risk of remaining for a little while at least. Yet where could I find a refuge? In this strange town I was helpless, not a creature would stretch out a hand to my assistance.

Unless it was the nurse I'd met that morning. I recalled her pretty face and gentle manner. She had thanked me for my sympathy, perhaps if I told her something of my troubles she would try to help me, give me a hiding-place for to-night at least. It was a slender chance, but I was desperate and ready to pluck at straws.

It wanted but a few minutes to eight when I reached the Suspension Bridge. The embankment was deserted, the river lay cold and grey under a sullen sky, across the water came the rushing of the weir. It was a lonely spot, at that hour, on a dull night like this not a soul was to be seen. The promenade, with its leafy trees, thronged with pleasure-seekers on a summer evening, was desolate and still. The lights from the houses standing back from the road were the only sign of human presence. And the houses seemed very far away. I crossed the bridge, and, standing in the middle, on the apex of the arch, searched either shore for a sign of the fair-haired nurse.

The water rushed over the weir, the wind sighed among the branches. I shivered, and as St. Paul's chimed the half-hour, and still she had not come, the greyness of the river crept into my soul.

Fearful of turning back, afraid to go on, I leant against the column at the foot of the bridge and waited in the silence of the night.

It might have been half an hour later when I heard a soft footfall across the path. A low, curious laugh sounded close beside me, a hand was laid on my arm.

"You dear thing," said a voice—the nurse's voice, "have you waited for me all this time, how good of you!"

She looked very fresh, altogether charming in her neat costume of brown, and the slight feeling of uneasiness that had inspired me that morning vanished as her big blue eyes met mine.

"You are tired and cold," she said caressingly, "and I believe you are in trouble. You comforted me this morning, it's my turn to play consoler now. You must tell me what's worrying you. Let's find a quiet spot where we can talk undisturbed."

It struck me that the place where we were standing was as quiet, not to say remote, as could be desired. But I yielded to the suggestion, and linking her arm in mine, the nurse and I turned in the direction of Newnham Bridge.

The silence grew denser, the darkness more profound. The rushing of the weir, which alone broke the stillness of the night, sounded ominous.

"Let us stay here," I said, pointing to a seat, "I don't care to go any farther. If I'm to tell you my troubles I'd better begin at once. Otherwise you may not have time to hear my tale."

"I haven't to go back for another hour," she answered, "let us go a little farther, dear, and we shall be quite undisturbed. Oh, I know it looks quiet enough here, but there are always a lot of loiterers on the embankment. I prefer to talk where I'm sure of not being overheard."

She laughed as she spoke, and the sound sent a shudder through me. I felt a sudden fear of this fair-haired, sweet-faced woman, and was half-inclined to return and run the risk of meeting Templeton. Even as the thought crossed my mind, she tightened her hold upon my arm and hurried me along the narrow path. The water here seemed very deep; the river, cold and clear beneath the sullen sky, must hold many a strange, dark secret in its keeping. Overhead the trees bent their boughs shivering in the night wind.

The nurse and I were quite alone!

By this time we had reached the end of the embankment and arrived at Newnham Bridge. Lonely and most romantic of spots, the scene of lovers' meetings, vows, farewells! Here,

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at this tree that overhangs the water, if legend is to be believed, long, long ago, a sister from a neighbouring convent kept a fatal tryst with a cavalier, who stole her heart away. There, so the story goes, the mother abbess traced them and, rather than brave the church's ban, the unhappy sister jumped into the river and found quiet in its cold depths.

Lonely it was, aye, very lonely. Strange whispers came from the trees, faint murmurs rose from the water.

"One moment, dear," said the nurse. "I've dropped my handkerchief. I must run back and find it."

I watched her down the path until she disappeared among the trees. Then, fascinated with the quiet of the place, the strangeness of the scene, I dropped upon the grass that grows right to the river's brink, and, leaning my head upon my hand, rested against the trunk of the wide-spreading tree that stands within a few yards of the bridge.

The rushing of the weir made music in the distance. Strange how the sound fascinated me. The water was deep, deep at my feet—how terrible a death to drown in that limpid stream.

I recalled with a shudder the tale that I had heard, how only a few days back, playing with his little girl in the recreation ground across the bridge, a man had tripped and fallen into the river. And so deep the water was, so treacherous its current, that he was borne away out of sight, out of the ken of those he loved. The band had been playing, the people had been laughing as he fell—and no one knew.

It was a terrible death to die. I shivered nervously, and watched anxiously for the figure of my new found friend.

The mist rising from the water enveloped me, I could not distinguish a yard before my hand. I scrambled to my feet and called.

"Where are you, nurse? Nurse, where are you?"

No answer, only a faint rustle in the bushes, no answer. Dear Heaven, what is it?

A hand at my throat, a grip of iron round my waist.

"Help! Help!" I shriek. But the shriek dies into a moan as the relentless fingers tighten. A rift in the clouds above casts a gleam of light upon the path.

"The nurse!" I gasp. "The nurse!" And then the truth breaks in upon me. With cloak streaming in the wind, bonnet thrown aside, I see the face, the figure of my assailant. Not the nurse, not the sweet-voiced, fair-faced woman, but Rigby Starr. Starr, the most cunning, the most unscrupulous of the partners.

I cannot call, my voice is strangled in my throat. Closer he grips and closer, urging me nearer to the water's edge.

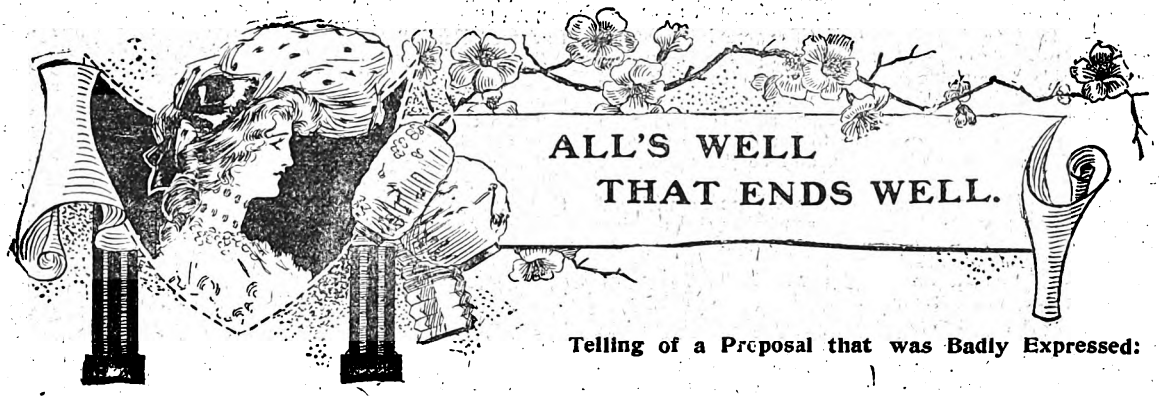
The river and the sky meet in a grey infinity; the swaying branches stretch into mocking fingers, pointing to my doom. I feel his hand upon my heart.

"The papers," he hisses, tearing at my bodice, "the papers—or——"

The ground slips from beneath my feet, the cruel waters hunger to lap my face. I strive with all the strength, the desperation of despair to keep him off, but I am helpless in his hands. Slowly but surely he forces me back. A wild desire for life, for love battles within me. I fight desperately, vainly against death.

The river closes over me, I am falling—drowning—lost!

(Another Episode next week.)



Telling of a Proposal that was Badly Expressed:

Roy Manville and Daphne Ellesmere sat together in Lady Cazenove's conservatory. The murmur of fountains was in the air, and each little spray rose from its white marble basin like a quivering column of mother-of-pearl, rose-tinted by the soft-shaded, ruby lamps that hung above. Tall, broad palms spread their cool, green leaves, gracefully drooping at the tips, from sap-scented stems that rose up out of the moist mould in which they were bedded. The scent of orchids was wafted between the leaves of fern and palm, and the singing of birds in an invisible aviary made music more harmonious than even the brilliant orchestra in the distant ball-room.

Beauty such as this—soft, subdued, harmonious—is perhaps the most subtle and ravishing of all. Giving wing to one's imagination, it might have been just such a spot as this where, in the first beginning of all things, Romance had been cradled and nurtured, and Love had breathed the first breath of her undying life. And Roy Manville sat side by side with Daphne Ellesmere and looked, not at the blended beauties with which he was environed, but covertly and disturbedly at the girl beside him. Thus is the witching loveliness of nature dominated by a woman's smile!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, after a pause, "I have asked you to accompany me here in order to prefer a request that has long occupied my thoughts."

A soft, pink blush tinted the whiteness of Daphne Ellesmere's cheeks, and a light, veiled in an instant, shone in her blue eyes. But of these things, too, Roy Manville was unconscious.

"The truth is," he went on hurriedly, "I love you very dearly, and have been bold enough to hope that you will consent to become my wife. I am not a poor man." He remembered, with some misgivings, that young Lord Seagrave had paid her marked attention of late, and though but a courtesy title, the holder of it was well known to be immensely rich. This had been the rift in Roy's lute for a long while, and he hastened to expatiate on his own fortunes. Love is not always clear-sighted.

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"I am not a poor man," he went on. "My income amounts to as much as two thousand a year, and I have other prospects upon which I may count with a tolerably good show of certainty. It is true, I have no title to bestow on you, but the lineage of my family is as unimpeachable as any that is represented to-night under Lady Cazenove's roof. Sir Cedric Manville fought side by side with William the Conqueror, and my ancestors have many times been chosen by their sovereigns for the bestowal of royal favours for services rendered both at court and in the field."

For an instant the light flashed again in Daphne's eyes. But it was not so soft and dreamy on this occasion. The flush, too, was this time more like the faintest indication of anger than of pleasure. But she made no reply, and Roy, regarding this as an unfavourable sign, went on as before.

"I know," he said, with slight embarrassment, "that there have been and still are many suitors for your hand, whose worldly position and prospects compare in many respects to mine with undeniable advantage. But if I admit this, I am at least conscious that, though in these respects you would be the loser, there are yet others where the advantages are upon my side."

Still Daphne Ellesmere maintained an uncompromising silence. There was now the very faintest indication of a curl at the corner of her ripe red lips. Was this Roy Manville, the very whisper of whose name had for more than a year sent a flush to her cheek and a sweet, shy longing into her young heart? Was this the love she had dreamt of as once to be hers—hoped for, in the secrecy of her own heart, as the glorious fulfilment of her life? Her spirit rose in revolt at this mercenary proposal, in which love but played the part of an auctioneer's hand-bell, calling the attention to bargains within. Even with herself, Daphne Ellesmere was honest, and she knew she had loved this man as she would love none other. But she had always believed he loved her. Even now a feeling that it was so lingered in her heart and would not be gainsaid. But if this were indeed true, why did he not say so honestly? Position, prospects, lineage, unimpeachable honour, comparison with other suitors—anything, everything but love! She was growing angry. But Roy suspected it not. Her silence seemed to indicate an under-current of hesitancy due to her doubts as to the indisputability of his qualifications, and he grew resentful at the thought.

Poor Roy! He loved this Daphne Ellesmere with all his honest young heart. She was his morning and evening star, the lodestone of his life, and the love he gave her was little short of absolute worship—the worship of a true man to a good, pure woman, whom he almost believes to partake of some higher gifts of spirituality not vouchsafed to other women. But he had long been troubled in mind. Life is full of strange and inexplicable contradictions. And here was one. His very humility made him boastful. He knew his own position was inferior to that of Lord Seagrave, whose admiration of Daphne Ellesmere could have but one termination. Comparatively speaking, he, Roy Manville, was a poor man beside this wealthy magnate. And the consciousness of this, accentuated by his innate humility, troubled him and made him doubtful of his own chances. And so he had crossed Lord Seagrave's Martini-Henri with his own little toy-pistol and tried to carry off the situation with advantage to himself. How much better would it have been had he gone unharmed!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, his hands nervously pressed together on his knee, "this is a very serious matter with me. Will you honour me with your answer?"

This was a little better. But Daphne's spirit had been roused.

"I think," she said calmly, "that, under the circumstances, the proposal is one which, however it honours me, admits of but one answer. The position you have defined so accurately is one that holds no attraction for me. I am heartily glad to hear that your prospects are so promising. The other circumstances I knew before, and they are therefore no news to me. I think we had better drop the subject. Will you be so good as to escort me back to the ball-room?"

She rose as she spoke, and Roy, grinding his teeth in impotent anger and wretchedness, offered her his arm.

* * * * *

It was a week later. Roy Manville sat moodily in the easiest of easy-chairs in his well-lighted sitting-room, and thought long and bitterly of his defeat. The real cause of that defeat, and the way in which he had himself hastened it, never for one moment occurred to him. Yet he was not a fool, but a thorough-going, good-principled, and, in all other respects, clear-sighted, young man. He was handsome, too, with short, crisp, curly-brown hair, and earnest hazel eyes, that looked fearlessly out upon all mankind.

Why had he been so blind? In his ignorant conceit, he had imagined that Daphne Ellesmere loved him, and now—well, it was all over now, and the fool's paradise in which he lived had vanished like any other figment of the imagination. He was very miserable about it all. Life would have been so bright with Daphne as his wife. And now—well, she would marry Lord Seagrave, and he—he would look on and hide his sorrow from the eyes of the curious.

A footman entered, bearing a card. Roy knitted his brows as he read the name inscribed thereon.

"All right," he said. "Show Mr. Ellesmere in."

The man retreated, and, a moment later, the visitor entered the room. He was a fair, boyish-looking young man of some two-and-twenty summers. Normally the face was frank and open, but to-day an expression of nervousness and embarrassment made this less noticeable. Roy looked up as he came in.

"Well, Bert," he said, "what on earth brings you here? I thought you were still cramming at Oxford."

Bertie Ellesmere shook his head.

"I'm supposed to be," he said dolefully. "But the truth is, I'm in a dickens of a mess."

"Ah!" said Roy understandingly. "Same old game, I suppose, Bert?"

Bertie nodded.

"How much is it this time?" inquired Roy, after a short pause.

"Two thousand," was the astounding reply.

Roy started, and he looked gravely over at his visitor.

"You're surely joking!" he said.

"Wish I was," responded Bertie, with a sigh. "I thought the thing was a dead cert. this time."

"You generally do," Roy observed quietly.

"Yes, I know," replied Bertie shamefacedly. "But I got regular inside information this time. Even the jockey had his money on her."

"Merely a blind, my boy," interrupted Roy.

The "boy" ignored the remark.

"I put every fraction I could rake together on the brute," he went on hopelessly. "Borrowed a bit more to make it a bigger thing still, and the bounder came in a bad fifth."

Again there was a long pause. Presently Roy asked:

"What are you going to do about it, Bert?"

Bertie shifted uneasily in his chair.

"God knows!" he said irreverently. "The governor would kick me out of the house if I told him. He said he would last time. That way is quite impossible. The mater hasn't got a hundred pounds in cash all told just now, so she can't help me. There's only one way out of it that I can see."

"What's that?" Roy asked quietly.

"Slope," was the brief reply.

Roy shook his head.

"Not a man's trick," he said decisively. "Surely an Ellesmere is not afraid to face the music, particularly when it is he himself who is responsible for it?"

Bertie coloured.

"Don't be hard on a chap," he said humbly. "I know I've been a fool, and if only I get can clear of this mess, the remembrance of it will be a lasting lesson to me."

Roy was silent. His thoughts flew back to Daphne. How

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her heart would ache if she knew of her brother's disgrace. He knew how dearly she loved this brother of hers, how she had screened and excused him on former occasions, how rejoiced she had been of late at his apparent studiousness and freedom from debt. And now he was in a worse plight than ever. The ruin he had up to this time averted was now inevitable. Then another thought occurred to him and his heart hardened.

"From one or two things that have come under my notice during the past week," he said, a little nervously, "I am inclined to think your sister Daphne has come to some understanding with Lord Seagrave. If this be so, it is more than probable that gentleman would not hesitate to help you out of the present difficulty. Particularly," he added, "if the matter was laid before him by the person most likely to influence his decision."

Even as he uttered the words, Roy hated himself for the thought which had inspired them. Bertie looked at him in wonderment.

"I think you're making a mistake, old fellow," he said. "But as it seems to me I have over-estimated your fund of sympathy for one so badly placed as myself, I will not intrude further."

He rose as he spoke, but Roy motioned him to the chair he had left.

"I beg your pardon, Bert," he said. "It was beastly of me. But you don't know all. I don't know what I'm talking about sometimes."

Bertie looked quickly into Roy's face, and a gleam of understanding came into his eyes.

"Ah!" he murmured inwardly. "So it's as bad as all that! Well, I should never have thought Daphne would have refused him."

"Bertie," said Roy, looking earnestly into his face, "does your sister know of this?"

"Yes," replied Bertie.

Roy sighed. Poor girl! He wished he could have spared her that.

"Well," he said, "will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you will never repeat this performance? You are a man now, Bert, old fellow, and you must recognise that the many and bitter humiliations which you are compelled to endure as a result of this reckless spirit of gambling are draining your moral character of all its manhood and sense of honour. The sum is a large one, even for me, but if you will give me your sacred promise to avoid such pitfalls in the future, I will make you out a cheque for the amount."

A flush—half of gladness, half of bewilderment—came into Bertie Ellesmere's face. For a moment he was almost dumfounded.

"Roy," he said, "do you really mean it? Why, the most I hoped of you was that you might be able in some way to show me how I could raise the money." His face shadowed a little. "I say, Roy," he added doubtfully, "I don't know how long it may be before I can hope to cancel the debt."

He tenderly folded her in his arms, and she laid her head on his breast.

Roy smiled.

"That will not be necessary," he said. "If you are not too proud to accept it, you shall have it freely. Only, I must have your promise."

Bertie's lip quivered.

"Oh, Roy," he said, "you are too good! Of course I promise. On my word of honour, this shall be the last time I give way to the temptation to gamble. I shall always remember how near ruin and disgrace I have been, and the memory shall make me strong."

Roy grasped him by the hand and shook it.

"One thing more," he said, and looked straight into the other's eyes.

"What is it?" asked Bertie.

"Don't—tell—Daphne!"

For a moment there was silence in the room. Then Bertie nodded his head.

"She's a good girl," he said warmly. "I once thought—but that was a mistake, I suppose."

Roy Manville felt the warm blood mantling his cheeks, but he paid no heed to the other's words. Drawing out his cheque-book he filled in and signed a cheque for £2,000, and handed it across to Bertie Ellesmere.

"God keep you straight from now on!" he said earnestly. And, half an hour later, the two men separated.

* * * * *

Another week had slipped—or rather dragged—by, a week of alternate depression and short-lived resolve for Roy Manville. There seemed no help for it all. Daphne's cold refusal of his love was as bitter to the taste as upon the night when it was uttered. What to do next had been his chief thought since, and at last he had made up his mind. He would go abroad.

The sunlight streamed in through the open windows of his room, and trunks, portmanteaux, valises, gun-cases, and other indispensable accessories to travel were strewn about the floor. He made it a rule to superintend his own packing, and to-day the occupation afforded him partial forgetfulness. He was trying to forget. But the attempt was a failure, and he admitted it to himself, though he still went on trying.

There was a tap at the door, and Bertie Ellesmere burst in upon him.

"Hullo, Roy," he exclaimed in surprise. "What the—where the—— I say, old chap, what's the meaning of all this? Not going away, are you?"

Roy nodded.

"Yes," he said, a trifle embarrassed by the interruption. "London's too beastly cold and wet for my liking. I'm going abroad."

"Where to?" asked Bertie.

"Oh, I don't know," was the somewhat vague reply. "I sha'n't touch the overdone continental resorts. Think I'll do a bit of big game hunting in Africa and South America. Anything for a change, you know."

Bertie Ellesmere regarded him quizzically. He thought

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he comprehended the meaning of this unexpected, and, to his mind, rather irrational exodus.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" he asked, as he took a seat and watched the proceedings.

"Well, yes—that is, no. I've had it in mind for some time. I say, Bert, how did you get on about the other affair?"

Bertie Ellesmere's face flushed.

"Ah!" he said earnestly. "You were just in time to save me, Roy. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

Roy stopped him.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Glad to hear it's all square. Now I am going to forget all about it. It must always remain a secret between us, Bert."

"I sha'n't tell many people about it, as you can well believe," responded Bertie grimly. "It's scarcely the sort of thing one would care to advertise."

Roy nodded.

"Just so," he said—"all the better for me."

For fully five minutes there was silence. Then Bertie said:

"I say, Roy, don't think me impertinent, but have you and my sister quarrelled of late?"

Roy bent his head over a portmanteau.

"Oh, no," he said thickly. "We are the best of friends. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Don't know," said Bertie laconically. "I wondered, that's all."

He sat still for a while, and then got up to go. There was a twinkle in his eye as he held out his hand to bid Roy good-bye.

"Well," he said, "I must be going. Good luck, old fellow. I hope your big game will be bigger than you anticipate."

Roy grasped his hand warmly.

"Thanks," he said cordially. "Good-bye, Bert. Oh, I say. Er—you needn't allude at home to the fact that I'm—er—going away. Not that it matters much, but I'd rather you didn't."

Bertie Ellesmere maintained a stolid composure and lack of comprehension that did him credit.

"All right," he said. And with a farewell nod, he took his departure.

"What the dickens made him turn up?" grumbled Roy to himself as he tugged viciously at the straps of a too-distended trunk. "I was forgetting all about them. Just my luck. Well, I shall be out of the way by midnight, and then——" He broke off abruptly and applied himself energetically to the task before him. For nearly two hours he packed and ordered and grumbled and praised, and then, the work ended, he dismissed his assistants and sat down on a chair to consider what was to be done next. He looked very handsome as he sat there, with the glow of healthy exertion on his expressive face. And yet there was an indescribable air of melancholy about him that, in the eyes of some, might have added to rather than have detracted from his unquestionable attractiveness.

A slight noise roused him from his reflections. Turning, he saw the figure of Bertie Ellesmere, with the handle of the door in his hand, holding it open for someone to enter. The lad's face was expressionless, and he paid little or no heed to the astonished man within. A lady stepped into the room, and Bertie prepared to retire.

"Beg pardon, old chap," he said shamelessly. "But really, you know, the thing was impossible. Ta-ta! See you later." And he closed the door behind him.

With an effort Roy recovered his self-possession and offered his visitor a chair. She accepted it, and, seating herself, looked round on the evidences of coming departure.

"You are going away," she said reproachfully. "You might have told us of your intention, Mr. Manville."

Roy was nonplussed.

"I did not think you would care," he said simply.

Daphne looked up at him in protest.

"Well," she said, "we will let that pass. You were going away, however, without giving us the opportunity to thank you for a deed of generosity which we can never repay."

Roy coloured. He inwardly anathematised Bertie for his garrulity.

"That is of small consequence," he said shamefacedly. "And I fancy Bert has a curious notion of gratitude, since he has already violated one of the conditions imposed upon him."

Daphne smiled. It was a very sweet smile, and Roy trembled to the finger-tips as he met it.

"It is a violation of which I approve," she said. "He told me the very day you gave him your help so unreservedly. Every day since then I have been expecting you to call. You used to visit us at one time, Mr. Manville."

Roy was growing desperate. It seemed the best thing to face the matter boldly.

"How could I?" he said warmly. "How could I lightly forget the way in which you met my addresses a fortnight ago? I knew then, and know now even more thoroughly, that I am unworthy of you. You showed me that truth all too plainly. How could our relations remain unaltered after an experience so humiliating?"

Daphne Ellesmere studied the pattern on the carpet.

"Are you quite sure you were not somewhat to blame?" she asked.

Roy looked down at her in puzzled surprise.

"I—to blame?" he repeated in bewilderment. "Miss Ellesmere—Daphne—was I to blame because, loving you with my whole heart, I dared to hope that the wish of my life might be realised?"

"Pardon me," replied Daphne, still with her eyes on the carpet, "but, if my memory serves me right, you scarcely mentioned such a thing as love in your catalogue of matrimonial inducements. I have a dim idea that your rather highly-varnished account of your present position, future prospects, and past lineage precluded any such sentimental admission on your part."

Roy stood quite still as he listened to the words. And then he saw it all—the mistake he had made—the too-important place he had given to worldly considerations, the too-trivial one to love. She wanted bread, and he had offered her a stone. And his jealousy of Lord Seagrave had done it all. Love was uppermost now, and he gave it the secondary place no longer.

"Daphne," he said tenderly, "is there any hope for me yet? I was a fool to speak thus to you. But I knew Lord Seagrave meant to ask you to be his wife, and I could think of nothing but the advantages he possessed over me. I was terribly afraid you would influence your choice by those advantages, and that made me expatiate on my own poor position. I forgot that, to a woman such as you, there is an inducement higher than all such as these—love. So I made my love subservient to my position. It was hard even to do this, for even as I enlarged on my prospects, my heart cried out for utterance. But I was afraid. Oh, Daphne, tell me, dear, is there one small chance for me even yet? I do love you, darling—love you with an intensity of devotion that swallows up every other thought. Say there is yet hope."

She held out both her hands to him, and he tenderly lifted her from the chair upon which she sat. Then he folded her in his arms and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh, why didn't you come?" she pouted. "I waited for you so impatiently."

"I was a fool," he said in self-condemnation. "But why did you come?" he asked her in return.

Daphne laughed.

"It was a case of Mahomet and the Mountain," she said archly.

At that instant Bertie Ellesmere put his head in at the door. He gave utterance to a prolonged whistle, and, in deference to what he beheld, closed the door once more.

Roy laughed, and said:

"That was the cheapest two thousand pounds' worth I ever had in my life. But the boy is a rascal nevertheless."

Walter J. Mowbray.

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JUDGED IN HASTE.

Showing how Easily Troubles Pass Away.

"It is a shame, a burning shame," cried Kittie Wayne, as she looked up from the letter in her hand, and dashed away the indignant tears which had gathered thickly on her long, dark lashes.

"What is a shame?" asked a soft, languid voice, and a tall, handsome young man, with dark blue eyes and a fair moustache, came out from under the shade of the elm trees which bordered the road, and leant carelessly over the garden-gate near which Kittie stood.

"Oh, Leslie!" exclaimed Kittie, with a quick blush, and smiling through her tears. "I didn't know you were there! When did you come?"

"Just a moment ago," answered Leslie Earl, "and when I saw you coming down the walk, reading that letter, I concluded to wait here for you. I prefer to interview you here," with a wave of his hand that took in rose-bushes, elms, and circular beds of heliotrope and verbenas, "to stifling in that abominable, stuffy little parlour."

Kittie laughed, then grew sober instantly.

"Tell me what troubles you, Kittie?" said Leslie. "I have a right to know your every thought now."

"I am not so sure about that," said Kittie; "but of course I will tell you this, for it may affect our future very materially. I may not be able to marry you, after all, Leslie, for mother may need me to work for her."

"I will work for your mother if anything of the sort is necessary," said Leslie. "I certainly sha'n't give you up, no matter what happens. But I understood from you that your mother was comfortably situated on a farm somewhere."

"But she is to lose the farm," said Kittie. "I was wondering why I did not hear from her, for she usually writes me a letter twice a week, but I never imagined anything was wrong. And now, after waiting ten days, I get the worst kind of answer. My cousin Asa, with whom my mother and two sisters have had a home for twelve years, died a week ago, after an illness of only a few hours, and he has left the farm, live-stock, and all his money, to Ebenezer Cranch, the son of his only sister. Mother is to have only the furniture of the house. Isn't it a shame? How *could* he be so cruel! And what *is* mother to do?"

"One question at a time, please," said Leslie, "and give me some explanation. I don't exactly understand. Why should this Ebenezer Cranch—beautiful name, I must say—have the property? What was the nature of his claim on your cousin?"

"He had none at all save his relationship," said Kittie emphatically. "More than twenty years ago—before I was born—he lived with my cousin Asa at the farm for a time. But his father was a worthless, wretched creature, who would never stay long in one place, and he soon took his wife and boy away, and Asa never saw them afterwards. When father died, my cousin sent for mother, and gave us all a home. He was very old, and she gave him the most devoted care, and now he has left everything to that Ebenezer Cranch. Why, he didn't even know where he lived! He left directions with a lawyer to find him!"

"It *is* a shame," said Leslie slowly. "I don't blame you for feeling badly, Kittie. But perhaps it will all come out right in the end. Don't worry."

"How *can* it come right?" cried Kittie. "Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch!"

"Now, that isn't just," said Leslie. "He isn't to blame for his uncle's whim, you know, and he may be a very good sort of fellow."

"I doubt it," said Kittie. "Probably a gawky, ugly, disagreeable fellow, who will make himself hated at Merrifield. And of course he won't have ambition or brains enough to manage the farm. It will all run to decay."

Leslie laughed

'Come, now, Kittie," he said; "let me make a prophecy. You'll throw me over and save the farm for your mother yet by marrying that very Ebenezer Cranch."

"I wouldn't have him if he was covered with diamonds," said Kittie. "And you know, Leslie, that I wouldn't give you up for any other man living."

"Dear love," said Leslie, kissing her, "I know how true you are. But still," with a teasing laugh, "I do feel a little shaky when I think of the fascinating Ebenezer."

"You may be sure I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night for thinking of him," said Kittie. "Of course he will turn mother out, and where is she to go?"

"Come in and sing to me," said Leslie, "and forget all about Ebenezer."

So arm-in-arm they walked up the tree-bordered path, and entered the house, where Kittie tried to coax some melody from the wheezy little piano which Mrs. Smith had bought in her girlhood.

Kittie was the teacher of the district school, of which the Rev. Mr. Smith was a trustee, and Leslie was a lawyer in the large town of Castlebury, two miles distant. He had an excellent practice, and was well able to support a wife; so when he fell in love with pretty Kittie Wayne, there were no difficulties in the way of an early marriage. The wedding had been fixed for the last week in June, for Kittie's school closed on the 15th, and she had intended to be married from her cousin's home in Merrifield. But now death had changed her plans very materially; and after Leslie had listened to all the ballads with which Kittie was familiar, he easily persuaded her to promise to be married quietly from the good clergyman's at the time appointed.

"It is unlucky to postpone a wedding," said he, as he argued the question, "and, of course, you can do a great deal more for your mother when you are my wife. Who knows we may outwit that Ebenezer Cranch yet."

"No such good luck," said Kittie. "There's no chance for a law case, is there?"

Of course Kittie waited very anxiously for her next letter from Merrifield, and when it came she read it with tears of thanksgiving, for Ebenezer Cranch's lawyers had written to say

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that Mrs. Wayne and her daughters need not move immediately from the farm, as possession would not be taken for several weeks.

"So, you see, the ugly Ebenezer is not as hateful as you imagined," said Leslie, when Kittie read him her mother's letter.

"He's only making a convenience of mother," said Kittie, who was too prejudiced to be just. "Of course, if he couldn't take the farm at once he didn't want it deserted."

"He's a bold, bad man," said Leslie. "There's no doubt of it. I suppose you wouldn't let even Hannah look on him favourably."

"Never!" said Kittie, tossing her curls. "Hannah is far too good for such a wretch."

"But she might keep the farm if——"

"Not at such a sacrifice," interrupted Kittie. "Please don't talk about the man, Leslie; you know how I hate him."

The day before her wedding Kittie received another letter from Merrifield. Mrs. Wayne sorrowed over her inability to be present on the great occasion, and wished her daughter every happiness. She concluded by saying that Ebenezer Cranch's lawyer had written to say that his client and wife would be at Merrifield a week or two later, but requesting that Mrs. Wayne would remain in the house until their arrival.

"Poor Hannah's last chance is gone," said Leslie, when Kittie told him what her mother had written. "She can't save the farm by marrying her foe, it seems, as he has a wife already."

"To think that *any* girl should have been willing to marry *him!*" said Kittie.

The wedding came off with due pomp and ceremony; for Mrs. Smith had insisted on giving a substantial breakfast to the guests, and the vicar had taken pains to invite every one for miles around. There was much feasting and merry-making, and Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Earl left Castlebury 'mid a shower of rice and old slippers. They were to take a honeymoon tour for a fortnight, and then return home by way of Merrifield, for Kittie was very anxious to see her mother and sisters.

"And if you desire it, Kittie," said Leslie, indulgently, "we will carry mother, Hannah and little Margie back with us to our own home."

"I don't see anything else to be done just at present," said Kittie; "but I don't like to burden you with the support of so many, Leslie. Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch! If he had never existed, mother would have had the farm for her own."

* * * * *

It was a warm day in the middle of July when the newly-married couple reached Merrifield. Kittie had written to Hannah to meet them at the railway station and that worthy spinster, who was a dozen years older than the bride, was duly there with a horse and trap.

"Oh, Hannah, I am so glad to see you!" cried Kittie, as she rushed to embrace her sister.

"But didn't the Cranches come?" asked Hannah.

"The Cranches?" repeated Kittie wonderingly.

"Yes, they were to come to-day," said Hannah. "I received a letter from the lawyer last night."

"How unfortunate," said poor Kittie. "I hoped to escape them. I know I sha'n't be able to treat them with common civility."

"But they haven't come," said Hannah, as the train steamed away, leaving only an old man and a dog on the platform. "I suppose they changed their minds."

"I am glad they did," said Kittie, as she climbed into the trap. "I hope it may never be my lot to look upon the face of that hateful Ebenezer Cranch."

The farmhouse was soon reached, and the tears sprang to Kittie's eyes as she noted the beauty of the fertile field stretching away on either side of it, and the luxuriance of the shrubbery in the garden. For she thought how soon the place was to pass into the hands of strangers

A well-spread table, loaded with everything in the way of eating that the farm could afford, awaited the hungry travellers in the great cool kitchen, where the large windows were shaded by fragrant honeysuckle vines and the door screened from the sun by stately elms nearly a century old.

But Kittie's brow contracted as she saw that there were plates laid for seven.

"You see, we fully expected Ebenezer Cranch and his wife," said Mrs. Wayne.

"I am not anxious to see the woman who could marry Ebenezer Cranch," said Kittie. "The man and the name combined would be the death of any ordinary mortal."

When supper was over, Leslie went out into the garden to smoke a cigar, leaving his wife to talk to her mother and sister. And Kittie had plenty to talk about, for it had been almost a year since she had left home to take charge of the district school near Castlebury. She was in the midst of an account of her wedding when Leslie came suddenly in at the kitchen-door.

"The Cranches have come," he said abruptly.

"The Cranches!" repeated four feminine voices in different tones of surprise.

"Yes; come into the parlour and see them," said he.

"Are they in the parlour? Did you let them in?" asked Hannah. "I wonder how they happened to come at this time. I know there is no train after five o'clock, and it is nearly seven now."

"Oh, Leslie, what are they like?" asked Kittie.

"The wife is a very pretty little woman," answered Leslie. "But Ebenezer is a great, ugly, awkward, fellow," laughing.

"I knew it," cried Kittie. "I had an intuition that he would be like that. You know I always said so, Leslie."

"You'd better come into the parlour," said Leslie. "It isn't polite to leave them alone so long," and he led the way through the hall, followed by the four women.

"Where are they?" asked Kittie, as they entered the parlour; for the room was empty. "Oh, Leslie, how could you hoax us so!"

He slipped his arm round his wife's waist, and drew her before a large mirror which hung between the two front windows.

"That is Ebenezer Cranch's wife," he said, nodding toward Kittie's reflection. "Don't you think her a pretty little woman? Bow to her and tell her you're ashamed of having abused her so."

"Leslie, what on earth do you mean?" cried Kittie. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Not in the least," said Leslie. "Sit down and I will explain matters to your entire satisfaction, I trust."

When they were all seated about him, he said:

"My father's name was Stephen Earl, and I was named Ebenezer Leslie, after some revered ancestor, I suppose. When I was only a year old my mother married Samuel Cranch, and very naturally I was called by the name of my stepfather as I grew up. We lived for several years on this farm with my uncle, and then my step-father moved to Sussex. There he deserted my mother, who died a year later. I was old enough then to appreciate the wrongs she had suffered, and I promptly dropped the name of the man I had learnt to despise and hate, and took my own. I never had liked the name of Ebenezer, so I thought I might as well drop that too. So I began again as Leslie Earl, and have been called so ever since. It was a great surprise to me to hear that my uncle had left me his property, and a still greater surprise to learn that the young lady to whom I was engaged to be married was my uncle's second cousin. And when I heard her abuse poor Ebenezer Cranch so fiercely I determined to play a practical joke on her. Tell me, Kittie, do you think I succeeded? And how do you like the appearance of 'the hateful Ebenezer'?"

In spite of her chagrin at having been so completely hoaxed, Kittie felt that she could afford to be teased, for the termination of her troubles was as happy as thee lose of a fairy tale.

Florence Hallowell.

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LOVED and ACQUITTED.

Telling How a Girl Saved Her Sweetheart.

"Oh, dry up, Oswald, for everybody's sake. You are for ever on that old subject of yours."

"Well, Frank, the danger was never greater that it is at the present day. Everywhere women are taking positions at small salaries to the detriment of men who have families to keep."

"Can't you find some fresh arguments, Oswald. Yours are getting a bit stale now."

Then Frank Becher made a frantic rush to escape the heavy, chastening hand of Oswald Gray, his future brother-in-law.

Oswald enjoyed the reputation of being a first-rate fellow, but a bit of a crank on the subject of women working in positions that men had once occupied. He was engaged to be married to Lilian Becher, to whom he was passionately attached.

The Becher family only consisted of three—Mrs. Becher, her daughter Lilian, aged twenty-one years, and her son Frank, aged nineteen. Mr. Becher had died many years before, and Mrs. Becher lived on the dividends which his invested wealth yielded.

When Frank Becher left school Oswald Gray had obtained for him a position in Messrs. Pole, Mannering & Co., where he himself was accountant.

Oswald and Lilian had been engaged nearly two years but they did not contemplate marriage until Frank was in a fair position so that Lilian would have no qualms in leaving her mother.

As Frank left the room somewhat hastily to avoid being assisted by Oswald, he almost ran into his sister who was entering the room. Oswald came forward to greet her.

"Why, Lilian," he said, "how pale you look, whatever is the matter?"

"I am afraid I shall upset you if I tell you, Oswald."

"But I would rather hear it, dear. Tell me."

Lilian's face became even more pale, but a determined look shone in her eyes as she said:

"I have accepted a berth as typine with Messrs. T. Austin & Co., the india-rubber merchants." She glanced up almost defiantly as she spoke. He saw the look, but did not put it down to nervousness, which would have been correct, but interpreted it as a defiance of his opinions.

"Why have you done this? You know how much I dislike it," he asked in an angry tone. It was the wrong attitude to adopt, and immediately she was on her mettle.

"My dear Oswald, I am surely at liberty to do as I please to some extent."

"Particularly if it is against my wishes, I suppose?" was his bitter retort.

"Oh, Oswald, how ridiculous you are!" she cried, stamping her foot in vexation.

"Very likely," he responded, now quite angry. "But you will either choose to do as I wish or our ways must part."

She started to her feet and confronted him with flashing eyes.

"Then I will choose," she cried, her anger at his unreasonableness quite carrying her away. She snatched off his ring, he took it, bowed slightly, and then the door slammed and he was gone.

The noise of the door seemed to wake up her senses. "Oswald, Oswald," she cried, and then covered her face in an agony of grief. Whilst he, in a blind rage, stalked on and on, regardless of direction.

So Oswald Gray and Lilian Becher parted, and pride kept them apart, whilst their hearts ached and they craved for one another.

At Pole, Mannering & Co's., Frank Becher treated his senior with silent contempt, for he felt that the quarrel was a family one. A sensible youth would have been the means of patching it up, but Frank apparently was not sensible.

As accountant to his firm, who were furniture manufacturers in a large way, Oswald had a great deal of money constantly passing through his hands, and his work was of a most responsible nature.

He dragged through the days after his quarrel with Lilian, wishing that each of them might be the last.

It was on the fourth day after the parting that Oswald received a message to go to the principal's room. He found that the manager of the bank was with Mr. Mannering when he arrived. The head of the firm was a tall, slightly built man, with very dark hair and eyes, always giving one the impression that he was in need of shaving.

"Can you explain that, Mr. Gray?" he said, placing a drawn cheque in front of him.

Oswald glanced at it and saw that the cheque was drawn to "bearer," and that the amount was £200.

"No," he said as he handed it back, "I have no recollection of drawing it."

"Neither have I any recollection of signing it."

Oswald glanced in surprise at Mr. Mannering and then examined the cheque again. It was signed "Harry Mannering" and apparently was in the handwriting of Mr. Mannering.

"What do you take it to be, Mr. Gray?"

"It looks like a private cheque of your own, sir."

"Examine it more carefully."

"Why," exclaimed Gray after a minute or two, "this does not appear to be your own writing, but it is a remarkably fine imitation!"

"Exactly what we think," drily assented Mr. Mannering. "But then I did not sign the cheque, neither was I here on

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Monday when the cheque was apparently drawn and cashed, and you and I are the only persons who could get at the cheque book. If you will look, you will see that the counter-foil has been taken completely out."

"You surely do not mean to insinuate ——" cried Oswald, and then he stopped, glancing from one to the other.

"I do not see any other course," said Mr. Mannering. The matter has been in the hands of a private detective since yesterday morning and he has stated that everything points to——" Mr. Mannering paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"But it's absurd," cried Oswald, trying to laugh but making a ghastly failure. "You surely do not believe it?"

"But, Mr. Gray, the case is a very simple one. Two persons have access to a cheque book, a private one only occasionally used. A cheque is drawn and cashed. You and I are the two persons, and it is out of the question that I should forge my own name, isn't it?"

"Now, Gray," he went on, "own up to it. It will be better in the long run."

"But I haven't anything to own up to," protested Gray. "Won't you believe me—I did not take the money."

"Well," said Mr. Mannering, "I was prepared to help you out—if you still persist, I have only one course open. I cannot afford to throw £200 away."

As he spoke, the door opened, and the plain-clothes officer from Scotland Yard entered.

"I arrest you, Oswald Gray," he said, "on a charge of forging the name of your employer."

"Great Heaven! But I am quite innocent. Mr. Mannering, you do not think me guilty?" cried Gray.

"I do not know what to think, but the evidence is very strong."

So they led Oswald Gray away.

As a matter of fact the bank manager who had discovered the forgery had practically been the means of Oswald's arrest. There had existed a bitter animosity between the two men for many years, and the manager was not slow to take advantage of this opportunity. He knew he could easily persuade Mr. Mannering, and so the most decisive steps were taken.

Lilian was prostrate at the news, and refused to believe that Oswald was guilty; whilst her brother openly jeered at him, and complimented Lilian on being well rid of a scoundrel.

But now she yearned for Oswald more than ever. Now that he had met adversity she longed to be by his side to comfort him, but still that pride prevented her. And Oswald, well, Oswald began to despair of everything. First Lilian and then this cruel blow—both seeming so unjust to him. He would have given much to have had Lilian beside him in this time of trouble; but as with her, his pride would not submit.

Once the law had got Oswald Gray in its grip, Mr. Mannering began to regret his hastiness. Gray had been in his employ for fourteen years with never a suspicion against his fair name. But it was too late to retract, the law must take its course.

At last the day of the trial came round. The court was fairly full of people, for the continuation of a much-tried case was to follow the trial of Oswald Gray.

Frederick Furrian had been engaged on behalf of the prisoner, whilst Lionel Lincoln was the prosecuting counsel.

From the first everything seemed to go against Oswald Gray. From the fact that he alone besides Mr. Mannering had access to the safe, down to the fact that the particular character in the signature which had caused the forgery to be discovered very much resembled the identical character in the prisoner's handwriting. In the correct signature the two letters "N" occurring together in "Mannering" were exactly similar, whereas in the counterfeit the second "N" differed somewhat.

Lincoln made out a very strong case against Oswald Gray, whilst Furrian's defence, although it was clever and well delivered, lacked material. Consequently in the judge's summing up it was clear that his opinion had gone right against Oswald.

Presently the jury retired but were only absent for about five minutes.

"We find the prisoner guil——"

"Stop!"

It was the defending counsel's voice; he was waving a paper in his hand.

"My lord," he cried, "I regret this irregularity, but the most important evidence has just been handed to me."

There was some commotion in the court, but presently everyone had settled down, and then Furrian commenced:

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury. On the purely circumstantial evidence put forward by the most learned counsel for the prosecution, we were within an ace of committing a great error of justice.

"My lord, I hold in my hand the written confession of the real culprit, but, as it is the desire of all parties concerned that his name should be suppressed, I will pass it to your lordship to read."

The judge read the confession as did the jury. It was a perfectly legal document, sworn before witnesses, and setting forth the details of how the robbery and subsequently the forgery was committed.

Thus Oswald Gray was discharged without a stain on his character, although he was bound over to appear if called upon at some future date.

Oswald could hardly believe the truth until he read the signature of the man who had committed the forgery. But he did not seem particularly astonished, his solicitor thought, only sad. But as soon as he was free from the necessary legalities, he hurried home to think.

At home that evening he found a letter from Mr. Mannering, who had been in the court. In it he suggested that Oswald took a month's leave of absence, whilst he trusted that the inclosed would help him further to enjoy it—"the inclosed" consisted of a cheque for £50. Mr. Mannering further went on to say how bitterly he regretted the step he had taken, and apparently his sorrow was quite sincere.

On the following day there came over Oswald an intense longing to see Lilian again. To gaze into her blue eyes and read the love message there. To feel her heart beating against his. Pride was conquered now, and he hurried with all speed to the Becher's home. The door was opened by Mrs. Becher.

"Oswald!" she cried. "You?"

"Yes, Mrs. Becher, I've come to beg pardon from Lilian."

"She is not home yet from business."

The words caused Oswald a momentary pang, but he took the thrust smilingly.

"You'll come in, won't you, Oswald?"

"Do you think she will see me?"

"Oh, yes, she will only be too glad of some comfort."

"Ah, I was forgetting your trouble in my own cares. How is Frank, where is he, do you know?"

"The last we heard of him was that he was on his way to Buenos Ayres. My poor misguided boy, and to think that you nearly paid the penalty of his crime."

"But how was he found out?"

"Lilian discovered it. He came home with the story of your arrest, and his effusive liking for you immediately turned the other way, just like his father used to be. Two or three days afterwards Lilian entered his room rather suddenly and surprised him locking up a desk, and she was sure she caught the glint of gold; he flushed very much, and went on at her for going about so silently.

"Next day Lilian lifted the desk and found it much heavier than usual, she shook it, but he had foreseen such a contin-

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gency, though he anticipated an accidental one only, and had put in paper to prevent the rattle.

"He bought some new clothes and a diamond pin for his tie, besides various other things, until Lilian could restrain herself no longer, and next day she forced open his desk and found almost one hundred and eighty pounds in gold and notes. When he came home she accused him, he blustered and protested, but eventually confessed.

"The following morning she made him sign his confession, but immediately afterwards fainted away. While she was unconscious Frank slipped away with the money, and this morning we got a letter from him to say that he was on board a tramp steamer bound for Buenos Ayres.

"Directly Lilian recovered, she hurried to the court with the confession and the rest you know. What with your quarrel and Frank's behaviour, the girl is quite wearing herself out."

Oswald's expression grew more doleful with each sentence of this explanation, and at the finish he was calling himself every name he could think of.

Mrs. Becher had gone upstairs to lie down, and Oswald paced up and down the dining-room like a caged panther.

"Will she never come?" he cried. He consulted his watch on an average every minute and a half. She was not due in till six o'clock, and it still wanted a quarter of an hour till then.

At last he heard the latchkey in the front door, and heard Lilian coming down the passage to the dining-room.

She opened the door, and started at seeing a man's form before her. She stared for a moment as though she could not believe her eyes, but only for a moment. Then with a glad little cry she was in his strong embrace.

"Oh, Oswald," she cried, "my Oswald; I've wanted you so much." But the reaction had been too much, and her tears began to flow. Tenderly he soothed her, and kissed her tear-bedewed eyes.

"Oswald," she said presently, "I have something to tell you. It is why I went against your wishes and accepted Mr. Austin's offer of employment.

"You know mother's money was invested in the Lode Star Diamond Mines, well, the company were in low water at the last meeting, and were unable to declare a dividend. Consequently, the regular income which mother received stopped, and it was thought that the company would have to go into liquidation, then I thought it time to put my hand to the mill."

"My poor dear Lil, how I misjudged you," he cried remorsefully. "But our marriage must take place at once, my income is quite large enough for all three of us."

"Impetuous boy," she laughingly said. "You haven't heard all yet. Last week a very rich find was made, and mother's solicitor sold all the shares at an immense profit, and reinvested them in Government stock. He sent a cheque, too, for £200 to Mr. Mannering yesterday, and I leave business next Saturday week, dear."

"Anyhow," he cried, "I cannot wait about any longer for you, love. More things will be happening if I do. How will next month do?"

"Of all the ridiculous old things, next year, you mean," she retorted.

But eventually they brought it down to September which was four months ahead. Thus once again that truest of all sayings proved itself—"The course of true love never runs smooth."

But a very pretty wedding took place early in September, and a radiantly happy pair left London *en route* for Jersey.

One thing more and my story is finished. From the first Oswald Gray suspected Frank Becher. He had lent him his keys, including the key of the safe, to open a drawer with. He had noticed that Frank was some time gone, but excused himself by saying that the key would not work properly at first. Oswald thought nothing more of it until his interview with Mr. Mannering, and then he remembered it, but for Lilian's sake he kept silent, and would have suffered for another in order to spare her ignominy and shame. But she never knew of it, and I only relate it now with the idea of dispelling the rather adverse opinion which I am afraid my lady readers may have formed of Oswald Gray. **E. Newton Bungey.**

I AM very glad to find that my new features, and especially the development in the pictorial covers, are so popular among my readers, and very many have written me congratulatory messages concerning them.

One of my numerous correspondents is "J. G. R," Streatham, who in the course of a long epistle, says, "I have been greatly interested in 'The Bridge of Ruin,' and am sorry that it is now completed. It is a story which should warn all inclined to gamble. I was much amused, however, at one part of the story, *i.e.*, the taking of the snapshots. I presume the games were played in a room, *and in the evening*." He then goes on to say that this is impossible from a photographic point of view. His assumption that the snapshots were taken in the evening is wrong, for in the number in which the episode is related, that of August 22nd, it distinctly states that they were playing *in the afternoon*. However, I thank "J. G. R." for his well-meaning criticism, and I feel sure that if he turns up that issue he will agree with me that he is under a misapprehension.

YOU will all, no doubt, appreciate this week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara." A great feature is the reproduction of photographs showing the actual places where the principal incidents occurred, and these, although, of course, of special interest to readers in and around Bedford, will be interesting to all readers. I am pursuing the same course in respect to Northampton, the next town in which Sara undergoes many exciting experiences, which she relates in next week's number. On the cover of this issue is depicted the scene at Newnham Bridge, where Rigby Starr makes so cowardly an assault upon Sara. There will be an equally striking picture on the cover next week. I anticipate that there will be a big demand for "SHORT STORIES" in Northampton and environs next week, so regular readers there had better ask their newsagents to reserve them a copy, so as to prevent the disappointment of hearing them say "Sold out."

BESIDES the thrilling relations of "The Pursuit of Sara," a splendid new attraction starts in our next. This is Mr. George Griffith's serial "A Criminal Millionaire," which is bound to create much interest. Very little need be said in recommending this to readers, because the author is so well known as a writer of stirring stories. "Good wine needs no bush," is an apt quotation, and hence I need not dissertate on the merits of our coming serial. You might, however, do your friends a good turn by mentioning what I have in hand for them, and thereby oblige me too.

A GOOD many correspondents have written me inquiring whether any more "Love Problems" will appear. They intimate that they would be sorry to see this feature dropped, but I can calm their fears by announcing that shortly some more of these interesting problems will be published. In reply to "Perplexed," the number containing "Should a Husband Discuss His Business Affairs With His Wife?" was the one dated September 12th of this year.

OWING to a printer's error one of the admitted solutions to No. 141 in the Juggled Letters Competition was given as Gilgach; this should have been Gilfach. I hope to be able to announce the names of the prizewinners shortly.

Your Editor.

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The Story of an Attempt at Matchmaking and its Result.

"Yes, I like the look of the young fellow very much," said Mr. James Reece frankly. "Then we may take it as a compact, Will, that the young people marry. You've seen my daughter, and you think that she would make a suitable wife for Charlie?"

"I think that the marriage should prove an ideal one!" cried Mr. William Crewe in a tone of conviction. "It would be very pleasant to both of us if the young people were to make a match of it. There are the two estates side by side; they would make a capital whole, if under one master. I cannot claim that my family has lived on my estate for ever so many generations, because I haven't had it two years, but that doesn't make any difference. Well, we will each do his best to bring it about, but it must be quite a question of free will. No coercion!"

"I wouldn't coerce Lucy for anything!" declared Mr. Reece emphatically. "Still, we can do a great deal to bring about the desired end. We can throw them together; we can make judicious remarks, and so on. Oh, I think it will come about, Will. You know, it is association that has a great deal to do with falling in love! If a man never sees a certain woman, he doesn't fall in love with her—how on earth can he? And, on the other hand, if he constantly sees a certain woman, it's about three dozen to one that he will fall in love with her. That sort of thing happens every day, under conditions that seem to preclude the possibility of marriage. Therefore, the chances are greater when the two parties are—well, attractive."

"Precisely!" agreed the other parent.

The matter dropped at that point, so far as actual discussion went, but both fathers set to work to accomplish the object in view. Reece and Crewe were friends. They had been to school together and had kept more or less in touch with one another during the succeeding years, although they had been separated for the greater portion of them.

Reece had spent a considerable time in various Colonies, in the Government service, while Crewe had devoted himself to business in the mother country. The Reece estate had been kept in hand by his sister during his sojourn abroad, but her death had had something to do with his return and his decision to settle down and take matters easily.

Reece was delighted when he discovered that the adjoining property had been acquired by his friend, and it was not long before the two men began to think of matrimonial plans for their offspring.

However, the respective son and daughter did not view the matter in the same light, for it was not long before the young people saw the drift of certain broad hints, and perceived the object of sundry excursions and invitations. If the hints had not been so broad, Charles Crewe and Lucy Reece might have fallen in love as a matter of course, but when they discovered that they were being thrust on one another, as Lucy mentally termed it, their independent spirits rebelled against the plan and they deliberately made up their minds that they were not going to be disposed of like so much furniture. The natural result was that there was no progress in the direction of matrimony and the fathers looked at each other in dismay.

"They don't seem to take to one another, do they?" observed Mr. Crewe dolefully. "It's rather disquieting, isn't it?"

"It's *very* disappointing," emphasised Mr. Reece. 'Yet," he added, brightening a little, "it's not altogether a bad sign, you know! They have guessed our plans and it has ruffled them a bit, probably! That will wear off, and they will fall in love as deeply as—as——"

Mr. Reece could not find a simile, so he lamely desisted.

Then they hit on a plan for throwing the young people more together for a time. Crewe intended to have various extensive alterations carried out in his house; this work necessitated that father and son should go away from the house for a time, and take up their abode at a hotel. Reece invited the Crewes to stay with him and his daughter during the progress of the work. Charlie Crewe, who had taken over the active management of his father's office in Manchester, an hour's ride from home, would find himself just as conveniently situated as in his father's house.

Thus it came about that Charlie and Lucy, already somewhat antagonistic, found themselves in closer proximity, which tended to increase their antagonism. To make matters worse, although he thought that it was doing quite the opposite, Mr. Crewe said that Charlie needn't go up more than three days a week as business was always flat at that time of the year, and they could all have a good time.

It was the third day after the Crewes had installed themselves in the home of the Reeces. Lucy entered the library to get a book on geology and she found Charlie lazily reclining in an armchair, reading the latest novel and smoking a cigar. He was the picture of indolence.

"Can I get it for you, Miss Reece?" he inquired, rising slowly and speaking in the tone of a man who hoped that a negative reply would be given. He received the negative answer but with an addition which he did not expect.

"No, thank you, Mr. Crewe! I should not like to cause you any undue exertion! Pray remain seated!"

"You are so dreadfully energetic, Miss Reece!" he drawled, sinking back into the comfortable chair. "I suppose *that*, and the fondness for fossils, come from living in the Colonies! I admire your energy and your studious disposition, but I cannot imitate them, I regret to say!" Then, lowering his eyes so that the malicious twinkle in them should not be seen, he added: "Are you going to keep me company by sitting here to study?"

"I should not like to disturb the profundity of your reading, Mr. Crewe!" she retorted, flushing. She bowed and passed out of the room.

"By Jove!" muttered Charlie. "I am afraid I was a bit rude, but she was not behindhand! Well, I think I am making myself appear something of a dolt to her, and she won't be in a hurry to say 'yes!' when I pop the question, as I must do just to please dad. He'll be cut up about it, but I can't help it!"

Charlie Crewe presented himself to Lucy as an indolent fellow, rather shallow in mind, and bordering on the fop; not at all the kind of man to maintain and increase a large business. She preferred a man of the masterly type; strong of body and brain, morally and physically brave, capable of facing and overcoming all difficulties. To her, therefore, this Charles Crewe was the opposite of her choice of a husband.

Lucy did not perceive that he was exaggerating, that he was not really what he showed himself to her, yet she ought to have guessed it, considering that she herself was playing a similar game of exaggeration. Lucy was not the blue-stocking which she made Charlie think she was; she had a liking for study and she enjoyed athletic exercises, but at heart she was essentially homely and womanly. Her disposition was gentle, tender, and she preferred the work of a home to the study of

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fossils, and the work of a geologist with hammer and other appliances. Instead of being really the rather masculine, independent, "stand-offish" girl, she was yearning for a strong arm to protect her.

They kept up the play whenever they met and they believed in the truth of one another's acting. When alone, each smiled at his, or her, success and experienced increased dislike for the other party. It was a game of cross purposes with a vengeance, and the cherished desires of the fathers were suffering in consequence.

Mr. Crewe and Mr. Reece both felt constrained to say something, when, after more than a week had passed, there was no result. Crewe had an interview with his son, in which he delicately made the young fellow aware of the fact that his own desire was no nearer realisation, and Charlie evasively stated that it was his intention to ask Luby to be his wife if—the elder man did not notice the significance of the remark—if she would have him! In his mind he was sure that he was making acceptance impossible. Reece, on the other hand, told his daughter that he feared she had not been so attentive as a hostess should be to a guest; this made Lucy flush as she felt that there was some truth in the reproof. She promised to mend her ways.

"That's right," said Reece, adding lamely: "You see, when we stroll out and Charlie's father and I somehow leave you behind, as we have done several times, and then we come back—h'm, some time afterwards—to find you, why, you two are apart as if you were strangers! He is smoking on the grass and you are botanising!"

It was a muddled kind of speech but Lucy understood the drift of it. She did not, however, respond to the obvious suggestion.

Lucy Reece began to mend her ways that afternoon; she decided to make an advance, a step which cost her some rebellious feelings.

"Mr. Crewe," she said to Charlie, whom she found in the library, smoking the inevitable cigar, "I am going to town, and it looks uncharitable to leave you alone, as our worthy parents are out. Will you walk with me? It is only three miles there and three miles back?"

She was just slightly confused; his clear eyes had lifted for a second, flashing a keen glance at her, only to close lazily.

"Is it the same distance each way?" he asked quizzically, seizing upon the awkward turn she had given to her speech. "I really do not think that I am equal to so much exertion, Miss Reece! Why not ride? It's perfectly useless to walk when you can ride, you know!"

"Then you will excuse me for leaving you?" she inquired in a tone that meant that he would be obliged to do so. "I am sorry to have disturbed you." Then, her temper getting the better of her at this rebuff, she burst forth before she was aware of it: "I don't believe you would walk or bestir yourself if you knew that someone was being killed outside on the lawn!"

She was gone. He laughed softly.

"That settles the marriage question! I must take an early opportunity of popping the question and get the thing finished. It *was* rather rude of me though! Yet, by Jove, she gave me a Roland for my Oliver!"

Lucy hurriedly dressed and went on her errand; she was furiously angry now, partly because of Charlie's refusal and partly on account of her own stinging retort. Oh, why do parents act so foolishly as to try to make matches between ill-assorted couples! Lucy could not understand why; she felt angry with her father, with old Mr. Crewe, with everybody, that she should have been placed in so awkward a position!

"It will not be for long now," she comforted herself by saying; "he will give up the idea and will find some excuse for going away!"

So she treated him with proper courtesy for the next two days, although he was almost exasperatingly cool and dense on occasions. She was congratulating herself that there would be no proposal, and therefore she would not have to bear the blame of having refused him, when the thunderbolt came.

They were alone in the small drawing-room used on ordinary occasions. Charlie Crewe laid down his book and went to her side. His face betrayed some set purpose, and, in her surprise and agitation—annoyance, she would have called it!—she rose from the couch at his approach.

The rope swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

"Miss Reece," he began hesitatingly. He did not call her by her Christian name. "I must apologise for bothering you, because I can pretty well guess beforehand what you will say. I won't waste any words or sentiment over it! Do you think you could marry me? Would you be my wife?"

Everyone will agree that no girl in her senses could have accepted such an offer. Small wonder, therefore, that Lucy drew herself up stiffly and gave him a frigid answer.

"I suppose it is very kind of you, Mr. Crewe, to make the proposal, but I wish you had not."

"Just as I expected," he said, with unconcealed relief. "It was a sort of duty, you see. I was bound to do it, although I knew that the proposal would be unacceptable. I don't think we are suited, do you?"

"I do not think that there is any need to discuss the question of compatibility, Mr. Crewe," she returned icily, and she left him.

Charlie went back to his seat. He tried to smile, but that expression quickly gave place to a frown, and he began to gnaw savagely at his fair moustache. Somehow, he was not satisfied, although he had achieved his object.

"It was beastly hard on her," he muttered, jumping up and pacing the room with quick strides. "I don't want to be forced into marriage with any girl, but I ought to have adopted the more manly course of declining to carry out dad's wish. It wasn't manly to throw the responsibility on her, and to make the proposal in that way. Suitable? Well, perhaps not, but I needn't have insinuated that I didn't think she was good enough for me. Of course, that's how she will take it."

If Lucy had seen him as he strode townwards ten minutes later, she would have marvelled at the energy of this indolent man; and if she could have gauged the depths of his eyes at that moment, she would have entertained some doubts concerning the correctness of her idea respecting the extent

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of his intelligence. But Lucy had her face buried in the clothes of the bed on which she had thrown herself. Her well-moulded figure was shaking convulsively and a smothered sob betokened a condition of mind and heart that would have startled Charlie Crewe.

That evening Lucy did not appear at dinner, and Mr. Reece, with some anxiety, informed his two friends that she was suffering from a severe headache and appeared to be quite prostrate. Mr. Crewe expressed his great regret with evident sincerity; Charlie mumbled some words of sympathy, which were not quite intelligible. The meal was not a success, and the three retired earlier than usual.

Charlie Crewe could not understand what ailed him; he admitted that he ought to have been pleased, but he was not. Of course he did not wish to marry Lucy, and he was not going to marry her, so—— That was how he reasoned on the following morning, but he could not get any farther than the "so——" Lucy was at the breakfast-table, trying hard to appear cheerful, but it was not a successful attempt at all; the elder men were not happy, either, for they had learnt of the failure of the matrimonial negotiations. There was no ill-feeling between the two parents because Lucy had declined the proposal; they accepted the situation in all friendliness.

Charlie saw Lucy go out for a walk, perhaps on some fossilising expedition, as he would have said previously, and he wondered that he should feel rather cross that she had not asked him to accompany her; she must have known that he was fooling when he declined her invitation on the last occasion, he told himself, and now that there was no further chance of an unwelcome proposal, what reason had she for not asking him to go with her?

He watched her out of sight, gnawing at his moustache. It was vexing that she had not asked him; it was a fine morning, and he didn't want to sit in a stuffy library and smoke. A fellow cannot always be reading novels and smoking!

He decided to go out alone and to take a different direction. "I suppose I might have offered to go with her," he mused, as the thought occurred to him, "but I don't care to thrust myself upon anyone." He went off at a swinging pace, trying to wear away his ill-humour by hard walking or to get it blown away by the refreshing breeze.

About a mile from the house the land was hilly, and at one spot was a chine or ravine known as The Grindle. On one side the descent was comparatively easy, but on the other it was exceedingly dangerous to attempt a descent. It was almost perpendicular, with jutting pieces of rock here and there to afford a precarious hold. The Grindle was a lovely spot and formed the destination of many a walk.

Charlie Crewe unconsciously found himself near the Grindle after nearly an hour's tramp; he was on the steep side, and he decided to approach the edge in order to obtain a view of the sloping side and rest for a while.

"I wonder which way she took?" he asked himself incontinently. He gazed at the beauties of the Grindle for a minute or so, after which he threw himself on the grass and lay at full length.

"Charlie, my boy," he said, apostrophising himself "you've been an idiot! If you didn't want the girl"—there was a meaning pause at this point—"*if* you didn't want her," he went on, unconsciously emphasising the little *if*, "you needn't have gone on like that. I should think——"

He stopped and sat bolt upright as a sound struck his ear. He listened. There! It sounded like a cry for help!

He sprang to his feet and hurried along the summit of the Grindle, calling out, in stentorian tones: "Who's there?" And presently he caught the reply: "Here, down the Grindle!"

The voice came from one of the most dangerous portions of the chine, and he recognised it. Good Heavens! How had she got there?

He soon located the exact spot. Lying flat on his face, he looked over; he saw Lucy on a narrow ledge, several feet down. She was compelled to hold a small projection by one hand in order to keep on the ledge, which was almost too narrow to afford a foothold, and, moreover, sloped slightly downwards. It was evident that she had slipped from a higher projection, and had just managed to save herself. Even now, if her feet should slide along the sloping ledge, she would certainly be precipitated to the bottom, a distance of at least one hundred feet!

"Hold on, for Heaven's sake!" cried Charlie. "I'll get you out of that!"

His blood ran cold for a second as he thought of what might happen, but in a moment he was cool and collected. All the latent strength of his character came to the front.

There was no help near, and if he spent time in running in search of a rope, Lucy's strength might give way and—— He shuddered.

He was wearing a light overcoat. He slipped it off and cut and tore the material into stout strips, which he quickly tied together. The nearest projection to which he could attach one end was two or three feet below the edge. He cautiously clambered down and secured the improvised rope. The free end dangled a foot above Lucy's disengaged hand.

"It isn't long enough," groaned Charlie. "Can you hold on while I tear my jacket and make it longer?"

"I can't. My feet are slipping. I'll give a spring and grasp it."

He had great difficulty in suppressing a cry of fear as he saw her spring lightly upwards. Her hands grasped the line. It swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

"For Heaven's sake," cried Charlie again, "be careful. Wait till I get down a little further to help you. Oh, what should I do if you fell? I cannot bear to think of it!"

She was climbing up, steadily, hand over hand, as she had been taught to do in the gymnasium; but at that involuntary remark she stopped and looked at him with a gaze that penetrated the inmost recesses of his heart and caused a peculiar feeling of exaltation to spring up within it.

"Would you care so very much?" The words came from her lips before she could realise their meaning; she flushed fiery red immediately she had uttered them, and, turning her eyes from him, she continued the ascent.

"I should have nothing else to live for, Lucy!" he declared, not impulsively, but with the cool deliberation that proceeds from full recognition of the truth.

She reached the projection to which the line was secured; while she held to that projection, he drew the free end of the line towards him and scrambled to the summit, where he held it taut as he lay on the ground. This gave her the means of getting to the summit.

Scarcely had she placed herself beyond danger when he had her in his arms; and she, nestling closely to him, gave vent to her over-strained feelings in a flood of tears.

She had been trying to get a specimen of the bee orchis when she had slipped, narrowly escaping a dreadful death.

"I am so sorry that I made that cruel remark about your not being energetic enough or brave enough to——" She began, but he stopped her with a kiss.

"I think we have both been making a big blunder, haven't we, now? And I propose that we go straight back to our worthy parents and tell them that we have decided, all of our own free will, to bring about the realisation of their hopes. Do you agree, Lucy?"

Charlie always averred that Lucy said "Yes!" but Lucy declared that she made no reply, for the simple reason that Charlie did not give her time. A man in love is so impulsive!

Geo. Day.

He: "But you promised me this waltz?" She: "Yes, but that was before I had seen you dance!".

"He offered her his hand and fortune." "Did she accept it?" "No; the first was too large and the second too small!"

"She is a Russian Countess." "Indeed! Has she much in her own name?" "Has she? She's got nearly the entire alphabet!"

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Making the Best of It.

MABEL: "I'm sorry you asked me to marry you; it pains me to refuse." George (cheerfully): "Oh, don't worry; perhaps you know best what I am escaping."

Brave Girl!

ADA: "I saved a man's life at Blackpool last summer." Clara: "How? I didn't see anything about it in the papers." Ada: "Well, I should hope not. He said he'd die if I didn't let him kiss me."

He Had His Doubts.

JUDY: "Will ye give me yer promise, Dennis, that y'll love me foriver?" Dennis: "Sure, an' Oi'd loike to do that same, Judy, but Oi'm hardly of the opinion that Oi'll lasht as long as that."

Then They Recommenced.

JACK: "The photograph you sent me is just like you, dear. I kissed it ever so many times." Nina: "Did it return your kisses?" Jack: "No, of course not." Nina: "Then how can you say it is like me?"

Two Different Things.

DAISY: "I have an engagement with Cholly, and I don't know how to get out of it." Helen: "Haven't you any reason for breaking it?" Daisy: "Yes, I have a reason—Cholly is the reason—but I want an excuse."

Forewarned is Forearmed.

ETHEL (engaged a week): "George and I have never had a quarrel!" Maud: "Oh, I think you ought to have one before you are married; otherwise you can't be quite sure whether you are going to have your own way or not!"

Then There Were Screams of Silence.

"AH!" sighed Miss Antique, with a languishing glance in the direction of Mr. Oldboy, "if I had been born in the days of chivalry!" "Well," he said, as he scratched the bald spot on the top of his head: "You came pretty near it."

He Would Have Cause to Remember.

SYMPATHETIC SISTER: "Cheer up, Arthur, Mabel has treated you badly in jilting you, but you will soon forget her." Arthur (moodily): "Not for a long time, sis, I fear. The lovely jewellery I gave her was purchased on the easy payment system."

Hubby Had Got Tired of Cold Meat.

MASTER (to cook): "You needn't say anything to your mistress, Jane, but have you a policeman for a sweetheart?" Cook (indignantly): "Certainly not, sir!" Master: "Then you'll have to get one, or else leave. I want someone to eat up the cold mutton."

A Little Going a Long Way.

MR. HENPECK: "I shall have to go to town to-day, Maria, and I shall want some money, for there's train fare, lunch, 'bus fares, and I've got to——" Mrs. Henpeck: "Well, John, take this shilling, and, mind, if you come home the worse for drink I'll not let you in."

An Unkind Suggestion.

SHE: "So you are writing me a poem?" The Poet: "Yes, but I can't find anything to rhyme with 'Cupid' that will adequately express my state of mind." She: "Why not 'stupid'?"

A Cool Proposition.

"MY daughter is absolutely too young to marry," snorted old Goldrick. "Well," replied the dejected suitor, "what would you say to my taking her marriage dowry now and waiting a few years for the girl?"

Cruel Girl!

"I MET a pretty girl this morning, and she looked at me in a way which led me to believe she was trying to make an impression." "Shouldn't wonder. People generally select something soft for that purpose."

He'd Had Them Before.

MRS. YOUNGWIFE (welcoming husband home): "Now, ducky, I've been cooking all day. I've made pie and cake and biscuits." Ducky (cheerfully): "Then let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

Less Sudden Than She Thought.

HE: "Oh, pray, Miss Dalrymple, don't call me Mr. Brookes." She: "Oh, but our acquaintance has been so brief. (Sweetly) Why shouldn't I call you Mr. Brookes?" He: "Oh, only because my name's John Somerset!"

Poor Old Hubby!

"WHAT time is it?" asked his wife suspiciously, as he came in. "About one." Just then the clock struck three. "Gracious! When did the clock commence to stutter?" he said, with a feeble attempt at justification and a joke.

Would His Love Melt or Dissolve?

SHE: "If it were necessary, and I were your wife, would you go through fire and water for me?" He: "Do you think it would be necessary?" She: "It might be." He: "Then I think you had better marry a fireman. Good evening!"

Sufficient Credentials.

CAREFUL PARENT: "Before I give consent to your proposed marriage to my daughter I must know something about your character." Suitor: "Certainly. Here is my bank-book." Careful Parent (after a glance): "Take her, my son, and be happy."

The Joys of Matrimony.

HUSBAND: "Don't you think that you are rather unreasonable to expect me to take you to a ball, and stay awake until four o'clock, and then get up at eight and go to my work?" Wife: "I may be a little unreasonable, but it's perfectly brutal of you to mention it."

His Debts Had Grown.

RICH AMERICAN FATHER-IN-LAW: "My daughter and I are much disappointed in your estate. It seems to be a barren tract of land, and I don't believe anything has been grown on it for fifty years." The Penniless Count (cheerfully): "Monsieur forgets ze magnificent mortgages."

The Sarcasm Was Intense.

"MY hands are awfully cold," said the pretty girl suggestively, as they drove home from the dance. "Why didn't you bring your muff with you?" asked the practical young man. "I did!" she snapped. But she wouldn't explain where the muff had gone to, and he has been wondering ever since just what she meant.

But Ethel Said Nothing.

"ETHEL," said a fond mother, "did George leave any package for me last evening?" Ethel (falteringly): "Why, no, mamma! What made you ask?" "Oh, nothing; only I heard him say, as he said good-bye, 'Now, here is one more for your mother,' and I thought that it might be that pattern for lace-edging that his mother promised to send me."

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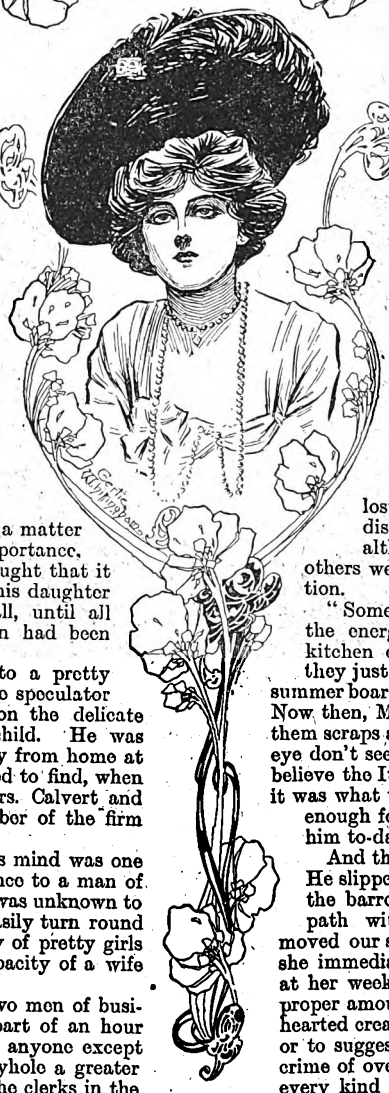
ONLY AN AMATEUR.



The Romance of a Gentleman Organ-Grinder.

THERE were three alternatives offered to Mr. Nicholas Frost. The first was suicide, and he put that on one side immediately as being too painful to contemplate; the second was borrowing from his friends to enable him to pay the debt which he owed of £10,000, which looked so much like the broad and easy way leading to the workhouse that he fought shy of venturing along it, and the third was marrying his daughter to the firm of Calvert and Son, his creditors.

Whether the father or son had her was a matter which after all was of very secondary importance, and this was especially so because he thought that it would perhaps be wisest neither to take his daughter into his confidence nor to consult her at all, until all the preliminary details of the transaction had been successfully negotiated.

"There is some advantage attaching to a pretty daughter after all," mused this unfortunate speculator one morning, as he set out to the City on the delicate mission of endeavouring to sell his only child. He was glad that the young lady was staying away from home at the time, and on the whole he was relieved to find, when he reached the magnificent offices of Messrs. Calvert and Son, Stock Brokers, that the junior member of the firm was also away on his holidays.

After all, the subject which occupied his mind was one which he could broach with more confidence to a man of a certain age, than to a young fellow who was unknown to him even by sight, and who might very easily turn round and say that there were in the world plenty of pretty girls who would suit him admirably in the capacity of a wife without a forfeit of £10,000.

Exactly what transpired between these two men of business, closeted as they were for the best part of an hour together, will probably never be known by anyone except the office boy, who had his ear to the keyhole a greater part of the time. But it was noticed by the clerks in the counting-house that when Mr. Nicholas Frost came downstairs he looked very hot and uncomfortable.

The subject which he had in hand was one of such extreme delicacy, that he spent half an hour in beating round the bush in the most elaborate manner, before he dared come to the point; and it was only when he at last blurted out that in the place of the £10,000, which was due, his daughter would be at the disposal of Mr. Calvert, senior, that he discovered the very unpleasant fact that Mrs. Calvert was still alive.

Thereupon he beat a very sudden and shame-faced retreat, and as he wended his way home he confessed that the choice now practically lay between suicide and the workhouse. After the most unfortunate mistake which had occurred, he could not very well mention the subject which he had in mind to the junior partner.

His prospects were anything but cheerful, and it was even a question whether it was practicable to borrow £10,000 from his friends. If not—then he must go to bed and think it over.

The organ grinder at the gate had been grinding away for fully twenty minutes at the popular tunes which filled his barrel. The nurses and the children under their charge had gaped over the fence to their hearts' content, and the pitiful old ladies confined to their rooms on the upper floors of that fashionable country boarding house had rained down sundry pennies upon him, a good many of which were lost in the long grass, to judge from the disappointed look on the man's face, although he found them quickly when the others were showered down by way of compensation.

"Some won't encourage them," said Mrs. Grit, the energetic proprietress, as she stood at the kitchen door, duster in hand; "but I say that they just help boarders to keep lively; and if your summer boarder gets low spirited you're apt to lose her. Now then, Maria, don't stand gaping there, but take them scraps and warm them in the oven. What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for, and I don't believe the Italian foreigner would care if he did know it was what the folks left on their plates. If it's good enough for mince to-morrow it's good enough for him to-day, ain't it?"

And then Maria called the foreigner to come in. He slipped the monkey's chain from the handle of the barrow, and shuffled up the well-kept gravel path with a look of eager expectation which moved our susceptible old lady upstairs to tears, and she immediately made up her mind not to complain at her weekly bill, although it was about double the proper amount, as Mrs. Grit was such a good, kind-hearted creature it would be cruel to hurt her feelings or to suggest that she had been guilty of the heinous crime of overcharging one of her boarders. And so every kind action has its reward, although we may not know it.

While the organ grinder was feeding in the kitchen with a relish which did great credit to the scraps, although it made them look rather small, a young man came down the road with a fishing-rod in one hand and an empty basket in the other. He was very good-looking, and his peculiar oval face with its bright Southern complexion and jet black hair was shown off to the very best advantage by the exceedingly Bohemian dress which he wore, probably for the very reason that he knew how becoming it was.

Your City man when he goes for a holiday as a rule prefers to be a little eccentric in his attire, and certainly the combination of coloured shirts, knickerbockers, and a huge fisherman's hat gave the young man the appearance of a theatrical bandit rather than anything else. He put down the empty fish basket inside the boarding-house gate, and then went back and examined the barrel organ.

"It looks easy," he thought to himself. "I never could see why girls should waste the best years of their lives learning

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the piano, which probably they will never play without giving offence to anybody with an ear for music, when the whole thing can be done so much better by just turning a handle. If I had to earn my own living I think that this sort of thing would suit me."

Then he took hold of the handle and began turning it. The result was very bad.

"Not so easy as it looks," he thought to himself, as he pounded the handle round with a series of disconnected jerks and began to get hot.

"Wonder what tune I'm supposed to be playing now. Never heard one quite like it before. Doesn't seem to attract any very great crowd either."

It was disappointing that there was nobody, not even a baby, to appreciate his efforts. The nursemaids, on whose support he counted, had all gone into the house to look after the children, and the older people, imagining that the legitimate grinder had recommenced operations in a very unfavourable mood, thought that the sooner he went away the better; and in the hopes of discouraging him to discontinue, they carefully abstained from looking out.

"Wonder where the owner of this muscle-developing machine has taken himself to?" mused the young man as he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. Then an inspiration came to him.

"By Jove!" he said, laughing softly to himself at the brilliancy of his own thoughts, "I'll trundle the thing down to the village and see how much I can make. It's down the hill all the way there, and the old man can fetch it back himself if he wants it. Good idea."

He found the barrel organ a considerable weight at first, but after a time it seemed to run easier, and finally the only question was whether he would ever be able to stop the thing at the other end. However, half way down the hill, when the speed was estimated at fifteen miles an hour, he brought up against the wheel of a small dog cart which was coming slowly in the opposite direction.

Thereupon the barrel organ went over, playing the last chords of "After the Ball" as it did so, and finally settled down on the top of the young man who had got entangled in the handles.

When he got up again he found that the horse was rearing and doing its best to run backwards down the hill on its hind legs, while the young lady, who was driving alone, was screaming at the top of her voice.

Whether the horse had a natural antipathy to popular tunes, or hated Italians, or thought that the barrel organ was going to attack it again, did not appear, but it was some time before the young man who sprang at the frightened creature's head was able to persuade it to assume its natural position on four legs.

In the meantime the young lady, whose nerves had naturally been very much shaken, had not failed to notice the good looks of the man whom she was kind enough to consider her saviour, although, as a matter of fact, he had done more towards bringing her to a sudden end than anything else.

"Saved," she muttered to herself, as the horse at last resumed its horizontal position, "and by an organ grinder as handsome as he is graceful."

Miss Frost, for she was the daughter of the man who at that moment was trying to sell her hand to his creditors, had been to a modern school and she knew Italian, and as soon as she had caught her breath she aired it for the organ grinder's benefit.

"Signor," she said, bending forward and showing her pretty white teeth, "how can I thank you for saving my life? It was very brave of you."

"An Italian lady, by Jove," thought the young man—an Italian would never have supposed it for a minute—and he instantly replied in the same language and an accent peculiar to street arabs.

"Signorina, that I have done something to spare you alarm has made me happy. If by chance I saved your life I am too much honoured and favoured." He thought, on the whole, it was better to put it this way to apologise for having done his best to kill her.

"Never was there such an organ-grinder," thought pretty Miss Frost. Then her blue eyes lighted on the barrel-organ, where it lay apparently none the worse for the collision.

"Is it hurt—your organ?" she asked anxiously in the Italian language as spoken in the class-rooms at Girton. And the young man interrupted her in the same language as taught by Professor Sprachemalli."

"That is my affair, signorina."

"How proud he is—perhaps he is a prince who has been obliged to fly the country," thought Miss Frost, and thereupon she bestowed another gracious smile upon him, and, thanking him with all the most eloquent phrases she could remember, she drove away, turning once to wave a dainty lace handkerchief to her preserver.

And so they parted—Miss Frost to tell her adventure to her aunt, and the young man to find the missing owner of the organ, and to pay him the price of the damage which he had brought about.

At tea-time he had made many inquiries concerning the Italian lady, and to his surprise he found that nobody, not even Mrs. Grit herself, knew anything of her.

This was most disappointing, for he had already been looking forward to their next meeting with pleasurable anticipation, and framing a few words which would express his anxiety after her welfare in the most eloquent words of her poetic language.

Do what he would he could not forget that pretty face and gentle voice, and he found himself singing, "Some Day" as he wandered about the garden on a moonlight night in a voice so plaintive that one old lady sent down her maid to inquire if he was feeling unwell, and if there was anything which she could do for him.

He procured an Italian dictionary and phrase book, and sat late into the night, brushing up his knowledge of the language, which had never been a very extensive one, and every day he wandered up and down between the boarding-houses and the village, looking out for that little red-wheeled cart with the spirited bay horse and the charming young lady inside.

However, it never came his way, and for the very good reason that Miss Frost's aunt had forbidden her ever to drive out alone again, and condemned her to the family carriage and the driving of old Carter Pattenden, the family coachman, who always avoided that hill into the village whenever he could.

So for many days the young man never saw the beautiful foreigner who had broken his romantic heart, while pretty Mildred Frost hardly knew whether she was wretched or happy, when she thought of the wonderful romance that had come into her life, for she owned to herself that she adored the organ-grinder, who was certainly a prince in reduced circumstances.

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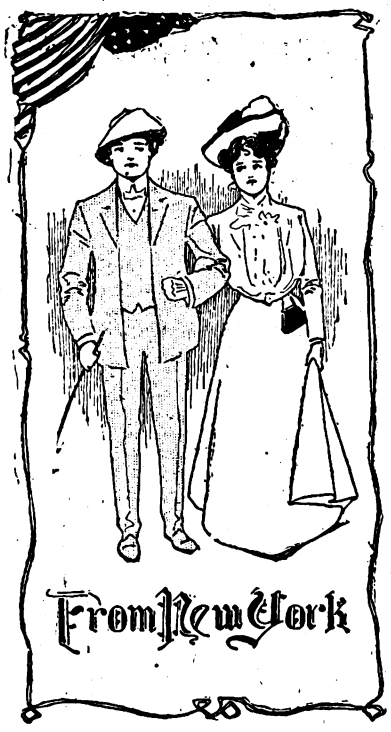

At last they met. It was in this way. The young man was consoling himself by fishing on the banks of a little stream which ran through a wood, and Miss Frost was out for a solitary walk, lost in contemplation of the happiness which was in store for her some day, when the second volume of her novel in real life would be good enough to begin.

"My gallant preserver," she cried, as she caught sight of his picturesque broad-brimmed hat. "Oh, signor, is it possible?"

And he answered in Italian also.

"Signorina, this is the happiest hour of my life. Ah, how I have dreamt of this meeting, how I longed with all the passion of my heart to speak to you once more, to stand face to face, and to gaze into those dazzling eyes," he had learnt this by heart out of an Italian novel, and he was rather proud of it.

And so these two began to make love to one another in a foreign language, and never for a moment did either of them suspect the nationality of the other. Miss Frost felt sure that her aunt would not welcome an organ-grinder as a guest, and so she had to make excuses for not asking him to call.

The young man, on his part, fished for an invitation as he had never fished for trout. He was a gentleman, and he thought that after the open way in which they had expressed their admiration for one another the least the young lady could do was to ask him to five o'clock tea.

He was desperately in earnest over this adventure, and he was burning to know her parents and to pay his addresses properly. However, Miss Frost did not feel equal to introducing a wandering musician into her aunt's drawing-room, and although she was in her heart secretly hoping that he would suggest an elopement, she did not dare even to think of her father's passion when he heard of her attachment for this handsome organ-grinder.

"I wish to goodness that she knew a little English," thought the young man as his adored sat on one side of the stream with a phrase book hidden under her muff, and he sat on the other with a dictionary concealed in his fish basket. "I don't understand half she says, except when she condescends to talk in the language of the eye. I expect something unpleasant will come of this."

Something did.

One evening about twilight the young man and Miss Frost sat in the little cove, which they had chosen on account of the utter seclusion, upon some damp but very mossy rocks.

His arm was about her waist, her head on his shoulder, and he had called her "Carissima" and "Bella Carissima" several times when an avalanche rolled down the steep bank upon them. That was the effect. It was, however, only the portly form of Mr. Nicholas Frost who had come down from town for the day and hearing that his daughter had gone out for a solitary walk, had set out in search for her. and attracted by the sound of voices, he had pitched upon the lovers, and, slipping in the excitement of the moment, he had come down the slope with a rush.

They broke his fall, but when he picked himself up he began to use language which was more forcible and penetrating than polite or coherent. And in the pauses he wanted to know "what the dickens his daughter was doing, and who on earth the confounded rascal was who sat with her."

The young man, quite conscious that he deserved the reproof, only it was the girl's fault for not having asked him to call, was just feeling in his pockets for a card, and wondering somewhat at the fluency with which the old gentleman, who was evidently her guardian or her father, spoke English, when, to his utter amazement, the girl flung herself on her knees.

"Father, please don't be angry," she pleaded in perfect English. "This is the noble organ-grinder who saved my life. He cannot speak one word of English, and in saving me broke his organ, and has to support himself by fishing. Remember, father, that but for him I should now be in my grave. Oh, father, I love him, and so, as you love me, be merciful."

"Mildred Frost," said the old man, "you're an idiot. Here, you organ-grinder, can you speaky Englesy at all, you know?"

"Perfectly," said the young man, with a gesture of despair. "In fact, I'm an Englishman. I thought your daughter was an Italian lady until this moment, and she apparently paid the same compliment to my knowledge of the language Allow me to explain the somewhat embarrassing position into which you have put us by your unexpected arrival. I have, I need hardly to say, the most respectful admiration for Miss Frost, and wish to——"

"I can't listen to any explanations," interrupted the old man, stamping his foot on the ground in ungovernable fury. "What business have you to make love to my daughter, you disreputable, dirty, lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond? If you broke your confounded organ in saving her life, although I would like to know how the dickens you did that, I will pay for a new one. I am deeply grateful for what you have done," he added, growing more conciliatory at the look of pain and supplication in his daughter's eyes, "but you see organ-grinding or fishing is not—that is—I——"

"Quite so," said the young man, with slightly heightened colour. "Only there seems to be some mistake. As to organ-grinding, I'm only an amateur. I thought your daughter knew that. I'm no more a professional than I'm an Italian. And perhaps you know James Calvert by name. He has rather an extensive business in the City. I'm his only son. It was a mutual mistake."

The old man sat down on the rock as if he had been stunned. "Done it again," he muttered to himself. "Lost my second chance. There's nothing for it but suicide now. What a fool I am to be sure. I might have seen the fellow was a gentleman."

However, when he had made it clear that he quite understood and appreciated what a good match the young man would be for his daughter, and how proud he would be to call Mr. Calvert, junior, his son-in-law, he found that things were going all right after all. The young man had no idea until he was married to Mildred, daughter of Nicholas Frost, that his father-in-law was no other than the ruined speculator who had lost all his money through his careless dealings with the firm of Calvert and Son, Throgmorton Street.

Stanley Hammond.

To Story Writers.

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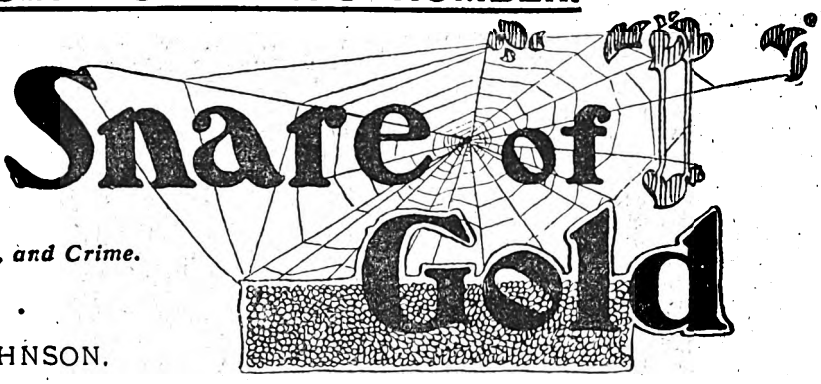
The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

· · By · ·

Henry T. Johnson.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

"Ronald Geldart was an outcast from his father's house. Now he is charged with the cruel murder of a poor lady whose only offence was clearly that she knew this Harvey Bligh for what he was; held in her possession the secret of his past, and, no doubt, to that knowledge owed her cruel death," continued Lord Lynton.

"Father! Father!" cried Madeleine, in anguished accents. "You must not speak of him so cruelly and so unjustly!"

"Why not?" exclaimed her father fiercely, fixing a thunderous look upon her.

And she, drawing herself erect, said very quietly and slowly: "Because I love him."

For some moments her father was silent, rage and amazement choking his utterance, then he demanded in a strained and husky voice: "How far has this folly gone? Has anything been said between you?"

"Yes," she answered, "he has asked me to be his wife, and I have promised."

"What! What! I could find it in my heart to say bitter things to you, but, of course, what has transpired has put an end to your folly; you will never see him again."

"On the contrary, I am going to see him now."

"To see him? A man in prison on a charge of murder—one who before long will doubtless be a felon. I forbid you, I dare you—dare you to sully the name you bear by such a course."

"I am sorry," she said, "because till now, strangers in all save ties of blood as we have been, I have always striven to obey you—but now——"

"Now? Well, now this fellow lies in a police-cell, the evidence against him, even without going into it is so overwhelming, that they will not grant him bail. And you——"

"I am his affianced wife. I believe in him and love him. It is in the hour of his direst gloom and peril that my place is most clearly at his side. In my hour of danger he rushed to my aid at peril of his life, in his time of peril I go to him whatever may befall."

"Go then," said the Viscount, pointing to the door, "but—you will not return, my house no longer is your home, you cease to be my child."

For a moment she swayed, convulsed by the conflict within her, not alone of love and duty, but of love and love, of duty and duty. Then she went forth out of the stately mansion, that palace in a colony of palaces, hastening in the direction of the cell wherein her lover lay!

Ronald sprang up with a glad cry. The station gaoler was a stern man, but with a strong heart within his coat of official mail, and he affected an absorbing interest in the perusal of a card of rules throughout their *tête-à-tête*, and there in the grim surroundings of the cell, in Ronald Geldart's darkest hour, the girl he loved repeated once again all that she had confessed of love for him, and trust and faith, in happier scenes, in brighter hours, all that and more.

So that when, a little later, he faced his accusers in the dock, he did so with head erect and a gaze so unflinching, that while some could not find it in their hearts to believe that the hand of Cain could rest upon a brow so frank and open, others, readier to believe evil, added to the list of his alleged offences the crime of callousness, averring that just the man who could bear himself so nonchalantly would do the evil deed.

Eric Geldart, called, repeated the evidence he had given at the inquest as to identification; also he identified the letter, making the appointment with the deceased on the night in question as being in his brother's handwriting.

This, however, Ronald admitted, reiterating also his admission at the inquest that he had kept the appointment on the night in question. And once again he was remanded.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Geldart Determines to Act.

George Geldart had attained his heart's desire, the end and aim he had aspired to had been reached.

What the big picture to be some day painted, the big book to be some day written, the big battle to be some day fought and won—what these things are to other men, his System was to him, it was his great work, at length he had achieved it, and, like countless men and women before him, he found the yearned-for fruit when gathered turn, like Dead Sea apples, to ashes on his lips.

His pet idea had realised his most sanguine expectations. Hundreds of thousands of pounds in various banks stood to the credit of the quaint, mysterious old man in the names of the various trusts and syndicates under whose denomination he, in conjunction with Sampson Scrimshaw, worked his elaborate scheme, and his one alloy of bitterness had been the reflection that, had his wilder son and partner had faith in him, and had his younger son availed himself of his birth-right partnership instead of flinging it aside, even the gigantic fortune he had piled up with Scrimshaw might have been multiplied, in fact, that with extended operations, their hoard might have surpassed those imaginations and calculations.

And there had been the consoling reflection that even yet it was not too late; he could go back to them now with his system proved, his new Golconda not only prospected but worked, and its output assayed, his Eldorado not only explored but exploited.

Wealth—wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, beyond the realms almost of human imagination could be his and theirs, and he could furnish proof, could give them earnest of the untold-wealth in store.

And then this had happened. Just when he had added the topmost pinnacle to his house of cards—of winning cards—at a breath the whole structure had collapsed in ruin, the son he had wronged and whom he meant to compensate so

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wholly, so munificently, and whose name he meant to clear from that unjust stain, now lay beneath a yet more heinous ban, charged with that supreme offence for which the law prescribes its extremest penalty.

That Ronald had done this thing he could not believe, and, reading the accounts of the tragedy, putting the evidence piece by piece together, he remembered on the night in question meeting, just by chance, Eric and Blagdon near that spot, coming from the direction where the ill-fated girl was found, within a few minutes, perhaps seconds, of the crime, and reflected that had he not turned aside to avoid encountering but pursued his path, he must have happened on the murdered girl.

What was Eric doing there on the very scene of the murder of the misguided girl who held the secret of his fraud?

And then, reading the account of Eric's evidence at the inquest, and listening to the stray comments that reached his ears regarding the affair (for the matter was the chief topic of public discussion), comments directly, desperately condemnatory of Ronald and sympathetic with his brother, the old man knew that Ronald had spoken only the truth and that it was his Judas brother who had lied.

What should he do? What could he do?

Suppose he stood forth before the world and proclaimed aloud his strange, weird story, who would believe him? Ronald perhaps, whose accusers would declare that belief, even if expressed, to be a lie. Eric? Eric might believe, but he would lie his hardest in denial, steep his soul in blacker perjury than ever to hide the lies and fraud of earlier days. And Blagdon? the arch hypocrite and humbug, would indorse his perjury.

True, George Geldart was conscious of the wealth at his command, but how was that to aid him?

Stanyer could tell his version of the story, but then to Stanyer he had represented himself as a very different individual in most ways from the well-known and highly-respected George Geldart believed to have died in Bryanston Square, and to be now resting beneath the marble sarcophagus of the family vault inscribed with his many alleged virtues.

Besides, even if he proved his story, which in the end he possibly might do, how was that to aid him? How was that to hinder Eric from his sinful hounding of his innocent brother to the scaffold?

What should he do? What could he do?

Whatever there was to be done, however many steps he had were to be taken, this was the first: to seek out Eric, to face him, and by all or any means prevail upon, force him if need be, to lift the load of calumny and perjury that he had heaped upon his brother's head.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

Blagdon Gets a Shock.

THREE men were seated in the smoking-room of Sampson Scrimshaw's luxuriously appointed flat. One talking, the others listening with indrawn breath.

And when George Geldart finished his story Scrimshaw wiped beads of perspiration from his brow, and Stanyer, clutching the arm of his chair, instinctively moved that chair a little farther from the speaker.

A shudder and a silence fell upon the two men, to whom it seemed that they were in the presence of one back from the grave, listening to the voice of one risen from the dead. And at last Stanyer, in a strained, husky voice, said slowly:

"Then, that man at Sydney was telling the truth?"

"Absolutely," said Geldart. "I knew Dick Farningham's cousin who went out to Australia very well."

His elbow resting on the table, he leant his head upon his hand with an absent, saddened air. His scheme had turned out so wrong, and ended so badly; the System had been proved; he had in what seemed to him the short sequel to his life's story amassed a fortune, yet what did it avail him?

He had also proved his younger son innocent of the theft of which he had suspected him, but then, at what a cost!

He had proved his elder son a very villain, how deeply dyed a villain he dared not even think; and Clare—whom he had regarded almost as a daughter—Clare was dead—murdered, and his younger son stood charged with the awful crime.

He was sure that younger son was innocent, also, of this charge, but who was guilty? That was the question he scarcely dared to frame.

"Well," said Scrimshaw, after a pause, "this accounts for a lot that puzzled me. I knew that only a man of long experience and colossal ability could be so perfect a master of financial craft as you. I knew you had a story of some kind, that you had been a man of mark.

"What I imagined was that in some way yours was a second life, though not in the way it has turned out to be; that in your earlier phase you had made some big mistake, something had happened that you could not face, and when I noted your aversion to meeting many people, and particularly people moving in certain swims and circles, and, again, when once or twice very early or very late callers at the office passing you casually upon the stair asked who was that strange old man, and tried to cudgel their brains to locate the face, I was all the more convinced.

"I remember watching from my window between the lights one night I saw a man in passing turn and look at you, then grow white and stagger, one hand on his brow, and the other on his heart; and when Jack Widdicombe came to the City to consult me about the *Meteor*, as he entered my room with a face white as death, he gasped out that he had seen a ghost."

"It seems to me," said Stanyer, "you'll very likely find some difficulty in establishing the fact that you are yourself, especially if you have two such men as Blagdon and that bright elder son of yours to deal with. Why didn't you make a clean breast of it all when you met me?"

"We hadn't met for so long, we'd become little more than strangers, and, to tell the truth, I was a little bit amused by the way you patronised me; it was a novel sensation. And then, again, I saw my way to fulfilling the dream of so many years and testing my System. But now I'm more bewildered than I was in those weird hours when the terror of the fate I had only just escaped was still upon me. What can I do—what can I do?"

"Clearly the first thing to be done," said Scrimshaw, self-possessed and matter-of-fact as ever, "is to extract the truth out of your son Eric and his precious partner. It won't be the easiest task. Getting butter out of a dog's mouth will be child's play to it. Eric will battle like a tiger; he's a villain, but he's a villain of grit—the easier man to tackle will be Blagdon; he's not such a villain as the other, but he's flabbier. Now it seems to me our best course is to get him here."

"Would he come?" asked Stanyer.

"He'll have to," said Scrimshaw. "I'll make him!"

"How?"

"I've got him in the toils; when you've got a man set fast in the toils of debts that he can't meet you can make him dance to a good many tunes, according as you pull the string. One moment!"

He walked across to the telphone and asked for Blagdon's number; then they heard him in conversation with the man they wanted.

"I want you to come over here to my rooms in Walsingham House. You can't? I'm afraid you must. Can't; you distribute prizes to—what? Oh, well, the Young People's Self Help and Mutual Improvement Society must get somebody else. You don't understand my tone? Come over here and then you will. Look here, if you're not at my rooms by nine o'clock to-night I close your account and tell my lawyers to put on all pressure. Don't do that? Well, you come here. What's it all about? Tell you when you come. Is it to your benefit? It's necessary to your safety. You'll come? Of course you will!"

He rang off, and turned to his visitors.

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"That cur will come to heel." Then he rang up Eric.

"Want to see you here at half-past nine. At the House? No, here—I'm not coming down. You must? I tell you you mustn't. What do I mean? Come here and I'll tell you. You mean to vote against the Amendment? You must pair. What the dickens am I driving at? Come here, and you'll see. You'll demand an explanation? You'll get it. Yes, I've been dining, quite wisely. Be here at ten to-night or to-morrow's papers will publish something more than interesting and less than pleasant, so far as you are concerned. You will? Oh, yes, I'll explain my words, and more. Good-bye!" Then to his guests:

"He's coming too."

* * * * * *

The hour brought the man. Precisely as the subdued chime of the bronze pedestal clock in Scrimshaw's smoke-room sounded nine the soft-footed, subdued-mannered man-servant announced "Mr. Blagdon," and Boanerges, very flustered and perspiring, and breathing deeply and rapidly, hurried in. Having glanced round the room to see they were alone, he exclaimed:

"Bless my soul, Scrimshaw, what's the meaning of this? I was perfectly astounded by your peremptory tone and words; perhaps, however, it sounded differently through the telephone."

"Yes, the tone does lose in transmission. Sit down."

"But surely, Scrimshaw, you're not going to be unpleasant with regard to my account? You've always been so agreeable, when the balance has been heavier against me than now, and at the present moment it would be most inconvenient; in fact, impossible for me to—arrange a settlement."

"It depends on you whether I am going to be pleasant or otherwise."

"Bless me! what do you mean? What have I done?"

"It doesn't matter what you have done, it's what you're going to do that matters."

He touched a bell. Frederick Stanyer entered, and Scrimshaw, motioning him to a seat, went on: "This gentleman is Mr. Stanyer, back from Australia; you don't know him, but that's of no importance."

Blagdon puffed out his cheeks.

"I want him to listen to what I am going to read, and you are going to sign, and he and I are going to witness."

"But you've got it all in the accounts. I've never disputed your figures."

"It has no more to do with our account than with the man in the moon. Listen!"

And Blagdon, with his eyes almost starting from his puffy cheeks, listened while Scrimshaw read. And this is what he heard:

"I, Boanerges Blagdon, of The Laurestinas, Brixwell, in the County of Surrey, and of Billiter Square, in the City of London, merchant and broker, being of perfectly sound mind, conscious of and responsible for my actions, hereby make this solemn declaration.

"In the month of January of the present year I did in conjunction with Eric Geldart——"

Boanerges clutched the arms of his chair.

"Conspire unlawfully to commit the following offences."

"Why, what does this mean?" said Blagdon, starting up, with a catch of the breath and even paler yet.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you." And Scrimshaw went on reading:

"Firstly, having embezzled from the partnership assets of the then firm of Geldart, Blagdon and Geldart, of Billiter Square aforesaid, merchants and brokers, the sum of £10,000 in notes!"

Blagdon gasped.

"Is that man a detective? I won't sit here!"

"You'd better." And Scrimshaw repeated: "The sum of £10,000—to procure and incite one Clare Armitage, spinster, now deceased——"

The man's face turned from white to grey.

"To abstract the keys of a certain desk on the premises of George Geldart in Bryanston Square. Secondly, in conjunction with the said Eric Geldart, to change the said notes and with the proceeds thereof to replace the amount of the said embezzled assets. Thirdly, to steal and destroy a certain promissory note for £1,500 given by me to the said George Geldart, Esq., of Bryanston Square aforesaid, to secure the sum of £1,500 advanced by him to me. Fourthly, with the said Eric Geldart and one Hamish Macquoich, L.R.C.P., to manufacture false and fraudulent evidence respecting the mental condition of the said George Geldart with the object of and for the purpose of placing the said George Geldart under detention in an asylum for the insane."

Scrimshaw paused. Blagdon, with a dogged, hunted look in his eyes, cried:

"Is that all?"

"Not quite all, there's something I am going to mention later. But so far you'll sign."

"I won't," said Blagdon hoarsely. "I deny it all—all!"

"Just as you denied giving the promissory note!"

He passed his hand across his brow. What did it all mean? Had Eric split? But, no! even if he would have done so it would be as fatal to himself as to Boanerges. And if Eric had not split what other evidence could there be? Geldart was dead. Clare? With a shudder he reflected that Clare was dead. What then was all this indictment? What was their attempt to wring this confession from him based upon? Theory, imagination, bluff; then he would meet it with bluff.

"It's all a lie, an infamous lie!" he exclaimed, "and I will nail it to the counter and I will assert myself and vindicate my character, my unblemished character, against those who dare to assail a man in my position. Yes, by George, sir, I'll do so to their cost!" Then, after a moment's pause, convinced that he was on the right track, he turned on Stanyer.

"Are you a police officer? If so, where are your credentials? I demand to see them. If you are not, how dare you intrude your presence on me. And you, Scrimshaw, how dare you bring me here to listen to a charge so false, so infamous!"

"I'll explain that later," said Scrimshaw, striking a vesta and applying it to his cigar. Then, his foot upon the arm of his chair, after a few thoughtful puffs, he said:

"There's one other clause I'm going to add, but I'm going to get you to draft it."

"Some other preposterous lie. And what may that relate to?"

"The murder of Clare Armitage, and your presence on the scene at the time!"

All the bluff, all the bravado of Blagdon was instantly crushed and pulverised; his knees fell over with a sudden jerk; his manner, his bearing, the whole man, suddenly collapsed as he listened to the thundered words—met the thunderous

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gaze of his accuser, a gaze he had never seen in that man's eyes before.

"Now," said Scrimshaw, "there is pen and ink, add the other clause and—sign!"

"I won't—I won't!" he said in a hoarse, choking voice. For a moment he seemed unable to breathe. "I'll leave this place; let me out—let me out!"

"When you have signed!"

"But I won't; I'll leave this place!" He made for the door, Scrimshaw put his back to it, and the key clicked in the lock. He gazed at the windows.

"I'll shout for police!" Then his eye caught another door. Panting and breathless he made a dash towards it, turned the handle, flung it open wide. "You'll pay for this!" he said, facing the two, for they were standing calm and immovable, making no sign to stay him. "As for your other clause," he went on, "it's only another lie, we—weren't—I mean I wasn't there!"

"You were! You were!"

"Who saw me there? Bah!" for his question unanswered by them, he turned, dashed into the adjoining room, a dimly-lit chamber round which he searched, casting a hasty glance for yet another door.

And his eyes fell upon a mirror, a mirror reflecting the tiny gleam of one solitary gas jet. And his own white face.

And another face. Oh, God!—the face of George Geldart! whom he had seen in his grave clothes lying in his coffin! There—there it was beside him! With a shriek he turned from the reflected image, and lo! there face to face, close to him, almost touching him stood the image that had been reflected.

A moment, with hair rising erect, with a great spasm at his heart, he looked upon the face and form of the George Geldart whom he had betrayed, whose son he was content to let unjustly hang—then down in a heap he crashed and tumbled at his feet.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Father and Son.

So complete was his collapse that for a while they thought the shock had caused heart failure. But by-and-bye he recovered consciousness and came round. Only they dared not let George Geldart again approach him.

Piteously, frantically he clung to them as a child might to its parents, beseeching them to keep what he could not conceive to be other than the apparition, the accusing spirit of the man he had wronged, away.

And when they bade him, as the condition of their so doing, sign that confession, he, whimpering abjectly, assented to sign it as it stood. But Scrimshaw was firm.

"Bring Geldart in," he said, "let him tell what he knows!" And then the broken wretch bade them give him the pen and he would sign it, clause and all, only in mercy let them keep the awful Thing away.

Then Scrimshaw put it to him that he was there, and with the certainty of one thing for the basis of a guess at another, that he was standing by when it was done.

"No, no, not close by! Not far off, but I could not see what was going on for the mist and the darkness.

"Put that down, Stanyer! But you knew!"

"Not all, not all. I couldn't tell why she was screaming."

"Write that down too."

"You didn't think that he was killing her?"

"No, no; not till he came back and I saw his hands."

"Write fast, Frederick Stanyer:"

"Her blood upon his hands, on Eric Geldart's hands, and then you knew what he had done!"

"Not quite, not for certain; for when I challenged him he wouldn't answer, he only washed his hands at the fountain, then caught me by the arm and hurried me away."

"My God!" ejaculated Scrimshaw, "this is the worst thing I ever heard. Poor, poor Old Mystery! Have you got it all, Stanyer?"

"And hurried me away," Stanyer repeated. "Yes, there it is."

"Now sign," said Scrimshaw, handing the beaten, pulseless, backboneless wretch the pen.

A moment he strove to make one final stand.

"It'll mean my ruin!" But they, knowing that, whatever the penalty, he had merited it, knowing with what unhesitating callousness he had been content if not to wreck, to suffer another's ruin, to hold his tongue when even a word might save an innocent life, were quite relentless.

"Sign!" said Scrimshaw. "Bring Geldart in; let him tell him all he knows!"

"No, no!" he quavered hastily, and, knowing that they knew much, but not how much they knew, and dreading the approach of the man he had seen nearly a year ago in cerements, the man he for long had thought his treachery had killed, he took the pen and signed.

And no sooner had he done so than the consciousness of what he had done flashed upon him, possessed him even more strongly than his terror.

"Give it me back!" he clamoured. "I deny all—deny you to prove anything!"

But he appealed in vain. Scrimshaw, snatching the paper with one hand, with the other thrust him back into his chair.

"My friend, it is so seldom you perform a really honest action that, having brought you to one, I can't stand by and see you spoil it. And now you'd better have another nip of brandy to bring you quite round. Hullo!" for a bell rung, just as the chime hummed out the half hour and the smooth-faced, smooth-tongued, smooth-mannered servant announced:

"Mr. Eric Geldart."

"Don't let him in; don't let him see me, he'll—he'll murder me!" And Scrimshaw, opening a third door, he bundled swiftly through it, and made his way down a side stair out into the street, out into the world that he scarcely dared to face and that ere long might be ringing with the news of his disgrace.

The member for Little Claverton entered with a stern, inquiring look on his face.

"I don't understand your message, Mr. Scrimshaw, and am here to demand an explanation." Then his eye fell upon Stanyer.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "I was not aware that I was going to meet a gentleman with whom I am unacquainted."

"I think we shall be able to explain everything, Geldart," said Scrimshaw, lazily; "won't you sit down, and, if you'd like a drink, there's the tantalus."

"I will not sit down, and be hanged to your tantalus! I came here to learn your meaning in presuming to address me as you did just now over the telephone."

"And you shall. I sent for you here to save a life."

"What do you mean?"

"Your brother's life."

"My brother's life is nothing to me. He and I have long ceased to be brothers, and he must take the consequences of his crime."

"Precisely, but not of yours."

"What!" for a moment his eyes wavered and his face paled. "What new insolence, I may say madness, is this?"

"Neither madness nor insolence; plain, straightforward fact. I sent for you to clear your brother from the charge of murder now made against him, and from the earlier slander fixed on him of having robbed his father."

"And you and my brother can be hanged if you think that, because I have done business with you, and perhaps you have a few thousands against me on your books, that entitles you to be insolent; let me tell you, you have mistaken your man! After this interview never presume to communicate with me in any way again."

"So be it," said the other, "but before this interview closes let me read something that may interest you."

And he read aloud—"I, Boanerges Blagdon," and Eric started as at an electric shock, and as Scrimshaw read on and on his visitor's face became more set and rigid, his breath came and went slowly, his cheeks, even his lips, paled and his eyes

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quivered with a dangerous light, his hands were clenched till the nails cut into the flesh

Stanyer, watching him narrowly, marked how when Scrimshaw reached the fifth clause Eric's nostrils dilated, his breath came deeper and faster; watched him, too, just as Scrimshaw had reached the last line of that confession, spring like a panther at the man who held it, and seeing this flung himself upon him, took him by the throat, and in another instant Scrimshaw had his wrist in a vice-like grip, for he was strong of hand as well as head.

"None of this, or else—a whistle, and the police are here, and you will leave with handcuffs on your wrists!"

"Scrimshaw, you shall pay for this!" cried Eric.

"I pay what I owe. Now listen to me. There is time for you and Blagdon to clear out to some country where extradition treaties cease from troubling, leaving a confession which clears your brother."

But the expression of impatient scorn on Geldart's face as well as on his lips, interrupted him.

"Very well then," he said, "alternatively, your brother steps out of the dock a cleared and vindicated man, and you take his place, charged with the crime of which he will have been acquitted."

"Scrimshaw," said Eric, "you talk like a fool. Do you think I am a child to be frightened by such a bogey as that. Blagdon never signed that paper; it's a forgery, or, if he did sign, then he was out of his senses or under duress, and beyond that where are your witnesses?"

Scrimshaw touched a bell. Stanyer threw the door open and in a moment father and son stood face to face.

Yes. Eric beheld the father he deemed he had followed to the grave nearly a year ago, beheld him with eyes dilated and glistening with horror, consternation, dread; iron as he was for a moment his fibre gave way.

"What—what is this?" he gasped, then he, too, trembled unnerved. "Who is it?" he cried again. "It can't be a ghost, there aren't such things! It's a living man—but no, no, no! it can't be!"

"It is—it is," the old man cried in an agitated voice, broken by a choking sob. "Eric, my misguided, poor, sinful son, it is your father!"

Eric Geldart with slow steps retreated, maybe some four yards, with terror-dilated eyes fixed upon the grief-stricken man who faced him, the others looking on as though spell-bound. For a while he could not find his voice, until at last with an effort, he whispered hoarsely and slowly:

"No—no, it couldn't be! I don't know what your plot is, but you are not my father, though for a moment I almost dreamt you were his ghost."

Then in as few words as might be, George Geldart told the weird and eerie story of his awaking from the trance which had held him so long only just in time.

As he listened, Eric Geldart's face underwent many and strange evidences of the mingled emotions working within him; dread, horror, fear, doubt, incredulity, and as he listened he reasoned, thinking as always, what was best for his own safety, his own advantage.

And gradually, clearly, the conviction forced itself upon him that his safest course, the only course it seemed that would save him from ruin, perhaps from the gallows, lay in absolute and strenuous denial of that story.

Brushing aside all considerations as to its possibility, plausibility, probability, its truth or falsehood, when his father, ceasing to speak, bowed his face into his hands, Eric Geldart, by an effort of will recovering to some extent his normal composure, sneered:

"Upon my word, a likely story for a twentieth century generation. Whom do you expect to believe it?"

"I believe it," said Scrimshaw and Stanyer together.

"It is true," said George Geldart.

"And nothing is of less importance to me than your belief," said Eric, with a venomous sneer at the listeners to the story. Then to its teller, "You'll find it somewhat difficult to prove."

"Not so difficult perhaps as you imagine, Eric. If it were

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Wanted: More Babies.

In recent years so many gloomy predictions have been made concerning the decline in the birth rate in Great Britain, that it is quite refreshing to find that John Bull has still left a remnant of sturdy sons and daughters possessing the faculty of perpetuating their species in a degree not one whit less than the most prolific of their ancestors.

To the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society we are indebted for this inspiriting discovery. At their Annual Exhibition held recently in Lincoln, prizes were offered to the labourers who had brought up and placed out the greatest number of children. The first prize was awarded to Thomas Hought, of Tealby, Market Rasen, with a record of 19 children born, 17 brought up, and 12 placed out. Other competitors had families of 16, 15, 14, 13, and 12, there being altogether ten entries for the prizes offered.

That large families, such as these, should still be common in rural districts, at a time when the birth rate is steadily declining in the great centres of industry and commerce, is but another proof of the damaging effect of city life and air upon the national health and vitality. One eminent authority declares that of persons city born and bred, who have attained the age of thirty years, not more than one in every ten is free from indigestion in one or other of its varied forms. When we consider how the body is starved and poisoned and the vital functions impaired by this scourge of modern life, we cannot be surprised at any shrinkage in the birth rate or deterioration in the national physique. To stop this ruinous loss of vitality and restore the national stomach to its former efficiency is an object worthy the support of every true patriot. Fortunately no time need be lost in experiments. In Mother Seigel's Syrup we have at hand a digestive tonic that exerts a curative and stimulating influence upon the debilitated organs of digestion, which fully justifies the position it has held for thirty-five years as the national remedy for indigestion.

To tens of thousands of tortured dyspeptics it has brought comfort, health, and renewed vitality. One of them—Mr. W. Nicholls, of Whitehall Mansions, Archway Road, Holloway, N., says: "At one time everything I ate, and especially the things that I most relished, seemed specially designed for my torture. After every meal the pain and discomfort in my body and sense of fulness and oppression at the chest were most distressing and wearisome. Coupled with this were constant retching, and the frequent vomiting of an acid fluid. It didn't much matter what or how little I ate, my stomach seemed utterly unequal to its task and I suffered in consequence. Though I regulated my diet and tried all manner of medicines, I gained no permanent relief until I had recourse to Mother Seigel's Syrup, and that went right to the root of the malady. In a very short time, under its influence, I could eat whatever was set before me without fear of pain or distress, and felt brighter and more buoyant than I had done for months. If, by any chance, anything that I eat disagrees with me a few doses of Seigel's Syrup invariably put me right again. As a digestive tonic I consider it has no equal, and my own experience and observation justify me in strongly recommending it to all who are cursed with indigestion or a weak stomach."

Abounding vitality and buoyant healthfulness such as follow the use of this tonic of fruits, roots, and herbs, are the surest antidotes to dwindling birth rates and national decay.

Pity the Lazy Man.

Don't be too hasty in censuring the lazy. Disinclination for work is often an indication of ill-health, and the idler in such cases is deserving rather of pity than blame. Indigestion and torpid liver cause languor, depression, and physical and mental degeneracy as surely as Mother Seigel's Syrup, the tonic of fruits, roots and herbs, dispels indigestion, tones the liver, and gives energy, vitality, health, and that is a fact proved beyond doubt by the experience of thousands who have tried it.

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not true, how could I have told you the conversation that transpired between you and Clare in what you deemed a death-chamber?"

"She might have blabbed—I mean I deny absolutely that such a conversation happened—it's a lie—a lie—a lie! Your object may be fraud or blackmail, but I'll defy you, and I'll fight you to the end."

"Eric!"

"My name is Mr. Geldart, sir, to you. My father, George Geldart, is dead and buried, and I shall know how to protect my own interests and my own good name. As for you, Scrimshaw, I shall have a searching inquiry into your share in this transaction. I'll have it all dragged out where you found this man, how the impudent, impossible story was hatched, what you paid or promised him."

Scrimshaw made a step forward, then paused, controlling himself, and said with a scornful laugh:

"What I paid him—ha! ha! ha! Your father, Eric Geldart, can buy you ten times over."

Eric, surveying the not too smart figure, with a sneer said: "Another strain on credulity! I never gave you credit, Mr. Scrimshaw, for so bold an imagination."

"It's true, it's true, Eric," said George Geldart, a note of triumph breaking into his tone. "I've worked the System, I've proved it, I've proved and it's rung true from beginning to end in every detail. I worked it with Scrimshaw; we started it with tens and made hundreds, with hundreds and made thousands, went on with thousands, made tens of thousands, with tens of thousands we made hundreds of thousands—and I've proved that if you'd only believed in me and been true to me, you, Blagdon, Ronald, aye, all of us, might have made our millions!"

Once again Eric blenched. The System, the System, that he had heard the father he deemed dead dilate upon, as he considered, rave about, the wonderful manipulation of figures and of financial mechanism.

And it had triumphed. Now he understood much at which he had marvelled.

The remarkable, unaccountable fluctuations in the Share Market of late, the frequent absences of Scrimshaw when Eric had called, his frequent and sudden visits to the Continent, the relegation of matters in connection with his ordinary business to his clerks, his recent developments in style of living, environment, and so on, his stupendous purchases at big prices of art treasures, horses, yachts, and so forth, and his munificent gifts.

Eric had always guessed that some abnormal influence was at work to account for these things, and had characteristically ascribed them to some colossal and triumphant stroke of fraud.

And then Blagdon's confession! Yes, yes, with growing horror he felt that the story he had just heard was true, felt that his own doom was sealed, but he would not own it, even to himself.

Facing them defiantly he exclaimed:

"It is all a pack of lies, part and parcel of some scheme of fraud, a scheme that I, aided by the law, will frustrate and expose, an impudent imposture that you shall rue and suffer for, each and all of you."

"Go then," said Scrimshaw, "judgment will follow you, will some day overtake you."

He little knew how near that some day was.

Eric flung wide the door, turned upon them one look of concentrated malignity and defiance, then dashed out of the room, strode swiftly to the outer door, wrenched the handle from the servant's hand, shouldering the astonished man aside, and hastened down the corridor.

Ting, went the bell. He rushed forward.

"Stay there with the lift," he shouted, "one moment."

"Too late, sir; stand back!"

But Eric, blind and deaf to all, except the passions that possessed him, rushed madly forward, clutching and forcing back the gate of the descending cage the man was closing. He forced it open, thrust himself forward, though the man cried, "For God's sake, back!"

There was a sound of a crashing, sickening blow, Eric Geldart, with a groan, sank in a huddled mass half-within, half-without the cage that fell—and then stopped fearfully.

A few minutes later a horrified group stood round his prostrate form, a doctor kneeling beside him in Scrimshaw's rooms, where, at his request, they had taken him.

Opening his glazing eyes he whispered: "How—long—have I—to live?"

"Not very long," said the doctor.

"Send for——"

"A clergyman?" asked the doctor, filling up the pause.

"No—a magistrate."

"My boy, my boy," said old Geldart, kneeling beside him—"my poor lad, what do you want to do?"

"To—put—things—right, to—undo—some—of—the—wrong, the—hand of judgment—has fallen—on me."

Then for a while only his heavy breathing and his father's sobs broke the silence.

"Do—you—forgive—father?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, my boy, the blame was not all yours, it was mine—mine, I made a god of gold and taught my sons to worship it. Then he turned to Scrimshaw, who had just re-entered, accompanied by another man, demanding almost fiercely, "Who is this?"

"My neighbour, Jefferson, who is a magistrate."

"Take him away," said the old man—"let the lad die in peace."

"I cannot—go—in peace—unless—I speak."

"But oh, my son—my son!"

"He is right," said Scrimshaw, "you must remember that you have another son. Justice must be done before it is too late."

Then in the silence of what was to be his death-chamber, Eric Geldart spoke, slowly, painfully, but distinctly.

"I have—read—that paper—Blagdon's—con—fession, it is—true—I—not—my—brother—robbed—my—father, I, and—Clare—planted—the notes—to—throw—suspicion on my brother. I—killed—Clare Armitage—to silence—her. God—have—mercy—on my—guilty—soul—for—Christ's—sake!"

His head fell back, the whispering accents ceased, and the soul went forth unto the Seat of Judgment and, thank God, of mercy.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Wedding Bells and Reconciliations.

The *Meteor*, in its next issue, which appeared upon the following day, excelled itself, broke even its own record in the way of sensations. It had done many things, had exposed gigantic frauds, brought home unpleasant truths to exalted people, originated and fermented during its short career many agitations which had resulted in drastic alterations in the law.

But on the day following the sudden and tragic death of Eric Geldart, the *Meteor* provided its readers with a sensation that was the subject of general topic that night in every club, dinner-table, or place of assembly in London.

The morning papers had furnished one sensation in the death of Eric Geldart, the Member for Little Claverton, but the *Meteor* surpassed them. For just when the editor of the paper had passed the complete number, Scrimshaw burst into the office with orders to stop the machine, and was closeted for a while with Mr. John Widdicombe, the general manager, and the editor, with the result that two formes were unlocked and reset up, and the paper on the following day appeared with an article which set the town by the ears.

For it dealt with the whole story of George Geldart's narrow escape from premature burial, his second secret life, and it wound up with the declaration that Ronald Geldart, charged with the murder of Clare Armitage and against whom a coroner's jury had returned a verdict of Wilful Murder, was

(*Concluded on page* 542.)

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The "Borderland of Deafness."

It seems remarkable that many people who have defective hearing refuse to believe that they are deaf. Although such a defect may be slight or only noticeable when the afflicted person has a cold in the head, and may not seem worthy of attention, yet such a condition will, of a certainty, become actual deafness if neglected. In fact the Aurist finds it most difficult in many instances to determine when the ear ailment began and consequently looks with great suspicion upon the slightest degree of defective hearing as placing the afflicted person within the "Borderland of Deafness." The Editor of *The Review of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases*, in the last issue of this medical journal, goes into this subject thoroughly, and for the sake of those who may be interested will send, post free, on application, a specially written paper on Tests of Hearing and the Prevention and Cure of Deafness. All applications should be addressed to The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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absolutely innocent of the crime, and that his innocence would be established by the evidence of his dead brother, and by a written confession made by Boanerges Blagdon, the one time candidate for Brixwell.

And when on the afternoon of that day Ronald Geldart appeared on the remanded charge against him, the court was crowded to suffocation. It was Cousin Jack who conveyed the startling news to Ronald Geldart.

Cousin Jack, accompanied by Madeleine Lorraine and Ronald's solicitor, entered his cell. First they told him that they had good news for him, then that the good news meant that evidence was to hand clearing him of the crime, that that evidence was the confession, the dying confession of the actual murderer.

That that murderer was his brother!

And here the strain told on Ronald, and he broke down and sobbed upon the bosom of Madeleine.

But they soothed him, told him to nerve himself, to prepare to hear yet more startling news, and they paved the way to breaking that news by telling him that it cleared him from all suspicion of having robbed his father. This gave him comfort, a comfort tempered, however, by his own exclamation: "If only my father could have known!"

Then they told him that his father had known, they could satisfy him on that point, strangely, marvellously. Then, bit by bit, they broke to him the startling story of his father's narrow escape from premature burial by waking from the trance that was so like the death.

And later they brought his father to him, leaving the pair alone in that strange interview that wrung both their hearts, that stirred innumerable emotions.

And later on Ronald Geldart left that crowded court discharged, proved innocent without a stain, after one of the strangest hearings of a charge that had ever taken place within its walls.

Blagdon had been called, had been sent for, and, not in the slightest degree to the surprise of those who knew, could not be found. He never has been found, though rumours have arrived by travellers returning from Colorado, Denver, U.S.A., that a man answering his description, but a silent, saddened, broken-down old man, is living there in retirement, his only companion a devoted wife.

* * * * *

George Geldart, though he reassumed his name and identity, led thenceforth a quiet, subdued, secluded life, devoting the means he had amassed to the alleviation of want and suffering and amelioration of the lot of those around him.

The truth of his story was finally established by the Home Office granting exhumation of the casket that had been supposed to contain his lawful remains, but which was found to inclose instead only the contents he had enumerated. Hence the tablet to his memory was removed from the cenotaph, to be replaced, when the time shall come, by tributes rendered by sincerer hearts.

His few intimates are Cousin Jack, whose bright home he sometimes visits, and whose buxom, cheery little wife always affectionately esteems him as "Old Mystery." Stanyer, restored to the daughter he loved, is as happy a returned cornstalk as thrives on English soil. Also Scrimshaw, who having at last got tired of piling up fortune upon fortune, has taken to winning Derbys, growing orchids at a thousand pounds a bloom, and dreams of some day sending out a challenger to lift that cup that Britain covets but America has nailed down.

So now this tale is almost ended—a tale of wrong wrought, injustice endured; of suffering and of sin, but at last of innocence vindicated, of injustice in some degree atoned for, of wickedness brought home and terribly requited.

It ends, as all stories dealing with a lover and his lass should end—with wedding bells. Wedding bells for Ronald Geldart and for Madeleine Lorraine, despite her father's anger, his declaration that if she bore that name he would see her face no more.

They were married, as became the circumstances, very quietly, and after their wedding they went away together for a while to try to forget in new lands and new surroundings the sorrows they had known.

The wedding bells of Cousin Jack and Phyllis, who are none the less happy because once, a while ago, Phyllis closed and buried in her heart of hearts a little love story that only she herself knew of, and that never worked out to an ending.

And someone else still cherishes a story that she and she alone has ever known of. A little servant-girl in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, who, while polishing boots, fireplaces, or knives and forks, dreams again and again of that bright Apollo whom it was enough for her to behold and worship from afar. Her love story never will have an ending because it will endure as long as she lives, for her alone to know, for her alone to muse on, until her dreams are broken by the rocking of the bells and shrill or strident calls for Arethusa.

Viscount Lynton, deceived in Eric Geldart, broken in spirit and in fortune, had declared that he would never again look upon the daughter who had disobeyed him and who for the sake of the man who though proved innocent, bore the name of one who had led him to his ruin.

For years he kept his word, nor indeed was he approached with any overtures to reconsider it.

And then, at times looking back, he saw where he had erred, saw that the estrangement between them had been of his own causing; and, broken in health and fortune, he began to yearn for the daughter's love that he had thrown away.

And one day, to distract his mind from these thoughts with the Spring sunshine, the Spring air, and the Spring flowers, he strolled into the Park.

And, by-and-bye, he happened on a fair-haired little fellow scarce some five years old, in great distress, and inquiring the cause the Viscount ascertained the little boy had lost his nurse. Patting the little golden head, Lord Lynton asked where his home was, and being told the number of the house in Holland Park next asked the little belated wanderer's name.

A pair of blue eyes, still tearful but sunny, looked up frankly in his face, and the little fellow lisped:

"My name, dear kind gentleman, is Lupus Ronald Geldart."

Geldart! The old man started at that name. And Lupus! Then she had given his name to this, her first-born, her dearest loved with the sunny hair and eyes. Yes! yes! he could see something of Madeleine in those eyes.

Then she had not quite forgotten him, had preserved some love and tenderness for him, they were not quite so far estranged as he had thought!; had they known it, perhaps had never been really so very far estranged at all, only too silent, too reserved, too occupied each with his and her own ways; he too absorbed in his dreams of politics and wealth, enmeshed too tightly in the Snare of Gold to take even her, his only child, close to his heart.

And while these and a thousand other thoughts flashed through his mind, he was walking on holding the little fellow by the hand.

And the younger Lupus, confident, trustful, and now quite composed, began to chatter of the things that occupied his dreams by night and day—his boats, his pony, his toys, and—best boon of all—his dear mamma.

And by-and-bye they came to the threshold of the little fellow's home. It was swiftly opened—not by the pale-faced servants in the hall there, but by the distracted mother, who swiftly stooping swooped up her treasure to her arms. Then she looked at his friend and guide.

"Father! father!" she cried. "You—you brought him back to me!"

"No, no, Madeleine! He brought me back to you!"

The End.

Next week starts "A Criminal Millionaire," by George Griffith.

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PRUDENTIAL GIGANTIC BALE

49/6 BEDDING & DRAPERY 6/- DEPOSIT 1/6 WEEKLY

This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

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Our Gigantic Parcel contains 6 Table Knives and Forks, 6 Dessert Knives and Forks, 12 Tea Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 1 pair Sugar Tongs, 2 Table Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, and 2 Salt Spoons. We send, carriage paid, on receipt of 3s.; balance 1s. weekly.

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GIVEN AWAY with this week's HOME NOTES (No. 510).

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Of all Bookstalls & Newsagents. PRICE 1d.

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Legibly as print, 5d. page; transposed correctly 6d. page. MRS. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, Devon. Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

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For 1s. Mr. WILDE will send a Reading of the Stars W. T. STEAD, Esq., and many other prominent gentlemen have testified to the accuracy of their forecasts. Send the exact or approximate hour of your birth, if possible, date, year, &c., together with P.O. 1s. and stamp. Satisfaction will be guaranteed, THE RESULT WILL ASTONISH YOU. SEND TO-DAY TO (DEPT. P.S.S.) GEO. WILDE, 143 High Holborn, London, W.C.

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SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.

A full list sent post free on application.

SAVE £ d $

13/6 Gent's magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased Chronograph Stop Watch, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; thus together.

12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.

14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff, beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14.9; approval willingly.

19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey, and white black and white, and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Necklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

Any of the above articles sent on approval willingly.

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Our Readers will Please Remember that

TUESDAY, 3rd NOVEMBER,

IS

KING EDWARD'S HOSPITAL FUND

SHOPPING DAY,

and that a large number of shops in London will be displaying a notice in their windows that they are giving a percentage of their takings on that day to the London hospitals.

We hope, therefore, they will make a point of making some purchase, anticipating some requirements on this particular day, *viz.*, TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER. Most shops joining the scheme will be offering some special cheap lines, and reducing their prices to make a good day for the Hospitals. Boots and bonnets, furniture and eatables, all and everything, little and great, help the scheme.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Lax Lover.

"I HAVE been going out with a young man for four years," writes "SISSY," "but he has as yet said nothing of marriage, though he has told me he cares for me very much. I am not in a hurry to marry, but my friends keep on questioning me about the date of the ceremony and what sort of ring I am going to have. Don't you think it is time he made some proposal? I feel rather hurt at his want of confidence in me."

* * * * *

Yes, four years is a very long time for a courtship which has not blossomed into an engagement. I should quietly tell the young man the questions that are being put to you by your friends, and leave it to him to act in a straightforward way. Perhaps, as you say, he is putting by money for a home. In any case, he should have confided that much in you.

Calf Love Again.

"MATER" has a son of eighteen, living some distance from his home. When he writes, he generally refers at length to his "love" affairs. Lately he has been talking about becoming engaged, though he is only earning a very small salary. How should "MATER" act?

* * * * *

As a general rule, "MATER," youths of eighteen do talk rather freely about engagements, and such things, and are generally fairly flush in the matter of love affairs. These things are not to be taken as seriously as if the youth were four or five years older. I presume the young lady to whom he refers has parents, who are not likely to allow your son to pay too close attention to her. A little visit to him would enable you to judge matters for yourself, and if things look serious, you had better take steps to stop it. A word to the girl's parents would, perhaps, have the desired effect.

A Prejudiced Sweetheart.

"SOME months ago," writes "J. M. A.," "I fell madly in love with a girl of twenty-two. I am sure she returned my affections. Since that I have heard she is not fit to be loved by anyone. Much as I dislike to believe this, I have infallible proofs of its truth. I still love her, but feel I could not see her without being prejudiced. What is the right course to pursue?"

* * * * *

If "J. M. A." loves the girl, as he says, that is rather an argument against his contention that she is not fit to be loved. She must have some redeeming qualities to have attracted him as she has. Let him ignore the "infallible proofs," and find out for himself whether or not she is a fit object of his affections. Nobody is blameless in this world, and a lover should be the last one to cast stones at the object of his love. Be charitable, "J. M. A.," and only be influenced by your own personal feelings towards her.

How to Start an Affair.

"I MET a young man the other day to whom I took a great fancy," writes "H. T. Y." "He has not seen me since, nor has he written or sent any message, so I do not know whether he wishes to resume the acquaintance. However, I myself am very anxious to do so. Will you please advise me how I can give him the opportunity?"

* * * * *

If "H. T. Y." has a friend who knows the young man, she might ask her (or him) to convey the hint that she is anxious to open up correspondence. Should the young man be also inclined to do so, probably he will write to "H.T.Y." on some matter or other, giving her an opportunity of replying. If "H. T. Y." has not a mutual friend able to do this service, why not drop him a line herself? She might easily find some excuse for writing; asking him for an address, or something of the kind, and she could then judge from the tone of his reply if he is inclined to correspond more fully. If not, then "H. T. Y." had better let the matter drop, as the young man may have other attachments.

Etiquette of Presents.

"WHEN a man admires a girl, but has not yet proposed, or even expressed his feelings, would it be bad form to send her a present? If not, what kind of present could be sent?" "E. W." asks me this question, he himself being in such a position.

* * * * *

It is not correct to send a girl with whom you are slightly acquainted jewellery, or any item of toilet. Those are reserved for the later stage of the affair. At the first stage, the present should take the form of flowers, or pretty trifles, Books, music, too, are presents which can be given under such circumstances; or if "E. W." possesses a dog or a kitten, and knows the girl to be fond of domestic animals, he could make her a present of that sort. The present, by-the-bye, had better be made in response to some wish expressed by the young lady, or "E. W." may find himself in the absurd position of making an unwelcome gift. I have known stern parents to themselves return such presents to the sender, with curt notes, particularly in the case of jewellery. Certain gifts are looked upon as suggesting familiarity, and that is an unpardonable offence in a comparative stranger.

A Mature Flirt.

"MONA" is in doubt as to the genuineness of a sweetheart of hers. He is a gentleman sixteen years older than herself, who has no particular occupation, but lives with his mother. Though he kisses and squeezes "MONA," and professes undying love, he has told her that he cannot yet consent to a public engagement. I am asked to say whether I think the gentleman has no further intentions towards "MONA" than to flirt with her.

* * * * *

From your description, "MONA," the man does not altogether seem of the marrying sort. As he has no occupation, and has reached a mature age, and also, as you say, has had a good many love affairs, and been rather "fast," he seems the kind of man that would trifle with a young girl's affections, but avoid the responsibilities of marriage with her. I certainly should ask him definitely what are his intentions, and decline to permit his attentions unless he makes a definite proposal. And why *not* tell your mother? Surely her advice in the matter is the very thing you want? Without knowing the gentleman, it is very difficult for me to say whether or not he is sincere in his admiration.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

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A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win.)

Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home."
Published by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly," &c.

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

100 CONSOLATION GIFTS WILL ALSO BE AWARDED.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 14.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.
Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.
This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.
The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.
Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.
At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt (President of the United States), Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton, the late Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.

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are composed of vegetable drugs of great purity and medicinal value; have been in almost universal use for over half-a-century, and are without doubt an **Effective Corrective** in all cases where a corrective is needed, as they act directly upon both the digestive and Nervous Systems

BEECHAM'S PILLS Assist Assimilation. Banish Biliousness, Cure Constipation, Develop Digestion, Liven the Liver, Strengthen the Stomach, Correct Unhealthy Conditions.

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REMEMBER *that if you require a reliable remedy to remove the complications caused by Biliousness, Imperfect Digestion, Torpid Liver and Impure Blood, you can always depend upon* **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**

Sold Everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 pills), 2/9 (168 pills).

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SHORT STORIES

No. 774.] Week ending October 31st. 1903. [Price One Penny.

"Give me those papers, before I count ten, or—*your lover dies!*"

(*A Thrilling Incident from this week's "THE PURSUIT OF SARA."* *See inside.*)

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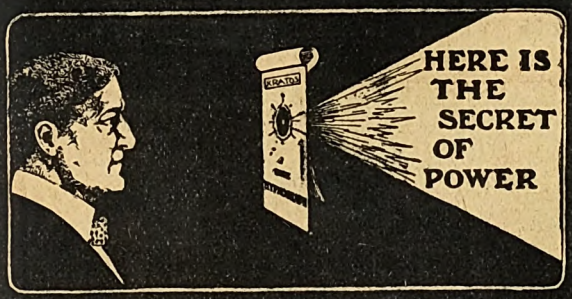
SELF-HYPNOTISM



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The Hypnograph is strictly scientific. It is to mental work what the compass is to navigation. It cannot fail to help you. Until you have used it you cannot realize what a wonderful and beneficial thing it is.

FREE. At present **The Hypnograph** is not for sale, but is offered free in order to create an interest in our practical books on mental subjects. If you are sufficiently interested to want **The Hypnograph** write for the free Illustrated Booklet "**The Power Within,**" enclosing 1d. Stamp for return postage.

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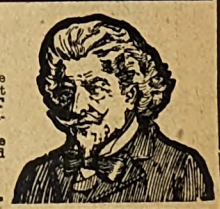

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Mr. C. R—— writes: "Your small sample has done me more good in a week than another much advertised remedy did in 6 months."

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 774.] Week Ending October 31st, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series. **Start To-day.**

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, who is the relater of these experiences, found employment as a typine in the firm of Messrs. Templeton and Co., General Agents.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

The latter was by profession a doctor, but as he lacked the capital to start a practice in England, he had accepted the post of medical attendant to a friend, who was travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, and was at present in Nice.

Noel had been brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, and had excellent prospects, but when he fell in love with Miss Gillespie, Sir Francis refused to have anything more to do with him.

Mr. Templeton assured Sara that he thought Noel had been very hardly treated, and suggested that the best thing for him to do would be to return, and he would see whether he could not obtain a practice for him.

Then one day Noel entered the office unexpectedly, and told his love he had had a wire from his cousin Herbert, saying that Sir Francis was not expected to live long. He had hastened from Nice in order to get his uncle's forgiveness before his death, only to find the Baronet already dead.

In his will, Noel's uncle had bequeathed him a thousand pounds, and with this he intended to buy a practice to which Mr. Templeton had recommended him.

One evening Noel and Sara paid a visit to Sir Herbert, and learnt from him that he had insured his life in favour of Templeton and Co. for fifteen thousand pounds. Just as they were leaving Sir Herbert's valet entered, and, with a cry of amazement, Sara asserted that he was Harrington Shackell, one of her employers. It was, however, explained that Shackell had a moustache, whereas the valet was clean shaven. With this explanation Miss Gillespie had to remain content.

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The following day Noel received a telegram summoning him back to Nice, and in order that he should be able to buy the practice in question, he gave the thousand pounds to Mr. Templeton, and signed a document authorising the firm to deal for him. By a piece of trickery, the senior partner converted this document into one authorising the firm to deal *with his whole estate.*

In the afternoon Sara overheard Templeton and Rigby Starr talking, and their words aroused her suspicions. She understands that Noel is heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of Sir Herbert having no children, and realises that, should Sir Herbert die, the firm has sole control of her lover's estate.

Just then Harrington Shackell entered, and she was shocked to hear him announce that Sir Herbert Masterman was dead—murdered by him, his valet! So, after all, her suspicions had been only too well grounded! Then, little by little, she heard the diabolical plot against her lover unfolded, and also the hint that she herself was in danger, as she was the only one the murderers had to fear, and they intended to run no risks.

Then she resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she seized the precious papers and managed to elude her astounded employers. Then she fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, Sara had about five pounds of her own money with her.

She wired to Noel, bidding him return to England at once. Then Miss Gillespie took train to Bedford, where she expected to find an old school-friend, who, however, had gone.

Calling at the Post Office to see if there was a reply to her telegram from Noel, she was thunderstruck to hear someone else had called for the telegram.

Who *could* it be but Templeton and Co.?

Faint at heart, she made her way to the Park, where she met a prepossessing-looking nurse, who seemed in great trouble.

They arranged to meet in the evening, and did so. Strolling along, they came to Newnham Bridge. Suddenly the nurse made a cowardly attack on Sara, forcing her back into the waters. The river closed over—she was drowning!

The nurse's bonnet was thrown aside, and revealed the features of Rigby Starr!

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The Pursuit of Sara

AT NORTHAMPTON.

The Horror on the Racecourse.

The water filled my mouth, the pressure of Rigby's hand upon my throat thrust me down deeper and deeper. Then, as the world turned dark with the foretaste of death, the grip of his fingers suddenly relaxed; in his eagerness to destroy me, he had lost sight of his own safety. The ground on which he knelt, sodden with water, collapsed beneath his weight. He was pitched head foremost into the river and carried by the current some short distance down the stream. Released from the fearful pressure, I rose to the surface of the water. My fingers, almost within reach of the bank, clutched eagerly at the grass, the fallen leaves, the very stones; slight as was their support, it served to bring me closer into the shore. With a desperate effort, I grasped at the overhanging branches of the tree. The bough I caught was slender, it bent beneath my weight. Slowly and painfully I dragged myself towards the shore. Once it had almost snapped with the strain, and, poised over the black depths for a shuddering moment, I had thought to slip back. With a convulsive movement I raised myself and fell, gasping but saved, upon the shore.

By this time Rigby's shouts for help were ringing through the night. I could distinguish a dark object floating on the water, nearing by slow degrees the fatal weir.

His life against my safety and my lover's. For a moment I had wished him dead. The next, with a strange relief, I heard an answering shout, and caught sight of figures running down the bank, distinguished the splash of oars from a rescuing boat.

I did not wait for more, but staggered, borne down by my garments, heavy with water, to the other side of the road. There behind a friendly hedge, I took off my coat, shook the wet from my hat and hair, and tried to think out my next move.

The precious document and the packet of notes were safe. My ordeal had not been in vain; but with my teeth chattering and my limbs numb, even this consolation failed. I was ready to lie down and die by the roadside!

A forlorn and miserable object, I dragged myself to the middle of the road, and stood with uplifted hand to attract the attention of a passing cart. The driver stopped short when he saw me, and commented freely on my bedraggled condition.

"Been in the water, eh? So I *should* think. Whatever were you up to?"

Falteringly I explained that I had stumbled in the darkness, and narrowly escaped from death.

"I came down to spend the day with some friends," I continued mendaciously, "and when I got here I found they had left Bedford. I must go back to London to-night or I shall lose my situation. Could you help me?" I looked up at him appealingly. "Perhaps you live near; your wife might let me dry my clothes. I can't go to a hotel, I haven't enough money."

He considered for a moment and looked at his nice clean cart—it bore, I believe, the familiar name of Dudeney & Johnstone—and from his cart to where I stood, dripping and depressed.

"You're in a terrible state, missie," he said at last. "Still, I suppose I must help you. Come along up." And, leaning towards the ground, he gave me a friendly hoist to the seat beside him.

It seemed a long time before the cart drew up at a small house in Garfield Street; a very eternity before, a wordy argument with his good lady over, my friend conducted me to a neat, bright-looking kitchen. A comfortable meal was spread upon the table, the kettle was singing on the hob, and a cheery fire blazed in the grate. The housewife, a comely matron of about forty, relented when she saw me, assisted me to divest myself of my clothes, and, wrapping me in a huge garment of her own, sat me in an armchair by the fire until such time as they were dry.

St. Paul's was chiming half-past eleven when I left the house—the kind-hearted folk would not take a penny for their trouble—and walked up the High Street once again; my limbs were stiff and my head ached badly, but my courage had returned and I was ready to fight to the last gasp. I realised that it was imperative I should leave Bedford before the morning. I must abandon the chance of hearing from Noel. To run the risk of capture again and renew the experience of the evening would be madness. The next day would find the firm eager and alert. I could not hope to escape their clutches if I were still in the town.

I found the station deserted, the booking office closed, and the porters in a state of somnolence from which it was difficult to rouse them. I feared that the last train for—anywhere—had already left, but a severe cross-examination elicited the fact that a train from London for the North was due at—1.33 a.m. I had as yet formed no decision as to my next stopping-place. I did not wish to go too far afield from Bedford. The hope of claiming Noel's telegram, which I fondly pictured lying at the little stationer's, dissuaded me. I must select a town large enough to hide successfully from my persecutors, near enough to permit me to communicate with Sawyer's—the shop in the Midland Road.

I decided on Northampton, and learnt that if I took the 1.33 to Wellingborough I might catch an early morning train from there to my destination. The next two hours dragged very slowly. Alternately I paced the platform and the waiting-room, starting at every shadow, shuddering at every footfall.

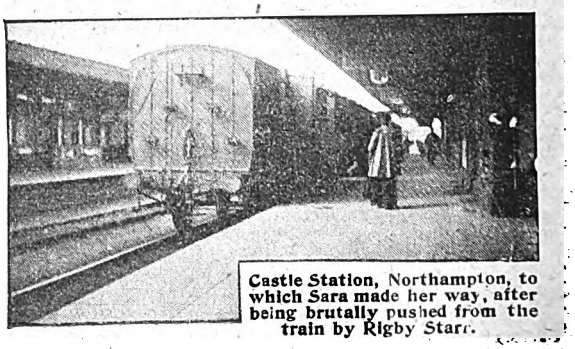
At length the station roused from silence, woke up to activity. The down train from London was due. I watched the few belated passengers alight, and envied them the comfortable homes, the warm and loving greetings which awaited them.

I hastily took my ticket, and, having claimed my packet of notes from the cloak-room, chose a carriage at the end of the train, and settled myself in the corner. The whistle sounded, the train began to move. I breathed a sigh of relief. I had defeated Templeton & Co.! I was leaving Bedford free, and with the papers still in my possession.

Another moment and we should have steamed out of the station. And then a figure darted across the platform, and, regardless of protesting porters and irate officials, swung into the nearest carriage. I had caught but a glimpse of the late passenger, but that glimpse had sent me sick with fear.

The man who jumped on to the train was Rigby Starr.

The train rushed through the night, a metallic roar rose from the glistening lines that marked its path. The throbbing of the engine, pulsating with energy, seemed to keep time to



Castle Station, Northampton, to which Sara made her way, after being brutally pushed from the train by Rigby Starr.

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The Drapery, Northampton, to which Sara wandered before she had recovered from the effects of her rough handling.

the beating of my heart. The carriage swayed from side to side; the dim lamp swung from the top, its faint beams falling on the huddled figure of a girl whose eyes, big with terror, looked from a small white face, whose hands wet with fear were convulsively enclasped.

What was that sound that rose above the rattle of the engine? A door banged farther down the train. I felt, rather than heard, soft, cautious steps upon the footboard, covering by painful, slow degrees the distance between my carriage and that other.

It was I, Sara, that those steps were approaching. It was I, that stealthy figure sought. I—weak, defenceless—that the bloodhound hunted. I heard, in fancy, those evil feet stop at my door; I saw, in fancy, a white face glare at me through the glass. A hand shot through the door, a hand that closed upon my throat with a relentless, murderous grip.

I started to my feet. Where could I hide, how could I escape? Under the seat—impossible, it would make the task easier for my assailant. Should I pull the danger cord to stop the train? I could not; if I summoned assistance I must offer explanation, and that would result in my incrimination.

Half mad with panic, I opened the door upon the other side, stepped through, and with the daring of desperation, turned my fingers round the handle, and crouched, half kneeling, on the footboard.

The whirr of the wheels deafen me, the jolting strains my muscles almost to tearing point. My eyes are dazed; the throbbing of the engine beats upon my brain.

And then the door upon the farther side is opened. The sound thrills me like the edge of a keen knife. The footfalls sound close. I sicken with a deadly nausea.

Will he never end his search? Each cushion has been overturned, the space under the seats examined.

Dear Heaven, surely he is going now?

He will not look through the window, nor open the door? He cannot dream I have escaped that way.

And then the window is darkened, his head cranes out, his face, his evil, mocking face, looks down on mine.

With a laugh he stoops and grasps my arm.

"I've got you now," he shouts, "you sha'n't escape this time!" and strikes at my wrists with all his force. "Let go, let go, you little fiend. You sha'n't escape this time, I say. Another minute and you'll be beneath the train, and the papers will be in my pocket. Let go."

The blows fall on my head, my arms, my hands. He twists my wrists, tearing by main force my fingers from the handle. In the struggle the door flies open. I am swung off the footboard, swung over the earth that rushes past with such velocity.

A moment and then—the door, the train, Rigby's white, wicked face are whirling in the distance, and I am left a quivering heap upon the ground!

At first I thought that I was going to die. Weak as a child, I had not the ability to move. I lay as I had fallen on a heap of gravel. My face was cut, my hands bleeding, but as yet I felt no pain; my heart seemed to have stopped beating. I was benumbed from head to foot.

The recollection of Rigby's threat stirred a desire for life within me. He had declared he would kill me, that dashed to pieces by the train the papers I had striven to guard would fall into his hands. Those papers, thank Heaven, were still safe, the touch of them seemed to help me. I wondered if he would stop the train and institute a search for me. It would be easy for him to trump up a tale of suicide.

Reflection convinced me he would adopt more cunning methods. There was some hours' interval between the 1.33 and the next train. There would be plenty of time for Rigby to get out at Wellingborough, the first stopping place, and walk back along the line until he found me—or as he hoped, my dead body. The train reached Wellingborough at 1.54. I judged it wanted ten minutes to that time. I might, therefore, expect the junior partner to return in something over half an hour. I could rest for a little while before I moved to safer quarters. Unless I had been injured in the fall, in which case I should still lie at his mercy.

Slowly I staggered to my feet. I could stand, my legs were not broken nor my arms, though my wrist was badly sprained. The movement stirred my blood, my body seemed to wake suddenly to a sense of pain. I ached and smarted all over, my nerves were jarred at every step. Ill as I felt, I did not realise at the time how close to death I'd been. Had I fallen on the bare ground I must have been killed. I should inevitably have broken my neck.

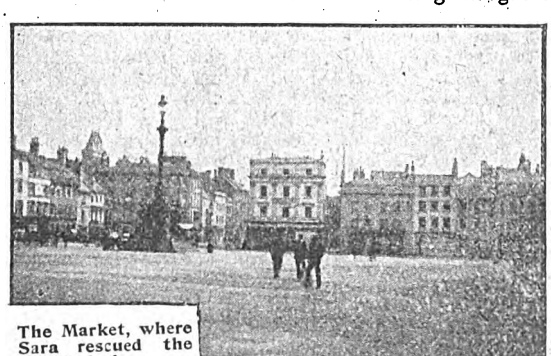
Gradually and with great pain, I stumbled along the line until I reached a gate opening into a field. It was padlocked, and at first seemed an insuperable obstacle. Somehow or other I clambered over, and walked, swaying to and fro, across the meadow, down a lane, and then into another field.

By this time I must have been light-headed. I remember fancying I was in the Strand with Noel at my side. The stars gave place to the electric lights, the spectral trees became shop fronts, the hedges the portals of a theatre.

Instinct must have led me to where, sheltered from the wind, there rose a hayrick. It had already been partially demolished and a lot of loose hay was scattered at the foot. Instinct again led me to gather up the soft, sweet-smelling stuff by armfuls, until I'd formed a fragrant heap. There, close to the rick, warmed by its scented heat, I rested, and thinking I was back once more in my Brixton lodgings, I fell asleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when I woke; the birds, lured into the belief that it was summer, sang their sweet songs until the neighbouring thicket thrilled with melody. The pain had left my limbs, my head was clear. I realised that, thanks to my youth and strength, I had passed safely through a dangerous crisis.

I found my way to a neighbouring farmhouse—removing first the straws hanging, Ophelia-like, about me—and purchased a slice of home-made bread and a long draught of



The Market, where Sara rescued the little boy.

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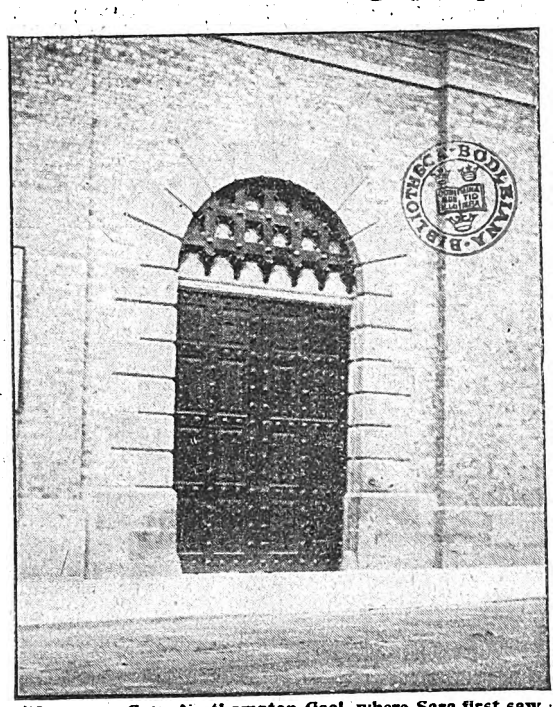

The Prison Gate, Northampton Gaol, where Sara first saw the red-haired man.

milk. The nearest station I was told was Elsham, a village a few miles from Kettering. By slow degrees I reached my goal, and after many changes and some long, dreary waits, found myself, at length, at the Castle Station, Northampton.

The platform was crowded, the bridge, which one had to cross to leave the station, thronged with passengers. I was jostled and pushed hither and thither, too weak and dazed to stem the current. I gave up my ticket, clasped mechanically in my hand, and then instinctively clutched at the pocket of my dress to reach my purse. It was not there!

The sickening feeling that came over me, the shiver of fear that seemed to run along my blood into my very fingertips, the sudden faintness that caught my heart! Penniless—it would be suicidal to try to cash one of Noel's notes—alone, in a strange place, barely recovered from one ordeal, how could I hope to face another?

The shock paralysed my faculties, I walked dazed and benumbed up Gold Street, not knowing nor caring where I went. The shock had been too great, I felt like a derelict tossed on a sea of circumstances.

I must have wandered about for hours before I found myself in a wide thoroughfare, lined with bright shops, busy with gazers into the well-stocked windows. The Drapery, as the townsfolk have christened this particular locality, is built on a gradual ascent. From Adnitt's, the Peter Robinson's of Northampton, I looked down on the square-towered church of All Saints, lit up by the noonday sun. The cool green trees that flank the building were restful to the eye, standing like sentinels, untroubled and serene, amidst the roar of traffic, the clatter of trams that circle round the church.

A town of sharp and vivid contrasts; a jumble of fine buildings, mean dwellings, splendid thoroughfares, squalid streets. Its people marked by fierce individuality, vigour of life, a scorn of bearing, an immense impatience of control.

Something of this I realised as I walked down the hill towards the church, leaving the fashions of the Drapery and Adnitt's tall electric lamps behind.

From the Drapery I made my way into the market, a huge square, shut in by large and for the most part unprepossessing buildings. A fine site, and on market day cheerful with the hum of buyers and sellers, busy with rows and rows of stalls. But on that morning it wore an empty, almost forlorn appearance. The shops seemed void of custom, the pavement of life. It was an oasis of silence in a desert of sound. A few stragglers loitered in the roadway, towards Sheep Street, a knot of factory girls, neat in white aprons and sailor hats, were gossiping.

Suddenly the silence was broken in strange, dramatic fashion. The wild inspiriting clatter of horses' hoofs upon the cobble stones, the jingle of harness, the shouts of the crowds, gathered as if by magic, proclaimed the coming of a fire-engine. In an instant the upper end of the market square was thronged. Shopmen left their customers, operatives curtailed their dinner hour, street boys appeared as from the ground beneath their feet.

Nearer and nearer came the inspiring jangle; swept by the crowd I stood eager as any, on the kerb-stones.

As the engine turned the corner, from the group of factory girls, there broke a curly-headed mite of five or six. Wild with delight he shouted, waving his cap, dancing with joy within the path of the galloping horses.

I stood the nearest to the child, and automatically responded to the exigencies of the situation. Like a flash I darted from the kerbstone, and plucked the child from under the horses' hoofs. For a second I stood dazed, and then, even as the horses and the men, aye, and the very engine seemed falling on me, I was pulled back, an arm was thrown about my neck, and I stood the centre of a crowd of cheering men and tearful women.

"He's my brother," said a dark-haired girl, her face ashen, her voice trembling. "I couldn't ha' lived if he'd been killed." She didn't thank me—in words—but gazed, a world of gratitude in her brown eyes.

"It's nothing," I said feebly, "nothing," and then the market seemed to rise, the statue in the middle to topple, the houses to shake, and I remembered nothing more.

Propped up against the knees of a fat and friendly market woman, I opened my eyes, a strong taste of brandy in my mouth—to find myself the centre of a friendly crowd. The dark-haired operative stooping over me, lifted me gently to my feet.

"You're a stranger, my dear?" said the market woman.

I nodded and clung to the slim figure that supported me.

"You'd best come home with me and rest a bit," she said; and spoke in such a kindly voice, and with such evident desire for my consent, that I could not demur. I felt as some poor traveller in a desert to whom a helping hand is suddenly extended from a bush of thorns.

Home—the word brought tears to my eyes. Home—I gratefully linked my arm in hers, and buoyed up with a sense of security, managed to walk to the corner of Abingdon Street, where we took a tram.

Some short distance up the road, my friend signalled for the tram to stop. We alighted at Wood Street, a wider and more picturesque turning than the majority of streets, where the workers of the Midlands have their homes. Profoundly depressing are those rows and rows of two-storeyed red-brick dwellings, which, without a pretence of forecourt, open right to the street.

Bald, and staring, without distinction, and lacking all possibility of privacy, the monotonous, barefaced structures—alike in every town throughout the Midlands—lack all that should be present in the dwellings of the people. The giant factories that consume the workers' health and strength, have left a mark upon their very souls, slowly but surely grinding out all longing, all desire for lovely things.

Maggie Dunkley lived at the top of Wood Street, on the right-hand side, going to Campbell Square. The house was overgrown with creeper, the windows, draped with clean white curtains, were bright with flowers. Her mother, an apple-cheeked woman, with brown hair touched with silver, accorded me a cordial welcome. The news of her boy's rescue had already reached her, and she was overflowing

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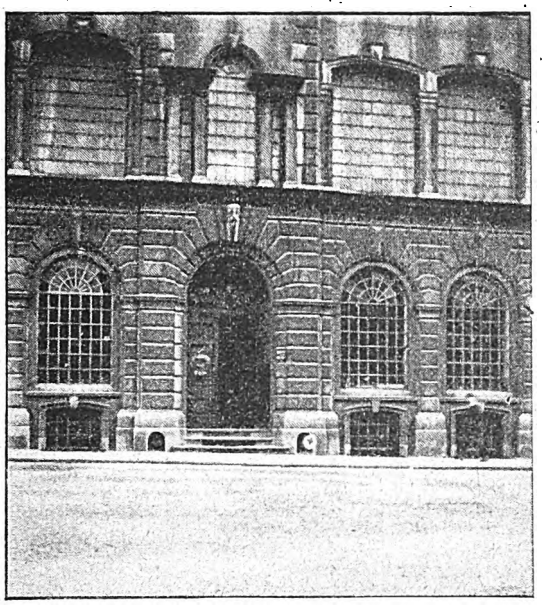

Cooper's Factory, where Sara applied for a situation.

with hospitable intent. She was somewhat anxious, however, as to who and what I was; and but for her daughter would have embarked on a kindly but thorough cross-examination. Maggie, however, nipped her intention short, and taking me up to her room, helped me into bed.

"You shall tell us to-morrow," she said, when I tried to explain my forlorn condition. "No money?" her kindly face flushed with sympathy. "Never mind, you're with friends." And, with a soft kiss on my cheek, she left me to a long, deep sleep—the first since my escape from Templeton and Co.'s London offices.

It was to Maggie's kindly ears I told my history, as much, that is to say, as I thought wise. The notes I did not mention. I had grown chary of trusting strangers. She was sufficiently quick-brained to understand the salient points of my narrative, and enthusiastic in her admiration for my pluck in fighting Noel's enemies. I explained that I had no money, and no means of getting any until I had a letter from my sweetheart, but she overruled all objections to my staying, and promised to do her best to find me employment if I did not hear from Noel within a week or two.

I wrote two letters that afternoon, one to Noel, telling him all that had occurred since we had parted, and another to Mr. Tenant, his patient. I addressed both to Nice, hoping that if Noel's failed to find him, the other would reach its destination.

Maggie at my intreaty took a journey to Bedford to inquire for letters or wires at Sawyer's, but the errand was fruitless. Noel had sent no word. It remained for me, then, to wait for my lover and to guard against Templeton and his two partners.

The time passed quickly and not unpleasantly in the house of the virginia creeper. Mrs. Dunkley was glad of my assistance in the house, and did not seem to grudge me a home. Her husband, at work at a shoe factory, was a quiet but not unkindly person. The other members of the family were Maggie, a "fitter" in the same factory as her father, and Dick, the curly-headed urchin whose life had been so nearly ended in the market place.

As day followed day and none of the firm made their appearance, I was lulled into a sense of security; but for my fear for Noel, the gnawing anxiety I felt for news from him, I had been almost content. When, however, at the end of the week no news had come, I felt it was time to bestir myself. I could no longer intrench on the Dunkley's hospitality. I must get work. Maggie's endeavours on my behalf not being successful, I determined to apply myself.

To this end one sunny morning I set out for Cooper's factory. At the top of Wood Street on the way to Campbell Square, there stands Northampton Gaol. The walls, tall and grim, tower above one's head, so high they stand that the mind cannot scale the barrier set between the world of silence and the world of life. The prison gate, Fate's doorway, through which how many children of despair have passed, lay dark and stern, a blot upon the sunshine of the day. It had a fascination for me this same door; often I stood, my ears filled with the sound of laughter as the hurrying factory hands swept past, my eyes dazzled with the brightness of the clear, cold sky, till gazing at the portals I had shuddered.

If it should be my fate to cross that threshold; if my enemies, relentless in their pursuit, should trace me, capture and cast me into that place of death!

As I gazed the little wicket on the right hand of the prison door was opened. A man looked out upon the world; not a warder nor yet a prisoner, though I doubt if there were in the prison one whose face bespoke such guilt. I did not know the man, I had not seen his face before. Lean and cadaverous, his long, thin face was pointed, his eyes—small, crafty eyes—set close together in his head. His hair of a red, so vivid as to touch scarlet, lay in a peak upon his forehead, like—like, yes—like a stain of blood.

My fixed regard attracted him; as his gaze met mine, I felt as if some evil thing had looked at me, a moment his eyes remained on mine, the next his face had disappeared, the wicket closed.

With a sigh of relief I turned away. Alas! that face was doomed to play a large part in my destiny.

After that afternoon my feeling of security came quickly to an end.

Arrived at Cooper's factory, I interviewed the manager and pleaded hard for work.

He shook his head, regarding me, I thought, contemptuously.

"You are too old for an apprentice," he said, "and too untrained for a worker. I don't suppose you can work a machine?"

"I could learn," I faltered. "I'm not stupid."

"I'm afraid I can't hold out any hopes," he replied. "All our workers are apprenticed quite young—just after they leave school."

Dispirited by my lack of success, I asked if I might go into the workroom and see Maggie. It was close on five o'clock, near the hour of dismissal. I felt that a walk with my friend and kind companion might cheer me up.

Having gained permission, I sped up the winding staircase, past rooms heavy with the scent of leather—brown, black, and faint coloured fawns. Huge piles representing thousands of pounds were waiting to be converted into shooting, walking, golfing—every kind of boot; past the cutters' room, where Maggie's father worked, packed full of men, young, old, and middle-aged, their eyes glued to their work, their shoulders bowed with stooping. Into the machinists' room, where the whirr of revolving wheels made the brain giddy. Young girls of seventeen and under, guiding with incredible dexterity the heavy leather that the needle pierced so easily; matrons, mothers of families, working machines even more complicated, and here and there a faded little woman shrivelled and wizened to the colour of the leather that she held. In the "fitters'" room I discovered Maggie; above the clang of the hammer her laughter rang out. Her face fresh as a flower, with damask cheeks and clear brown eyes, glanced up at me.

In a few words I explained my errand. She smilingly agreed to my request that she should leave, and a few minutes later, after a hasty cup of tea, we were hurrying down Abingdon Street, to look at the shops.

We studied the windows intently, admiring the hats in Adnitt's, the dress materials in Cole and Hughes. Maggie was a managing soul; her earnings, some sixteen shillings weekly, she husbanded carefully, the greater part being deposited each week in a savings' bank.

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She decided that afternoon, however, to purchase a new gown, and to that end collected a large number of patterns. By the time we had selected the ones we preferred, the evening had set in. The streets immediately about the market were thronged with work girls, shouting, laughing in high spirits. At the corner of Guild Hall Street we encountered a neatly-dressed, horsey-looking man.

Maggie turned crimson when she met his eyes.

"It's my young man," she whispered, and the next minute was clinging closely to his arm. It seemed to me a time when my absence would be more appreciated than myself. I shook hands with the horsey gentleman, and murmuring something about "shopping," moved off in a contrary direction; up the street, towards Abingdon Square, past troops of operatives, with here and there a young man in their midst, clean-shaven, gaitered, horsey from head to foot. Through the square itself, with its desolate looking People's Café that flanks the statue of Charles Bradlaugh, dauntless and unafraid, the genius of the Northampton people. Whether the statue be a fine one or not it is impossible for me to say. During my stay in the town it was invariably surrounded by barrows bearing advertisement placards setting forth the attractions of the Music Hall. It was strange to catch a glimpse of that earnest, powerful face rising above letters a foot high proclaiming that "Joe Elvin's" performance was unrivalled!

I was too tired to walk further that afternoon, and the trams, crowded with folks, did not appeal to me. I retraced my steps, taking a short cut through the Guild Hall from Abingdon Street. Half way down the corridor I ran against an individual coming in the opposite direction. Glancing up, I recognised the man I had seen that afternoon at the prison gate. Murmuring an apology, I hastened on; to my discomfort, he turned round and followed me. In a sudden panic I rushed on at full speed, flying down the steps of the Hall, and falling almost into Maggie's arms.

"Help me," I said wildly. "I'm—I'm frightened. Look," and I pointed to the man with the scarlet hair regarding us from the top of the steps.

"He's not pretty to look at, certainly," said Jim Goodman, Maggie's sweetheart. "Would you like me to go for him, missie?"

"Oh, no," I urged. "Let us get home. I can't bear to be near him," and much to Mr. Goodman's disappointment we set off for Wood Street, the groom, for that I discovered was Jim's calling, enlivening our way with descriptions of certain fights in which, by all accounts, he had not played the part of a spectator.

He left us at the door with many expressions of good-will towards me, and offers "to go for" any man I liked to name.

That night I could not rest. Every sound resolved itself into footsteps, each gust of wind seemed to me like a voice—my enemy's voice crying for my destruction.

Next morning I confided to Maggie that I carried with me bank notes for a thousand pounds. I felt I could no longer bear the weight of the secret all alone.

"If you really think the red-haired chap means trouble, you ought not to walk about with the notes upon you," she said thoughtfully. "You say you've cut 'em in halves? Well, you keep one packet, I'll hide the other here under this board in the floor."

It struck me as a primitive hiding place, but, failing a better, I took advantage of it, and deposited the packet under the loose plank by my bed.

Abingdon Abbey, near the park, where Sara encountered Shackleton cunningly disguised.

I was up early that morning, straining my eyes down the street to catch a glimpse of the postman.

"No letters?" I asked, my heart torn with fear and hope.

"Not this time," was the answer, and the man, unconscious arbiter of life and death, passed on.

In the afternoon of the same day, I took Dick up to Abingdon Park, where it was arranged that Maggie and her lover should meet us later on. It was a lovely afternoon, the old Abbey girdled with trees, cloaked with ivy, towered up straight and tall against the clear blue sky. I sat down on one of the seats provided by a thoughtful corporation, and, keeping Dick well in sight, waited for my friends.

Maggie and Jim arrived a full hour before I had expected. I gave Dick into their charge, and declining an invitation to accompany them, gave myself up to reverie. If only I could see Noel but for a moment! I hungered for him, my soul cried out for a touch of his dear hand. The tears forced their way to my eyes and a lump rose in my throat.

"Noel," I whispered, "Noel."

As if in answer to my call a step sounded on the gravel path. Hoping I do not know what wild feverish thing, I turned, and met the gaze of the man I had seen at the prison door!

He was taller than I had thought at first, and his shoulders were broad, his build powerful. I rose from my seat and hastened from the Park, not pausing until the echo of his steps, pursuing me, had died away.

I left the Park by the nearest gate. It led into a fine wide thoroughfare, lined with well-built houses standing in ample gardens, it is a pleasant suburb and a growing one.

Some distance down the road I passed a pair of large iron gates through which I caught a glimpse of trees and flowers and a broad carriage drive. The lodge, overgrown with green, was picturesque enough to make me pause.

Looking up I scanned the windows, neatly draped with spotless muslin. One I noticed particularly, was framed with creeper, kissed by the autumn into blushing red, looking exquisitely pretty.

"What is this place?" I asked a passer-by.

"It's an asylum," was the answer, "*a lunatic asylum!*"

I gave a start—flowers, open windows, fresh green trees—the place did not present the appearance one associates with a madhouse. I wondered if the inmates were all mad; it might be some were the victims of a conspiracy as cruel as that which parted me from Noel. I glanced again towards the window of the lodge and watched until, as if in response to my scrutiny, someone approached. A hand lifted the window higher, a black-coated arm appeared upon the sill, and then a head and shoulders filled the aperture. For a second I gazed, breathless with fear and hope. Then, with a scream that brought the people to their doors, I flung myself upon the iron gates.

It was Noel who looked at me from the window. His dear face that gazed at me. Noel, *Noel!*—a prisoner in a madhouse!

"Come out!" I shrieked, and then gripping the iron bars, clanged the bell, appealing with wild cries for help!

The window was shut down, Noel taken away, perhaps—the thought was madness—to a padded room, where bound and gagged he would endure the horrors of torture both physical and mental!

Again and yet again I shook the gates, until the sound of approaching wheels aroused me from my passion. A brougham drew up outside the house. A tall, professional-looking man whose air and manner proclaimed him to be a

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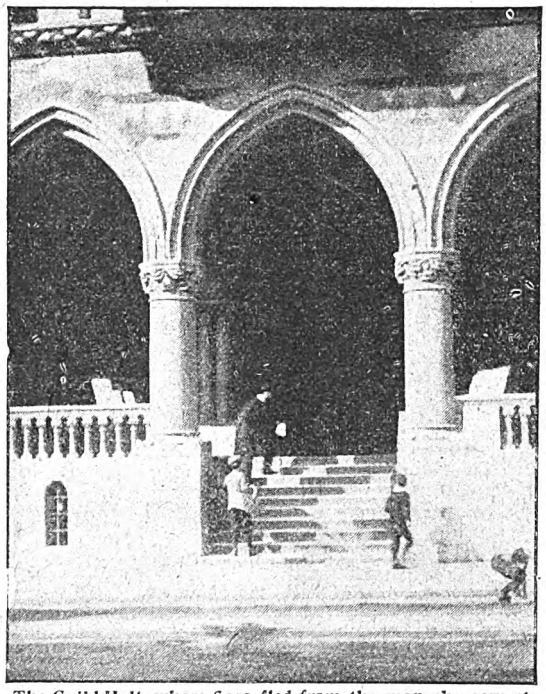
doctor alighted on the path, close to his heels a second man stepped out; the red-headed individual who had caused me such alarm.

"We're in good time after all, Dr. Anesley," he said.

Anesley! The name awoke a thousand recollections. The doctor whose practice Noel had wished to buy was called Anesley. Doubtless he, like Noel, had been duped by the firm of Templeton & Co. He would help me, help my lover. It was a veritable stroke of fortune that had sent him to me at this crisis.

"Doctor, I want your help. My sweetheart, Noel Masteman, the man who was in treaty for your practice through the agency of Templeton & Co. is in that place"—and I shook my fist towards the lodge. "You don't know me; I'm, Sara Gillespie, the girl to whom he is engaged. I was employed as typine in their office at St. Helens. I discovered they were plotting against Noel; I discovered they had murdered, *murdered* his cousin, and that—"

With a gesture the doctor stopped my flow of eloquence.



The Guild Hall, where Sara fled from the man she saw at the prison gate.

"What proof have you that Mr. Masterman is here?" he asked.

"I have seen him in that room"—and I pointed to the window framed in rich red leaves.

"Doctor," I clasped my hands about his arms. "Let him come to me; he is not mad; dear Heaven, you know he is not mad!"

He gazed at me with kind, compassionate eyes, then, signing to his companion to withdraw, led me aside.

"Now," he said quickly; "if I'm to be of help you must control yourself. You tell me Mr. Masterman is at the lodge. If that is the case, I, as one of the physicians of the establishment, will inquire the reason of his detention there. It is, however, possible," his voice sank almost to a whisper, "that he's there for purposes of investigation. Others beside yourself my dear young lady, have reason to suspect Messrs. Templeton & Co. You must understand their influence is far-reaching. Mr. Templeton, in fact, is one of the trustees of the asylum. I cannot openly question his doings; it is a matter for diplomacy."

"Meantime——" I interrupted.

"Have no fear, Miss Gillespie; I will help you to the best of my ability. I will call at the lodge, see Mr. Masterman, and ascertain the reason for his detention. If he is kept there by the agency of Mr. Templeton I will on my own responsibility release him. If, as I suspect, he is there to keep an eye on the head of the firm, I will ask him to send you a message to that effect."

His words were plausible, his manner kind. I yielded to his persuasions and consented to remain *outside* the lodge gates until I heard from him or Noel.

"That man," I said, pointing to the red-headed person, "I mistrust him; who is he?"

"A keeper in the asylum," the doctor replied. "He is devoted to me, and takes special interest in my own particular cases."

"I saw him at the gate of the prison the other day."

"Quite possible; his brother is a warder in the gaol."

He smiled the gentle, persuasive smile of the medical man. I yielded to his influence, and watched him and his familiar through the iron gates, waiting, hungry of heart outside.

Within five minutes the scarlet-headed man appeared. My own locks being more of red than auburn, it may seem peculiar that his hair should have inspired me with such a feeling of revulsion. The explanation lies, I think, in the fact that his head was sleek and smooth (my hair is very curly), his skin of, leaden hue, his face, his figure, redolent of craft and cunning—a very Judas.

"I am to tell you," he commenced in a gruff voice, which to my fancy sounded like the grating of a prison door, "I am to tell you that Mr. Masterman is watching over your interests and his own. He dare not see you now. Were he to try and leave the place it would excite Templeton's suspicions."

"Where's Templeton?" I gasped, "not here?"

"He is at present seated with the Board in company with Dr. Anesley."

"But is Noel a—a—— Is he thought to be *mad?*" I asked.

"He was received here on Templeton's recommendations and by the certificate of two doctors as a patient. His cleverness helped him to escape and remain concealed in the lodge. That same ability will enable him with my help to leave the place to-morrow morning, when he will join you."

"Where?" I asked, my heart beating wildly, "where?" In my enthusiasm I was ready to smile upon the man of the prison gate.

"You are to meet him on the racecourse by the grand stand at five o'clock in the morning. That, and no other is the hour when he can in safety see you. Will you be there?"

He looked at me nonchalantly, not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid did he reveal the anxiety which he must have felt.

"I will come," I answered. Then: "Can you take a note from me to—to—Mr. Masterman?"

"Better not," he answered, shaking his head. "It will excite suspicion."

Somehow the answer reassured me. I felt reproached at the disgust the man's personality had inspired in me, and at the conclusion of the interview felt constrained to thank him for his kindness!

Maggie was not enthusiastic when on my return to the house in Wood Street, I told her what had happened.

"You should have hammered and hammered at the gate until he came to you," she said, "I could not have left Jim in a madhouse were it ever so."

"But Noel sent a message to me," I remonstrated, "saying I must wait. Don't you see, Maggie, there's so much at stake. We have to bring these people to justice, to——"

"I reckon you want *him* most of all," she interrupted, "so long as I had my lad I'd let the others—rip."

With which illogical conclusion she ended the discussion.

Next morning before the dawn lightened the darkness of the sky I was astir. Something, I know not what, a premonition of menace, a foretaste of danger, made me rouse my sleeping bedfellow.

"I'm afraid to take these with me, Maggie," I said softly, thrusting my packet of banknotes and the paper that Noel had signed into her hands; "keep them for me. If all is well, Noel and I will come together and reclaim them, if not——"

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"If you're not here by seven o'clock I shall know there's mischief," she interrupted. "Even now, I'm loth to let you go alone. I wish I had told father," she paused; "anyway, Jim knows." She smiled at the mention of her sweetheart's name, and, linking her arms about my neck, wished me "good luck" with all her heart.

The streets, dim and ghost-like in the grey morning, struck a chill to my heart. Abingdon Street, void of trams and traffic, empty of pedestrians, seemed like a churchyard. Wellingborough Road, shrouded in mist, was to my excited fancy peopled with ghosts. The trees made shuddering noises; through the white vapours the funnel-shaped steeple of the church built by a healthy brewer—dubbed by the irreverent Spillsby's "Fire-escape," formed a landmark. I groped my way until the racecourse, ghostly and deserted, loomed before me. I leant against the palings that fence the grand stand and waited, heart and brain on the alert to catch the sound of anyone approaching. Gradually the mists dispersed, the course lay clear before me. In fancy I conjured up phantoms of the steeds, the jockeys who had ridden to the winning post. Scarlet and green and blue, the jackets passed before me mounted on satin-skinned thoroughbreds, darting like arrows from a bow.

What fortunes had been made and lost on this same course! How many eyes had craned to follow the horse which bore the last hopes of a spendthrift; how many voices had been raised to greet the victor as he swept by!

The place, no longer desolate and lonely, was to me thronged with the tragedies, the comedies that are enacted on a race-course.

Far, far as the eye could reach the white posts reared themselves upon the soft green sward; in the background a line of hills, mystic, wonderful, made the sky line. In the near distance a row of houses, spectral in the dawning, turned blind eyes towards me.

Of a sudden a shaft of light crept rapidly across the horizon. In its beams I distinguished a group of men approaching me. Filled with apprehension I hastened towards them. I had taken but ten paces in their direction, when from the grey mist that enveloped me, I felt a hand upon my shoulder, another on my wrist.

I was held fast—immovable.

Struggling, I turned my head. The men who held my arms were strange to me.

"Keep quiet," said a low voice, "and we won't harm you. It's no use to struggle, you'll only hurt yourself."

The figures I had first observed were rapidly approaching. A tall man, gagged and bound, led by two others; a third walked at their side; a fourth in advance.

The latter came quickly to where I stood. I seemed to recognise in him the man of the prison door.

"Where is Noel Masterman?" I called, struggling with frantic efforts to release myself.

"Here!" And he pointed to the figure bound and gagged behind him.

"You," I commenced. With a gesture he cut me short.

"Look," he said, and, raising his hat, he made a mocking bow. "Look at me, Miss Gillespie. Do you not know me—now?"

He thrust his face—his hateful mocking face—into mine. The red hair, that like a stain of blood had marked his forehead, the leaden-coloured skin, the narrow brow, were gone—gone—and in their place there looked at me the murderous face of Shackleton!

"You're very clever, Miss Gillespie," he said derisively. "But this time we have you *tight*. There is your lover," he pointed with a gesture of contempt to Noel. "And now"—his thin lips twitched with eagerness—"you must make your choice. Tell me where I shall find the paper and the notes or——" he paused, throwing up his hands. At the signal the man who walked near to my lover drew out a pistol, and held it to Noel's head.

"Speak," cried Shackleton, "or——" and his gesture said the rest.

"I give you ten seconds to make up your mind. The papers are not on you; that I know. Say where they are, and your lover's life is spared. Refuse, and, by Heaven, he shall die!"

My throat grew parched, my tongue clung to my palate. I tried to think, tried to evolve a plausible tale that would deceive him, so that I need not confess that the papers were in Maggie Dunkley's hands. He simply dared not murder Noel before my eyes. He——

"One!" counted Shackleton, and the earth went round me at the sound.

"Two!" Gasping, I babbled out a tale of having buried notes and papers up in Abingdon Park. It sounded wild, improbable, to my own ears, to his it was mere balderdash.

Fear, as the torturers of long ago well knew, deprives the imagination of all power to invent, the mind to all strength to conceive. The victim under the strain of torture is driven back upon the naked truth. He cannot lie.

"Three!" Must I tell him? I might surely trust Maggie to keep faith, and yet on my silence hung my future and my lover's. They dare not kill him?

"Herbert Masterman died," said Shackleton, reading my thoughts, "why not Noel?"

"You will not have him killed," I gasped, "if—if——"

"I will spare his life," he answered, "if you confess. Then, marking the irresolution still upon my face, snapping his fingers. "Four, five, six!" he cried.

My eyes searching the plain espied a horseman galloping towards me. Close on his heels ran a figure, strong, alert. Were they coming to help me and Noel? Had Maggie, fearing foul play, flown to my aid?

Why could I not invent a colourable lie to gain time, until they arrived? If I could hold his attention, if I could keep back the seconds that he counted with such fiendish joy!

"Help," I screamed, throwing my voice towards the horseman.

"Eight," said Shackleton, and the trigger of the pistol held to Noel's head was raised.

The horseman spurring his steed drew nearer.

"Nine! Is he to die?" cried Shackleton.

I tried to answer, but my voice was strangled in my throat. Only a hoarse murmur came from my lips. I could not speak, I could not even make a sign.

A second, but a second, and my love must die!

Ten—and the fatal shot was to be fired!

(Sara Relates her Adventure at Leicester Next Week.)

Arthur Applin's New Story,

"THE GAMBLE OF LIFE,"

Has Just Started in

Pearson's Weekly.

One Penny. Every Friday.

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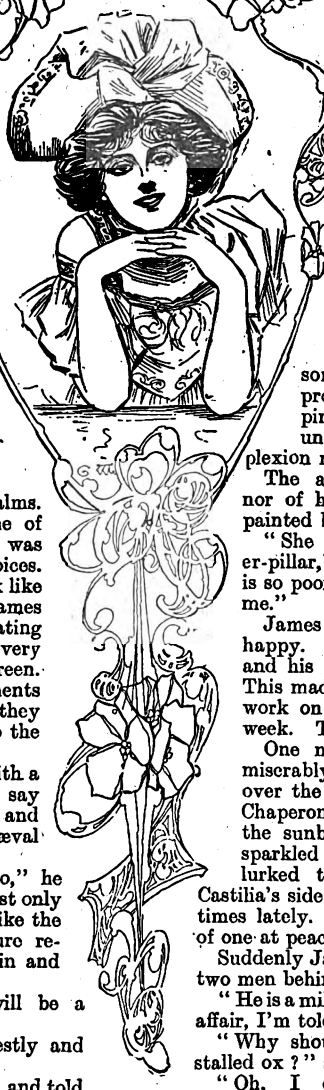
A ROSE-LEAF PRINCESS.



Relating the Mistake She Made.

HER name was Susan Anna, but her lover re-christened her Castilia. If he had been a plumber or a paper-hanger he would probably have called her his "black-eyed Susan"; but he was a poet and an artist, even if his name was James Henry Perkins, so he named her Castilia, and told himself that her eyes were the colour of a mountain lake when the storm hangs over it, and her hair was as densely black as a moonless midnight.

They met at an afternoon tea, and sat talking in a little shaded alcove behind some tall palms. The atmosphere was heavy with the perfume of roses, and the tremulous music of the violins was broken by the thin, airy treble of women's voices.

A red-shaded lamp made Castilia's cheek look like a peach on the south side of a sunny wall. James Henry told her so with a delightful, hesitating boldness, and she blushed divinely and was very glad that the lamp-shade was not blue or green. They discovered in those ten undisturbed moments that they were absolutely sympathetic; they worshipped the same authors, were devoted to the same actors, and adored the same things to eat.

"Fancy you being an artist," said Castilia, with a fascinating note of awe in her voice. "I dare say you have a lovely studio, with painted windows and rusty armour, and old tapestry and mediæval chairs."

Perkins smiled cynically. "I have a studio," he answered, "but the properties you speak of exist only in the imagination. The light in my studio is like the strict truth, crude and hard, and my furniture resembles the tale of Mark Antony in being plain and unvarnished."

"Ah, yes," sympathetically. "But you will be a great artist some day."

"I hope so. I mean to be," he said, modestly and firmly.

At this moment the Paternal Friend appeared, and told Castilia that her Chaperon-Aunt desired her presence immediately. The Paternal Friend was a very charming man, by the way, but James Henry hated him on the spot.

For several days after this James Henry saw nothing of Castilia; but it happened that Castilia could not easily forget the man who had so plainly given her to understand that he thought her lovely. She reflected that for a long time she really had been intending to have her portrait painted, and she was quite sure that Mr. Perkins had a great deal of talent, not that she had any especial interest in him, but she was so weary of frivolous and empty-headed Society people, that it was very pleasant to meet an interesting and companionable man.

When James Henry was made aware of this decision of Castilia, he promptly turned his great historic picture to the wall. He would, for a season, cease chasing the will-o'-the-wisp—Fame—and paint the droop of Castilia's eye-lids and the curves of her lovely mouth.

Castilia did not find him so companionable as she had hoped during the sittings. For one thing, he looked at her with a certain critical, professional gleam in his eyes, and for another, he scarcely talked to her at all, and it was very tiresome sitting in one position so long, but she obtained some consolation from the reflection that he probably stood in awe of her aunt, a vast, pin-cushiony woman, with a skin so white and unwrinkled that it instantly suggested complexion masks and an unfeeling heart.

The aunt did not approve of James Henry nor of her niece's wild idea of having her portrait painted by an obscure young artist.

"She treats him as though he were a c-c-cater-pillar," sobbed Castilia upon her pillow, "and he is so poor, so deserving, so m-m-much in love with me."

James Henry, in the meantime, was miserably happy. He was desperately in love with Castilia, and his affection he knew was absolutely hopeless. This made him miserable. He was doing excellent work on her portrait, and he saw her twice a week. These facts made him happy.

One night when he was feeling particularly miserably happy, he went to the opera. Glancing over the house, he saw Castilia in a box with the Chaperon-Aunt. She wore a gown that was like the sunbeams veiled in mist, and shining stones sparkled in her dark hair. In the background lurked the detested Paternal Friend, and by Castilia's side was a man James Henry had seen many times lately. He was florid and stout, and had the air of one at peace with the world and himself.

Suddenly James Henry's quick ear caught her name; two men behind him were speaking of her.

"He is a millionaire—made money by mining—definite affair, I'm told."

"Why should she yoke herself unequally with that stalled ox?" said the other man.

"Oh, I don't know. Money always marries money."

James Henry levelled his glass at the chorus, but it was a confused blur; he paid no heed to the *prima donna*, although she was singing divinely. After the curtain fell he rose and left the house.

He was now obliged to confess to himself that unless Castilia returned his love, life would not be worth living; but he had no reason to suppose that she did; and what had he, who was just beginning to make his name known, to offer her? It was by reason of these inward cogitations that James Henry became acquainted with the chill, grey dawn which crept through the windows each morning and greeted his sleepless eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Perkins, are you ill, or have you had bad news?" faltered Castilia, at her next sitting.

"I am not ill," said James Henry coldly. He looked towards the Chaperon-Aunt, who had fallen into a gentle doze; then he blundered desperately, "but—but—I am going far away."

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"Going away! Why are you going far away?" cried Castilia, with a sob in her voice.

"Because I love you, Castilia, with all my soul; because I will not be so selfish and cowardly as to ask you to marry me, when I have nothing to offer you, so I am leaving you forever."

"Nothing to offer! Leaving me forever!" exclaimed Castilia, with honest scorn and amazement. "You don't regard my feelings in the matter," she said inarticulately, "and—and"—impulsively—"I love you, James Henry, just as much as you love me."

The pincushiony Chaperon-Aunt opened her eyes on a prettier tableau than she had ever seen on the stage, but she was a very unromantic person, and she expressed her opinion in very strong terms. She was only one, however, and her opposition did not count for much.

So Castilia and James Henry were married, and fancied that they were destined to live in a state of ideal bliss ever after—only they did not.

In the first place, James Henry was a very ambitious man and absorbed in his work, and Castilia, instead of being properly delighted at his industry, was offended, for she was young and foolish and exacting.

The artist sat many hours in his studio, and when the light faded, and he could no longer paint, he thought much of his work, and was often pre-occupied and absent-minded, and Castilia was firmly convinced that he had ceased to love her, and sought once more the society she had characterised as frivolous and empty-headed.

Her portrait was finished in time for the Academy, and all London rushed to see it, and went into raptures over it.

And Castilia was very, very proud of him, but she would not tell him so. "He would think it's only because he's become famous."

"She might have said one little word of appreciation, and not have been so utterly, heartlessly indifferent," thought James Henry bitterly.

When Castilia's portrait was brought home the best light was found in her sitting-room, so there it was hung, where she could sit and watch it by the hour. And how she grew to hate it!

Really, it was Castilia at her best, her beautiful, Spanish, haughty best. Some one had called it the portrait of a rose-leaf princess; and, indeed, her lovely face stood out, flowerlike, from the warm shadow of velvets and furs.

She often apostrophised her portrait ungratefully. "You hateful thing," she would cry, "I don't want to be 'a rose-leaf princess,' I—I'm a woman, and I want to be loved."

Just about this time, Perkins began to paint the portrait of a very charming woman, older than Castilia by some years. She had a mobile face, wonderful light eyes, changeful as the sea, and masses of light hair; and she was very witty and fascinating. Castilia hated her, especially when James Henry expressed his opinion that to paint her portrait so as to do her justice was the work of a lifetime; for she was variable as the winds, and her wonderful play of expression mirrored every mood.

His artist's soul was pained because Castilia would not see her beauty.

"Beauty!" she scornfully exclaimed, "I should think her bones would make holes in her dresses, poor creature! and she looks as old as the hills with that sallow, faded complexion."

She became more and more dissatisfied with her own portrait. Sometimes she felt that she would like to burn it. Why had James Henry given her that arrogant expression, which seemed to say, "Behold me! I am an heiress!" She wished she hadn't a penny.

One evening she strolled into the dimly-lit room, where her husband sat dreaming before the fire. Resting one arm on the mantelshelf, she looked curiously down upon him. "He's thinking of that horrid creature," was her jealous fancy.

"Tell me, James, dear," she said, "what is the best thing in the world?"

"The best thing in the world?" he said dreamily. "Why, freedom, I suppose."

That was enough. She turned and left him. "You poor thing!" she said to her portrait as she passed it. "You poor thing," she repeated, meaning herself.

"Why, Susie," said the Paternal Friend, who had just been admitted, "in the dark, and in tears? Is the world hollow, and your doll stuffed with sawdust?"

"I'm crying," she said meekly; "I—I—was just crying."

"I see. Shedding a few tears for want of something better to do," jestingly.

"I'll tell you why," she said desperately: "I hate that portrait of myself—I loathe it. I can't stay in the same room with it!"

"Send it to me then, Susie," he said soothingly. "I'll give it house room until you want it again."

"Oh! for goodness sake, take it, will you, really? It's so cold, and haughty, and scornful."

The Paternal Friend thought he understood. "I will send for it to-morrow," he said. "And, remember, when you wish for it, it is yours."

"Where is your portrait, Castilia?" said James Henry the next day.

"I didn't like it here," replied Castilia, "I took it down."

The artist grew a little pale and said nothing.

Now, since his marriage with Castilia, he had become very chummy with the Paternal Friend, so a day or two after this conversation he called at the house where the Paternal Friend lived in solitary state. He was admitted on the supposition that the master of the house was at home, which turned out to be a mistake.

While waiting, James Henry looked idly about him. Suddenly he staggered back against the wall, for there, hanging in the broad light, was his portrait of his lovely, haughty Castilia. Hastily leaving the house, he turned mechanically homeward. As he neared his own dwelling he lifted his moody eyes to see the Paternal Friend walking blithely away from the door. James Henry strode gloomily into the house; in the hallway stood Castilia—a radiant, different Castilia.

"Oh, James!" she cried joyously, "what do you think has happened?"

"Susan Anna," he said, sternly and gravely, "I know what you have done with your portrait."

"Susan Anna!" The end of the world had come. In the days of his greatest indifference he had never called her Susan Anna.

And because she was a woman, and very much in love, she—slightly prevaricated.

"Yes," she said sweetly, "he has just been here to tell me that he is going to be married to that horrid woman with the green eyes; and"—triumphantly—"I sent the picture to him as a wedding present."

James Henry's face cleared, and then clouded anew. He looked bewildered.

"But—but," he stammered, "he came to-day to tell you of his engagement, and you sent the picture to him three days ago."

"I know I did"—despairingly—"I hated it so, and I cried and said that I couldn't stay in the same house with it, and he offered to keep it until I wanted it again."

"You hated your beautiful portrait, the best thing I ever did," said James Henry in astonishment. "Ah, I see! It was because I painted it, and you had ceased to love me or to take any interest in my work."

"No," she cried, "not that; I never ceased—to take an interest in your work. I—I—James Henry, it was you who ceased to love me."

"Castilia!" he exclaimed in amazement, "I never loved anybody in this wide world but you."

"Not even the Paternal Friend's *fiancée*?"

"What nonsense! My lovely, darling Castilia, she is excellent for purposes of study; her grace and odd colouring are so marked; but you are you—and all is said."

Nancy Blake.

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A Matter of Business.

Which Tells of a Policy that Cut Both Ways.

"Yes, Jack, I do love you."

"You — do — really, Doris?"

"Why, of course I do, you silly boy."

The above conversation took place in the wood which stretches from the outskirts of the village of Amfield away down to Mouswater.

It was the old, sweet, inexhaustible story over again; man's love told in halting, passionate utterances; woman's reply, shy and trembling.

In this case Jack Guthrie could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. Not that he doubted Doris Thornton, but he did not seem to be able to bring himself to understand that this beautiful girl could actually yield herself into his keeping for ever.

Doris Thornton was the only daughter of James Thornton, Esq., a wealthy brewer, who was also the proprietor and editor of the *Domsey Times*.

Jack Guthrie was the owner of Horseley House, a fine old English mansion standing in its own park. It had a home farm, good and plenteous shooting, wild deer, and, in fact, all the attributes which go to make up an English country gentleman's home.

Jack's father, the late William Guthrie, J.P., M.F.H., had died some years before. Mrs. Guthrie and Jack had lived on at Horseley House although they often spoke of buying a smaller place. At least Mrs. Guthrie did, and Jack would doubtless have agreed if Doris Thornton had not come home from the Continent.

She had gone away an angular, bony, plain, awkward girl, and had returned to England at the age of twenty, a most graceful and beauteous maiden.

Why, it was the custom in Amfield and Horseley to say, in praise of anything beautiful, that it was "as pretty as Miss Doris."

Now she had hardly been back four months, and she was already engaged to be married.

It may sound rather calculating to say it, but Doris could hardly have done better. Jack Guthrie was a good-looking, well-educated man of about twenty-six years of age. He was exceedingly well off in regard to monetary matters, and a better fellow or finer athlete was not to be found if you searched the countryside for miles around.

Was it not on record how he had caught hold of Bill Boffin, who was more drunk than usual in the King's Head at Horseley, and carried him struggling for almost half a mile into the park; there he dipped him in Catbasket Pond, which effectually sobered him, and took him home to Mrs. Boffin, into whose hand he put a sovereign.

And there were many similar tales to be heard, for the young master was a great favourite in Horseley.

So now he stood with the trembling form of Doris Thornton clinging to him; his face bent down and pressed against hers; his arms holding her to him as though he would never release her.

She loved him; he could hardly credit it. But it was true—true as God's air and sunshine that he breathed and stood in.

They had met near the Keeper's Cottage at half-past two, and now it was just on six o'clock. Guthrie glanced at his watch, and uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"I must hurry back home, Jack. Father will wonder wherever I have disappeared to," said Doris, when he acquainted her of the hour.

"H'm!" he replied. "That opens up some fresh possibilities. Do you think Mr. Thornton will be pleased when he hears of our engagement?"

"Whyever not, Jack?" Doris cried, in tones of astonishment.

"Well, you remember, he and the guv'nor never used to hit it off very well, did they?"

"Oh, no," cried Doris in anxious tones. "But surely he would not let that interfere between us."

"I hope not, Doris, with all my heart. I suppose I must come over and see him soon. When shall I come?"

"He is going to London on Wednesday, Jack. You had better come to-morrow."

"To-morrow then it is," he replied with an anxious and enormous sigh, which provoked a rippling laugh from Doris.

In half-an-hour's time Jack was striding swiftly along the woodland path which comes out just above Mouswater.

Doris was his, he kept repeating to himself. The very birds sang her name, and he caught himself repeating:

"There's a thought of Thee in the soft sweet breeze,
That sighs o'er the golden moor.
There's a song of thee in the green-leafed trees,
And will be for evermore."

He hardly slept that night through excitement, but a swim in Catbasket Pond refreshed him wonderfully, and he whistled merrily as he passed through the Amfield Woods to beard Mr. Thornton.

"Mr. Thornton will be down in a moment, sir," announced the footman who showed Jack Guthrie into a large morning-room, that opened out into the grounds of Amfield House.

Jack seated himself, and proceeded to survey his surroundings and the position. His reverie was broken by the sudden entrance of Doris. She stood for a moment in the flood of sunlight at the door, and then, with a cry of pleasure, she darted forward and in a moment was in her lover's arms.

It was exceedingly unfortunate that Mr. Thornton happened to choose that exact moment to enter the room. And it was still more to be deplored that his game-keepers had reported that morning that there had been a big raid by some poachers during the night.

"Wh—wh—what the d—d—dickens does this mean?" he spluttered.

"Er——" remarked Jack.

"Oh!" cried Doris, and then she retreated hurriedly, basely deserting her lover.

"Good-morning, Mr. Thornton," began Jack. "I am pleased to see you."

"That's not the truth, sir. You were not pleased to see me," was the ungracious rejoinder.

"No," replied Jack meditatively. "I suppose I was not."

"Well," grunted Mr. Thornton, "now you are certainly candid.

"First of all, though," he went on, "I should be glad to

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know what the pretty scene that I was unfortunate enough to interrupt meant. Confound it, sir!" he was getting angry now. "What do you mean by kissing my daughter?"

"That's what I came to see you about, Mr. Thornton."

"Oh, you did, did you—came to see me about kissing my daughter, eh? A peculiar mission indeed."

"Well, not exactly that, but——"

"Do you know what you do want?" peevishly broke in the old gentleman. "At least I can tell you one thing you do want and that is a business education. You come here to see me about something, and you hum, and haw, and what not, instead of coming to the point."

"I love Doris," burst out Jack, goaded to desperation by Mr. Thornton's haggling.

"Oh, now we have something to work on. Is she equally silly?"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Thornton."

"No, I suppose not. You are one of those young men who have been brought up in the lap of luxury and have never known what it is to want. You have never had to depend on your business ability or your own cleverness, have you now?"

"No," replied Jack glumly.

"I suppose you want to marry Doris?"

"Yes," replied Jack blithely.

"Well, the question I put to you just now was, does she want to marry you?"

"Why, you do not suppose——"

"I do not want any suppositions," broke in Mr. Thornton, "but a plain answer. Yes or no."

"Yes," snapped out Jack.

"Well, that's decided, at any rate. Now then, what qualifications have you as a suitor for my daughter's hand?"

"Eh?" responded Jack blankly.

"Goodness, gracious! You are as dull as the Opposition. Why should I agree to your marriage with Doris?"

"We love each other," replied Jack shortly, for he was beginning to lose his temper. "I shall make her mistress of Horseley."

"Very nice, very nice. But I do not wish my daughter to marry a man for whom I have no respect."

"What in the world do you mean, sir?" roared out Jack, as he towered over Mr. Thornton.

"Now, please don't get excited, a good business man always keeps his head."

"Good business man be hanged," retorted Jack. "I want to know what you meant by saying you did not respect me?"

"Well, what have you done that I should? You are not responsible for your position and wealth. You have done nothing but shoot, ride, drive, and all the rest of it. Why should I respect you?"

There was no reply. It was a knotty point and required consideration.

"Now, look here, my boy," said Mr. Thornton, in a kindlier tone than he had yet adopted. "When you can come to me and show me that you have got a good business head on your shoulders you shall have Doris. Do something clever in the business world, something to show that you have brains, but until you have succeeded I refuse to agree to your marriage with Doris."

It was a knockdown blow for Jack, but the fighting blood of his race surged through his veins; he set his jaw, and momentarily clenched his fists. Mr. Thornton noted these unconscious actions, and inwardly approved them.

"That is your ultimatum, sir?" said Jack at length.

"It is, my boy."

"Well, then, I'll agree. But you'll let me see Doris once more?"

"You shall have her to yourself for half-an-hour," replied Mr. Thornton. "And then you must endeavour not to see her until you have fulfilled the conditions of our compact.

"It will be better in another way, too," he added. "For it will test whether your love for each other is strong enough to endure separation. Now I'll send Doris in to you."

Jack impatiently paced up and down the room after Mr. Thornton's departure. His brow was knit, and his lips tightly compressed. Hearing the door open, he swung round. Doris came towards him with a troubled, apprehensive look on her face.

"Well, Jack?" she said, as she crept into the shelter of his arms.

"Well, little woman. We must make the most of this half hour for it is the last we shall have together for some considerable time."

"Jack!" she cried. "The last! What do you mean?"

Then he told her of her father's decree, and that he had had to agree to it.

"But I will not keep you long, dear," he added. "I'll do something to make him come round very quickly."

The remainder of the interview need not be chronicled, but after Jack had gone Doris was some considerable time putting her hair straight. Having done that, she sat down and sobbed, and made her hair all untidy again.

As for Jack, he strode on down the main road, looking neither to the right nor the left. Through Amfield he tramped, down the road past Mouswater and on to Horseley, but he did not come back to ordinary everyday thoughts until he found himself past the village of Abis, and only a little way from Dunchester.

Two days passed by, and many plans had evolved in his brain, but they were all dismissed for some reason or other.

Suddenly his eyes gleamed, and he jumped to his feet excitedly.

"Got it!" he screamed. "By the Lord Harry, I've got it."

And the next day he departed to London.

* * * * *

Domsey (pronounced Dumsey) is a quaint old town built round a very ancient monastery. It is tenderly referred to by its inhabitants as "Domsey in the Mud."

Sleepy is the most characteristic adjective to apply to Domsey, except on every other Thursday when a market is held. There is one every Thursday, but the fortnightly market is much the larger of the two.

Like the town, Mr. Thornton's journal, the *Domsey Times*, was a peaceful, ambling sort of newspaper. They used to say that subscribers who were accustomed to an afternoon nap, very often failed to sleep if they had not got a copy of the *Domsey Times* in their hands.

It had a delightful little way of its own of appearing on different days of the week, according to how much time the Editor could spare to it.

However, Domsey woke up one morning to find all its walls placarded with staring posters. They were printed with a green ground and white letters with a scarlet edging. Altogether they produced a most startling effect. The text of the contents was as follows:

TO THE INHABITANTS OF DOMSEY!
You will shortly be the proud possessors of a first-class
NEWSPAPER
which will not send you to sleep.
READ THE *DOMSEY TELEGRAPH.*
Price 1d. Published every Thursday.
A LONDON NEWSPAPER IN DOMSEY!!!

It is really only in a country town or village that people talk to each other about everything, and that the popular opinion is generally quickly known.

Domsey viewed this innovation with marked interest. It was a splendid idea of the promoters to publish the paper on market days.

The *Domsey Times* had always been on sale at the various stationers, and there the subscribers had to go to obtain a copy. But on the Thursday when the first edition of the *Domsey Telegraph* came out, a number of boys paraded the town with copies of that paper for sale.

Most people bought both of the papers, and made nasty comparisons to the detriment of the *Times*.

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"Well, Oi be danged!" remarked a burly, red-faced countryman. "This be a foine paper, I'll taak it hoam to the missus."

This expressed the general opinion of the Domseyites, more particularly when they read that copies would be delivered free of charge to all subscribers within a three mile radius of Domsey.

A large office and printing works had been taken over by the promoters in Church Street, which was surveyed with wondering admiration by all the townsfolk.

At Amfield House, Mr. Thornton read the *Domsey Telegraph* with vague, angry feelings of uneasiness.

"Won't last, my dear," he assured Doris. "You will see that my words will come true. The *Times* has been established too long, and has too firm a foothold to be thrust out by a flashy paper like this. I tell you, my dear, the *Telegraph* will expire in a fortnight."

Doris did not care much about the rivalry between the papers, all she wanted was Jack. She had not heard a word about him since he went to London, and she yearned to see him again.

However, a month went by, and the two vivid red motor-cars still made their rounds to the subscribers to the *Telegraph*. The new paper appeared with marked regularity, and was always far better informed than the *Domsey Times*.

The latter paper never made the slightest mention of its rival, but where you saw one copy of the *Domsey Times* you would see four copies of the *Domsey Telegraph*.

The climax came when the *Telegraph* commenced a series of prize competitions which highly took the fancy of Domseyites.

The circulation increased by leaps and bounds, and people living in Dunchester and Sarbury, both large country towns about eleven miles distant from Domsey, began to take in the *Telegraph*.

Mr. Thornton commenced to look worried. The *Domsey Times* had always been a lucrative investment but now he was beginning to lose money over it.

True it was that he could well afford it, but the idea went against the grain, and at last he came to the conclusion that he must adopt some means of altering the state of affairs.

It was a sore blow to his pride after having held the field for twelve years to have to give in to a newcomer after two months.

Sadly, therefore, he sat down and indited the following letter:

Amfield House, near Domsey.

To the Proprietor of the Domsey Telegraph, *Domsey.*

SIR—*It must be apparent to you that there is no opening for two local papers in Domsey, and in consideration of that fact I beg to make the following proposal:*

That the Domsey Telegraph *and the* Domsey Times *be amalgamated and incorporated under one Proprietor and Editor, but that the original proprietors of the two papers receive a division of profits, such division to be arrived at by placing the accounts of the two journals in the hands of a trustworthy valuer, etc., etc., etc.*

In two or three days' time a reply came back from a London firm of solicitors who were empowered to act for the proprietor of the *Domsey Telegraph*. The letter was to the effect that their client would not consider for one moment the question of amalgamation, but he would be willing to be bought out.

Mr. Thornton was now at a critical piont. Either he must give in, and cease to issue the *Domsey Times*, or else he must agree to the said proposal.

Already people were quietly laughing at him, and he knew that the death of the *Domsey Times* would mean a great loss of prestige. So he took the bull by the horns and commenced negotiations for the purchase of the *Domsey Telegraph*.

The price asked was a high one—£500 more than he had anticipated paying. After some haggling he managed to reduce it by £150, but had to close at that figure.

So the *Domsey Times*, now somewhat glorified, remained the only local newspaper in that remarkable and somnambulistic town.

All this time Doris was worrying the roses from her cheeks through the absence of Jack. Never a word or a message had come from him, all she knew was that he had gone to London.

Mr. Thornton had been too much occupied by reason of his newspaper controversy to pay much attention to his daughter's looks, but now he had time to himself he was astonished to find how ill she was looking.

"Here," he said, when he had elicited the cause of her pale looks from her. "We'll have that young man back at once. I'll write him to-day."

But at that very moment a footman brought in the visiting-card of Mr. John Guthrie.

Doris hastily slipped upstairs.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Thornton, "what can I do for you?"

"Fulfil your part of our contract," was Jack's reply. "I have done my part."

"Indeed, and what have you done?"

"That!" cried Jack, as he handed Mr. Thornton the cheque with which he had paid for the *Telegraph*.

Mr. Thornton looked at it, and then his face went scarlet with suppressed rage.

"What!" he shrieked. "You did that?"

"Yes, sir. Good business, was it not?"

"Good business!" Mr. Thornton almost screamed. "You young——" He paused and considered for a moment. Then the angry look died away, and an amused twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"Well, after all," he said. "You've only done what I told you to do. Here, take this back."

He held out the cheque.

Jack took it, and deliberately tore it into several pieces.

"Now, sir, we're quits. I've had my turn and paid for it."

"No," cried Mr. Thornton. "You must not do that."

In vain he protested, Jack was obdurate.

"Well, my boy. You've been a bit smarter than your future father-in-law. Here's my hand on it. Now I will send Doris in to you."

Presently she came in, and Jack has said that the bliss of that reunion was worth the pain of the parting and absence.

With the aid of some of his journalistic friends and the outlay of some capital, Jack had found it very easy to produce the *Domsey Telegraph* and to make it a far better paper than the *Domsey Times*.

"Where there's a will there's a way"—even in Domsey—and generally everywhere when there's money to back the will.

E. Newton Bungey.

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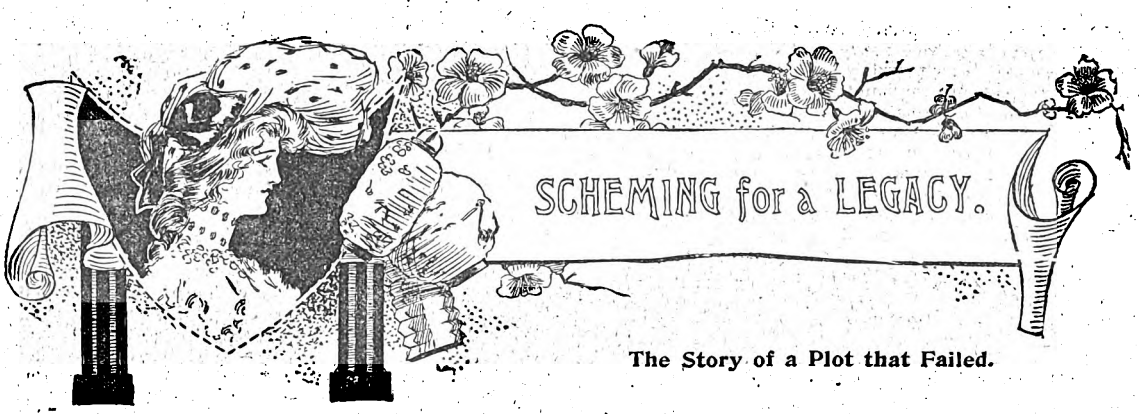

The Story of a Plot that Failed.

THE first time I met Mrs. Penthony she was—very naturally and properly, as it was only two months after Terry's death—clad in deepest widow's weeds. "My poor, dear husband," was written large all over her, from the orthodox crape bonnet on her head, to the dainty black-stockinged ankles revealed as she stepped out of the carriage.

We had not been aware of the existence of Terry's wife until she announced herself in a heart-broken letter to my father as Terry's widow, and then my mother insisted on inviting her at once to Penthony Court.

We had all adored Terry—my father, mother, and myself. In earliest years I had trotted after him, his devoted little slave, and, when asked my name, had always responded, "Terry's sister," instead of the proper reply, "Diana Penthony."

Terry, however, had not turned out quite as he ought to have done, and after a somewhat lurid career, he was sent abroad with a tutor, to rusticate in a quiet German village, from which he sent my mother repentant and affectionate letters. It was a terrible shock to us all when we had a wire from Mr. Green, the tutor, announcing our poor, dear boy's sudden death, followed by a letter telling us that the authorities had insisted on the interment taking place within the next two days.

My father was prostrate with grief, and his next heir and nearest male relative, my cousin, Dare Penthony, was in India, so poor Terence was buried far away from us all without one of his kith and kin to follow him to the grave.

Six weeks later, Mrs. Terence Penthony's letter amazed us all. Of course Terry, being twenty-four, might quite easily have got married without seeking his parent's consent, but there seemed no motive for secrecy.

Katherine Penthony was, she told us, the daughter of an independent gentlemen, who had settled in the remote German village for his health's sake, and she certainly wrote us in the style and handwriting of a gentlewoman.

"Poor, dear boy," sighed my mother, "it seems strange he did not tell us of it."

"It seems her father died very suddenly," said my father, glancing over the letter again, "and Terry asked her to marry him at once because she was alone, and then the poor boy's death followed before he could announce the marriage to us."

"Poor child, it is very sad for her," murmured my mother.

"She doesn't seem to know that Terry came into ten thousand pounds on his marriage," my father went on.

"Did he really?" asked Dare, who had come back from India, on receiving my father's summons.

"His godfather left him ten thousand pounds, to be paid over to him on his marriage day, not before, and to pass to his widow, if she survived him. It was rather a queer idea, wasn't it?"

"Rather," said Dare. "But you are not going to accept this woman's unsupported statement that she is Terry's widow, are you?"

My mother fired up at the idea of doubting the poor girl's word, and my father picked up another letter with the same post-mark, and opened it.

"As it happens, my dear Dare," he said quietly, "we are not required to accept Katherine's unsupported testimony. This letter is from Green—Terry's tutor, you know, giving a fuller and more detailed account of the marriage than the poor, broken-hearted child has been able to do. It seems that they fell in love with each other at first sight, but that the father's sudden death precipitated matters. Terry's own death occurred but two days after his marriage, before he had time to write to us. Read for yourself." He handed the letter to Dare, who glanced over it, and then passed it on to my mother.

An invitation was sent to my sister-in-law by return of post, with the result that, within three weeks, she arrived in the deepest possible mourning, and with a face expressive of the acutest grief.

But she was very beautiful. I had been in the habit of considering myself rather a pretty little person, but I faded into insignificance beside Katherine. What was my round, rosy face compared with that faultless oval of hers? How commonplace were my grey eyes beside her large, velvety black orbs. My nut-brown curls seemed unworthy of admiration, seen near the heavy, rich black locks that crowned her small, graceful head. And how short and stumpy I looked beside her tall, slim, exquisitely graceful figure.

She took us all by storm. Her manner was perfect, sweet, gentle, mournful, pathetic. My father and mother adored her, and wished her to make her home entirely with us, but, to my secret joy, she refused. She would spend every summer with us, she promised, but there was an old uncle in Krahwinkel—the German town where she had met Terry—with whom she wished to make her home while he lived. It might not be long, for he was over eighty, but, while he lived, her duty, she thought, was to him.

So it was agreed that she should remain with us until arrangements could be made for paying over to her the ten thousand pounds, due to her as Terry's widow, and then she should be free to return to Krahwinkel until next summer, when she would come again to Penthony Court.

I secretly hoped affairs would be arranged very soon, so that she might go, for, however much I might have liked her had she not been such a general favourite, it was really more than an ordinary, flesh-and-blood girl could stand to see her winning the affections of both father and mother, and, far worse, of the young man on whom I had set my own heart, and whom I had fondly imagined to be my own lover.

He had certainly been very tender to me in my first grief at my brother's death, and we had got upon very affectionate terms before the arrival of the disconsolate widow. Was she so very disconsolate though? Were my jealous eyes mistaken when I saw glances cast at Dare—glances which no disconsolate widow ought to throw to another man, much less a man who was rightfully another woman's property.

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Quite three months had passed before the lawyers had everything in order, and were ready to hand over the ten thousand pounds to Terry's widow. The money was, by her request, to be paid into the hands of a banker in London, there to await a suitable investment.

It was a lovely evening in mid-September, a glorious harvest moon shone down on the flower-beds on the lawn at Penthony Court, lighting them up with its pale but distant beams, and leaving the terrace and house in the shadow.

I had been at the piano ever since dinner, playing favourite bits of music to my parents, but my attention was chiefly occupied in wondering with all my jealous, wounded heart, what had become of Dare and Katherine. An hour ago, they had gone out of the low French window on to the terrace to look at the moon, and apparently they were still looking at it.

I stole a glance at the other occupants of the room. My father had dropped asleep over his newspaper, my mother was absorbed in a difficulty she had encountered in her lace-work. They would not notice, if I slipped out after the missing couple. Go I must; my heart was on fire with jealousy, anger, and pain.

Two figures, both dark, were at the end of the terrace, where the steps led down to the lawn, and the moon was shining full on them. They were leaning against the balustrade, so absorbed in each other's society that they did not notice my approach. I did not mean to become an eavesdropper, but there was a big lump in my throat as I saw their loving attitude, which quite prevented speech, and before I could swallow it down and call attention to my presence, Dare had bent forward and kissed the glowing cheek so near his own, and I stood frozen to the spot. My worst fears were realised; the man I loved was the lover of my brother's widow.

"Kate, darling," he was saying, when, to a certain degree, I came to myself, "you do love me, don't you? It's too early to talk of a second marriage as yet, I know, but give me a word of hope."

"Don't be ridiculous," Kate's sweet voice replied. "You know you love Diana."

"I thought I did," Dare answered slowly. "Yes, Kate, you are right; I thought I loved little Di; she is a sweet, dear little girl, but you—Kate, you are a goddess. My beautiful, my glorious love, kiss me."

With a faint cry I drew back, and fled in the other direction, down into the park. How could I bear it? My grief for my brother's death had been hard to bear, but what had that been compared with the pain that his widow had brought upon me? As I ran sobbing through the park I suddenly heard a man's step approaching me, and before I could stop myself I ran headlong into the arms of someone coming from the West Lodge.

"Di, my little Di," said a familiar voice in my ears, and dear, well-known lips pressed mine. "Well, little sister, is it you?"

"Terry, Terry, *Terry*," I cried. "Oh, how can it be you? You are dead."

"Dead!"

He released me in his surprise, and faced me in amazed silence. The moon showered its beams full on his astonished face, and showed it to me as clearly as if it had been daylight. It certainly was my brother Terence; my brother whom we all believed to be buried in a little German village, and whose widow was now on the terrace with the man I loved.

"Dead!" he repeated, almost in a whisper. "Diana, what do you mean?"

"Well, anyhow, your widow is here," I said confusedly.

"My widow!" he echoed. "Dear little Diana, what is the matter with you? My widow? How *can* I have a widow? I never was married—nor am I dead, as you can see."

"Well, she *says* she's your widow," I said, doubtfully, "and she *says* you're dead. And Mr. Green says you're dead."

"Ah, that I understand," replied Terry, with a peculiar look. "Does mother think I'm dead?"

"Why, of course, Terry," I cried; "you mustn't go to her now—the shock might kill her. I'll prepare her. But—who's Kate?"

"Kate? A great, strapping creature, is she? With black hair and eyes? Handsome, but coarse?"

"Yes, that's Kate," I replied, greatly consoled by this description of her triumphant charms. How I wished that Dare could have heard it."

"That's Green's sister. I'll tell you all about it, Di, and then you must break the news of my return to my father and mother, and I'll make a clean breast of it to them. Come and sit down here. I know very well why she's posing as my widow here. We weren't long in Krahwinkel—why did my father send me to such a dull hole?—before I found out that Green wasn't a bit what he pretended to be, and he found the place as unendurable as I did, so we soon set off together for Monte Carlo, where I lost heavily. Kate, Green's sister, was at the tables, too, and Green, who knew that by my godfather's will I came in for that money on my marriage, tried his best to bring about a match between us. But I was not having any. She's just the kind of girl I can't stand at any price. Well, I had lost so much money that I had got into a regular fix, and I worried myself into a brain fever over it. When I came to myself, I was in a miserable little hut, where I had no idea, with a dirty old woman gabbling Italian to me. After a bit, Green turned up, and told me that he was going to keep me prisoner there until I promised to marry his sister. One way or another he did manage to keep me there—I was very weak with the fever, remember—until three days ago, when he also took ill with some kind of fever, and I managed to escape, while the old woman was attending to him. Now, dear, run off to the house, I can't wait any longer. Break the news to my father and mother, but don't give Kate Green any warning, if you can avoid it."

How I managed to tell them the glad news, I don't know, but I did somehow, and in a very short time Terry was in his mother's arms, back from the dead!

The routing of Terry's widow followed shortly afterwards, and was undertaken by Terry himself.

I was not present at the scene, and only know that she was permitted to remain at Penthony Court that night, and that no proceedings were to be taken against either her or her brother. She went off by an early train next morning, and we never heard any more of either brother or sister.

As for Dare, he was first stunned and then remorseful for his treatment of me, but I am of a very forgiving disposition, and I soon pardoned his brief infatuation.

In fact, I may as well confess that when he asked me to prove my forgiveness by becoming his wife, I only required a judicious amount of pressing before I faltered out a shy but very willing "Yes."

It was very lucky that Terry returned at the moment he did, lucky for himself, myself, and—Dare!

Vera Serkoff.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **STARTS TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Lady Medcalf-Mears' "At Home."

"I SAY, Maud, you know everybody in town. Tell me who that chap is?"

"Which 'chap,' my dear Captain Iddison?" replied Lady Maud.

"Oh, look here, Maud, you needn't be so awfully formal with a fellow, you know. Hang it all, we're——"

"Yes, of course, my dear Percy," interrupted Lady Maud Hyam, the latest, and, as some said, the most beautiful of the season's *fiancées*, "but I was only following your own example, and, after all, formality has its uses even between engaged people."

"All right," replied Captain Iddison. "You know I don't pretend to be much good at formality."

"No, my dear boy, I know you aren't, and I am very glad of it," replied Lady Maud, dropping her fan lightly on the broad shoulder of the young Hercules who was sitting by her side in Lady Medcalf-Mears' big drawing-room in Lowndes Square. "You are a good deal better at fighting, and that's why—well, I suppose that's why I like you. At any rate, it's one of the reasons. And now which fellow is it that you mean?"

"Why, that one, of course," he replied, so far forgetting his good manners as to half point with his finger at what was certainly the most distinguished male figure in the big, crowded drawing-room.

"Oh, yes!" she said, with a little note of awe in her voice. "That? Why, Percy, do you mean to say that although you returned only a fortnight ago from the ends of the earth, you haven't yet made the acquaintance of the lion of the season? Don't you know that Lady Medcalf-Mears always has the newest and biggest lion in the whole social menagerie at her 'At homes,' especially just when the season's beginning? That is Mr. Isolo Staunton, the modern Monte Christo, as they call him.

"He is one of the biggest scores that even our experienced hostess has ever made. He is a man—you have only got to look at him to see that—six feet one in his boots if he's an inch, and built to scale; a millionaire no one knows how many times over—and something else which raises him far above the ordinary rut of men and millionaires—a mystery."

"What's that?" murmured the Honourable Percy, leaning if possible a little closer to her and looking into the beautiful face which was so temptingly near his own. "A mystery—what do you mean by that? I should hardly have thought that a man with a past that no one knows anything at all about, if that's what you mean, would have been taken up by Lady Mary, however big a pot he might be in other ways."

"My dear boy," she laughed, "you ought to know that a man with an unknown past, if he has done something, or made himself something, is one of the most successful social exhibits that the modern hostess can put on show!"

"Is that all you have to tell me about the new lion? You see I have only been back a fortnight, and I have spent about eight days of it up at Harrowby, which is nearly a day's journey each way. Can't you tell me anything more about him? I don't know why I should take such an interest in the subject, but somehow I do."

"Yes," said Lady Maud with a little toss of her golden-crowned head, "if he were a woman and as good-looking as he is as a man, I should almost be inclined to be jealous, but really I can't tell you anything more than I have done, except what everybody can tell you at the clubs.

"He is, as I have told you, a multi-millionaire. No one knows who he is, what he is, or where he came from. Of course, without his millions, I suppose no one would ever have heard of him, but with the millions to gild what everyone admits to be a very interesting personality—well, here he is, Isolo Staunton.

"But stop, here comes Mr. Ellerton. You know him, of course—the only son of Sir Wilfrid Ellerton. I think Sir Wilfrid is one of the men we really ought to be proud of. He began life, they say, as a fitter, or whatever they call it, in a machine shop at Ellerton, in Yorkshire. You know such a lot of people in the North are named after the places they live in, or else the places are named after some far-away ancestor who made the place, and so they must be a sort of aristocracy of their own kind with scores of generations behind them. But you can see for yourself," she continued in a lower tone as she rose and held out her hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ellerton, I hope you haven't been here very long, or I should feel inclined to be offended with you for not having come to speak to me before. You don't know Mr. Iddison—I beg his pardon, *Captain* Iddison? He is only just back from Somaliland, so you may as well be introduced now."

The Honourable Percy Iddison, captain of His Majesty's Engineers, V.C., D.S.O., and special service officer in South Africa, shook hands warmly with Ellerton.

The handshake didn't mean much, but the look that was in their eyes convinced both of them in the same moment that each had met a man, and each instinctively liked the other.

What Percy Iddison saw, when he shook hands with the son of the man who had taken the world by the throat for the sake of his son, was just this:

A straight, upstanding, square-jawed, broad-browed, curly, chestnut-haired young fellow of about twenty-four, a year less than his own age, with dark eyebrows over-arching grey-blue Celtic eyes. A sort of man that he would like to have

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with him in a tight corner, or meet face to face in what he would have called a really good scrap.

"I see that you know each other already," said Lady Maud, with a little laugh rippling through her words. "I suppose it is a case of when man meets man—now, isn't that quite the prettiest compliment that woman could have paid both of you?"

"Really, Lady Maud, I am afraid you are quite too flattering, at least to one of us," said Ellerton, with a glance which the other man would have resented if he hadn't felt that he was quite safe, "still——"

"Thanks, but don't say any more just now, because—well, I think other things are going to happen. Now, Percy, you are going to have a new sensation. Excuse me, just one moment, Mr. Ellerton, here is Lady Mary bringing the lion of the evening to be introduced."

As she said this Wilfrid Ellerton turned his head towards Lady Mary Medcalf-Mears and the Lion. As he did so, Iddison noticed that there was a streak of almost white hair running from the front of the left ear down almost to the base of the skull, which showed up like a streak of white mist against a bank of blue-grey thundercloud. His hair was dark chesnut, almost black in certain lights, and almost golden in others.

"Rather curious, that. Still, I've seen that sort of thing happen in a month or so in the field, but not go in a streak like that. Wonder what's been the matter with him. Not an Army man, so he can't have got it in that way!"

These were the thoughts which ran through Percy Iddison's brain as he shook hands with Wilfrid Ellerton and then turned to greet his hostess, Lady Mary Medcalf-Mears, who had brought her latest lion to be introduced to her most interesting, although, perhaps, not her most distinguished guests.

"I don't think you all know each other yet," said Lady Mary. "Mr. Isolo Staunton, Lady Maud Hyam, Captain Percy Iddison, Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton, and *vice versâ*. Well, now, you know yourselves as far as the conventionalities go, and the rest, I think, I can safely leave in your own hands. You see, I am rather busy this afternoon, and so I know that you will excuse me."

With that she vanished into the throng of the other guests with grace that no other woman in London had been able to copy.

The preliminaries of polite conversation-making were hardly over when a famous Hungarian violinist, accompanied by an almost equally famous German pianist, began to play. This, of course, put an end to all talk save among those who, in spite of their breeding, were yet sufficiently ill-mannered to think that the music—which was costing their hostess something like five guineas a minute—was only intended to mask the muttered commonplaces with which they were wasting time until it was possible to make a decent leave-taking.

"Shall we go and listen?" said Lady Maud, rising with a look, that was practically a command, at Iddison. "I love the violin."

The others who were seated rose also, and they drifted along with the tide, which was flowing with a gentle frou-frou of silken underskirts, into the music-room overlooking the pretty, old-fashioned garden.

SECOND CHAPTER.

A Spectre from the Past.

But there was one man in that company for whom just now the sweetest strains that genius could win from the most perfect instruments were only utter discords, tormenting almost to madness.

Percy Iddison was not the only man who had noticed that curious white streak among Wilfrid Ellerton's chestnut curls. Isolo Staunton had seen it to, and he had all too little reason to wonder how it came there. As soon as the music was over he made his adieux and went out into the street, staring about him with wavering eyes like a man newly awakened in a strange world. When his brougham came up to the door he dismissed his man, saying that he preferred to walk home, and telling him he was not required.

Isolo Staunton was a man of action, as well as of thought, and when he was thinking really

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ellerton," said Lady Maud, "let me introduce you to Captain Iddison."

hard it was also absolutely necessary for him to have his muscles as well as his nerves at work, and so he walked.

His brain had never been working with such fierce intensity as it was working now as he made his way along the crowded pavements of Sloane Street and Knightsbridge. Much of his life had been passed in the wilderness, and now he felt a desperate longing for the solitude of the wilderness again, and the solace which that solitude brings.

He turned up into the Park past Apsley House, and walked across to the Marble Arch. So far there was only one thought in his brain, only one thing that his eyes really saw—that thin streak of white hair running through the closely-cropped chestnut curls of Wilfrid Ellerton. It was something like a brief but ever-recurring nightmare to him.

At the corner of Edgware Road he took an omnibus to Cricklewood.

He got out into the open country as soon as he could. He knew it had to come, and with that primeval instinct which possesses every human being, he wanted to get away from his fellow men and fight his trouble out in solitude.

For an hour he walked on, a strange figure, clad, as he was in his light grey frock suit and a glossy hat, which was now tilted back at an angle which would have made men in Pall Mall look round at him, his hands behind his back, his head bent forward, seeing nothing but the road over which he was walking.

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Then out of the dust which rose on the wind blowing behind him, certain shapes began to form themselves. The fields and the hedges vanished. In their place came a wide, blue-grey expanse of water.

The sky-dome above was blue-grey also. Its colour had been burnt out of it by the fierce rays of the sun that was blazing overhead. What was left of paint on the whale boat was crinkling up into blisters. There was a man lying forward, just as he had dropped off the seat. He was the second who had died that day. The other had seen visions of islands, green with verdure, fed by clear springs, and he had drunk the seawater and had presently dropped himself overboard, raving mad, to drink more of it, and so find the common death of the castaway.

He was steering, and beside him was an axe, the symbol of the power which he had taken into his own hands when the boat was cast adrift from the sinking ship which had been hurled hundreds of miles before one of those gales which come up from the Antarctic.

On the mid-thwart there was a man sitting. His arms were on the gunwale and his head lay loosely between them, moving with every motion of the boat. He was half dead already and it would not take very much to finish the business with him. Forward on the next thwart there was a boy of about fourteen, dying, but still strong with the miraculous vitality of youth. There was enough of biscuits and tinned meat and water to last one man for another fortnight or so, but not enough for three. He was half mad with the insanity of thirst aggravated by the horrible temptation to drink by the pint the precious water which his discipline had so far limited to a few spoonfuls. He saw himself let go of the tiller and rise wearily from his seat. He heard himself say:

"It's no good, Willy. Jack's gone and old Tom is about finished. You and I had better make an end of him and finish the cruise somehow between us. We have not stuff enough for three. There might be for two."

Then the boy jumped up and came at him with a sudden flush in his white cheeks, and a sudden energy in his whole body.

"No," he muttered hoarsely, the words coming thickly and slowly from between his parched lips. "No, I see what you mean, but you sha'n't. It is murder. It doesn't matter whether he is half dead or not. It is murder all the same. You —You shan't do it. It's murder, I tell you!"

He picked up the axe as the boy jumped at him. He tripped over the half dead body of the man on the middle thwart, and as he went down the axe fell. He saw a streak of red among the chestnut curls and then the sky and ocean seemed to come together.

He stumbled forward, lifted the axe again and struck the prostrate man. As he lifted it once more his own brain seemed to snap with a bang—and there the scene ended.

The curtain of forgetfulness dropped swiftly upon the stage of memory. The scene vanished—and here he was again walking between the green English hedges with the broad fields on either side of him sloping upwards to the softly rounded tree-growing hills.

Isolo Zuarez, castaway and convict, was dead, once more. Isolo Staunton took off his hat, wiped his forehead, put his hat on again, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked back to the Cricklewood Arms, saying to himself between his tightly clenched teeth:

"If he remembers well, I suppose it will mean I return to the Chinchas, again a convict. If he doesn't, so much the better. If I'd finished the job before I fainted no one could have traced me. Tom was dead and Willy was insensible, and I was mad when they picked us up. The axe had dropped overboard, and when the young beggar came to he remembered nothing.

"If he only has forgotten, then in just a few years more the world shall see another Napoleon—the uniter of a thousand warring interests, the director into a single channel of the energy which is now spent in conflicts which are as trifling as the quarrels of children in the gutter, the Creator of a new Power in the world, a Power which, directed as I will direct it, shall break the yoke which these Anglo-Saxons have put upon the necks of the nations, and make Spain once more what she was in the days of Cortez and Pizarro, Queen of the Seas and Mistress of East and West!"

THIRD CHAPTER.

Looking Backwards.

The key-note of Isolo Staunton's later existence had been independence. It did not matter to him whether the person with whom he had to deal for the moment was a man or a woman. He was wont to pride himself on the consciousness that in matters of business—he recognised no distinction of sex, and this, as many of his unsuccessful rivals were forced to admit, was a very great advantage to him. He could swindle a pretty duchess or get a Cabinet Minister into financial troubles which would be profitable to himself with just as light a heart as he would get the better of a German Jew financier.

He cared for nothing but money, and for what money could buy for him.

Although he possessed the genius of making money he also had the cleverness to see that it is not exactly money which makes one a power in the world, but rather the use that money is put to, and so he used the superfluity of his wealth wisely.

One of his carefully calculated extravagances was his turbine yacht *Isola*. She was a thousand-ton vessel and her engines were the latest development of the turbine principle of propulsion. Her lines were exquisite, she was a veritable aristocrat of the ocean and, although no one outside her officers and crew knew it, she was also the fastest craft in the world.

His little expedition to Cricklewood had really been one of the most strenuous experiences even in a life as full of living as his had been. He was just thirty-eight and he had begun to live at ten. His father had been a Scottish adventurer, called sometimes Staunton and sometimes Saunders, and Zuarez had been the Spanish disguise or semi-translation of the latter which he had adopted when he took the plunge into South American politics which, after a couple of bitterly fought revolutions, had resulted in his becoming first Vice-President and then President of Peru. He had married a very beautiful Spanish girl and Isolo, their only child, was both physically and mentally as good and as bad a compound of Scottish and Spanish American as could well have been produced from such a union. He had his father's inches, a good six feet of bone and muscle, his mother's features, but the shape of his head was Scottish in its squareness, and his hair was a crisp, curly, reddish-brown. The fire of the Spanish American was tempered by the cold, calculating genius of the Scotsman, strangely combined with the dreaminess of the Celt.

The second revolution had ended in utter ruin. His father had refused to believe in the failure of his cause, and so had delayed beyond reasonable limits his preparations for escaping with the Presidential plunder. The result was that he was caught and shot by the victorious revolutionists, and his plunder duly transferred to the pockets of his successor, and those who had helped him to overthrow the tyrant, and in the natural course of events some other tyrant was put in his place.

This had happened when the boy was ten years old, and after it had come five or six years of poverty and exile with his mother in Chili. Then his mother, the only human being he

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had ever loved, died, leaving him her own ideals and the lessons she had taught him as her only legacy, and after this had begun the wild life on the coast, now ashore and now afloat, a desperate gamble of liberty, and perhaps life, for sudden wealth, the living death of the Chincha Islands, the almost miraculous escape, a few years at sea, then the tragedy of the whale boat, and then the marvel which had laid the foundation of his present fortune, the extent of which no one but himself could measure, and of which no one save those in his inmost confidence knew the real sources.

So far for nearly fifteen years these fortunes had grown steadily and swiftly, and as the millions had piled themselves on each other the great ideal which he had inherited from his Spanish mother had come nearer and nearer to its longed-for fulfilment. Political and military agents all over the world had been working for years towards the same end under the orders of an unknown and invisible master. Diplomatists had found their negotiations shaped almost unconsciously by the same mysterious power and, in short, all the vast machinery that he had set in motion was working smoothly and well, when this spectre from the past had suddenly risen above the unclouded horizon and he saw not only the fabric of his life work but even his own liberty, nay, his very life itself, at the mercy of a lad of twenty-three.

The *Isola* was lying alongside Ocean Quay, Southampton, about a week after the reception, with steam up ready for one of those mysterious trips which periodically took her owner far away beyond the ken of the fashionable world of Europe.

Isolo Staunton was lying on a lounge in his exquisitely, though somewhat plainly appointed, private room at the after-end of the long, spacious promenade deck. It was entirely isolated from all the other saloons and state-rooms on the ship. It had double walls of steel and oak and double windows of thick plate glass through which no sound could penetrate, and it was generally understood on board the great yacht that when the Señor was in his sanctum no one was to approach him, or have any communication with him except by telephone from the captain's room under the navigating bridge. It was in fact the most perfect council chamber that any ruler of men crowned or uncrowned could have possessed, an inviolable sanctuary of secrets which the most ingenious curiosity must fail to penetrate.

The Señor was just now in earnest consultation with his principal counseller and only real confidant, a tall, sparely-built man of about fifty-five, whose delicately-cut, aquiline features, dark, piercing, though somewhat closely-set eyes, high, narrow forehead, and still dark, glossy hair only slightly frosted with grey at the temples proclaimed him a Castilian of the purest blood. This was Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia. He was the last remaining scion of one of those ancient Castilian families which had settled in Peru soon after the conquest, and had kept its proud blood pure by avoiding all inter-marriage. Like many other such families in South America, wars, revolutions and confiscations had reduced them to almost absolute poverty, but President Zuarez and Don Ramiero's father had been comrades in the revolution which placed him in power, and he had done much to restore the fortunes of the Valdez family. Comradeship in arms had led to complete personal devotion, and Valdez had become the President's one trusted counsellor as Ramiero was now the one confidant of Isolo Staunton.

He knew of the irregularities which had consigned the man whom Society called the modern Monte Christo to the sea-girt prison of the Chincha Islands, but in his eyes they were political offences against a usurping government, and therefore rather in the nature of virtues than of crimes. He knew also of the tragedy of the whaleboat—for Staunton never gave half confidences, knowing well how treacherous they are—and *that* he excused on the double ground of delirium and self-preservation. Under any circumstances the son of his father's friend and the benefactor of his house had a better right to live and do his great work in the world than a couple of common seamen and an insignificant ship's boy.

"Of course the great point is," said Staunton, after they had put in a few moments of hard thinking, "whether young Ellerton remembers me and the painful circumstances of our last meeting or not. If he doesn't, which is the same thing as saying that if that crack which I thought necessary to give him across the head has, as such a crack will do sometimes, cut that little piece out of his memory, I don't see that we need disquiet ourselves in vain about him."

"Pardon, Señor," interrupted Valdez, with grave deference, "but there I would say that you are going wrong at the very beginning. It is exactly in that case that I would counsel you to take the most prompt measures for his very necessary suppression."

"I am afraid I hardly follow you, my dear Ramiero," said Staunton, looking up quickly. "If the fellow remembers nothing, and he certainly didn't seem to have the ghost of a recollection of me the other day at Lady Mary's, what harm can he do? As far as that little incident is concerned it is as good as dead."

"For the present—yes," replied Valdez softly, as he rolled a little brown Peruvian cigarette between his tapering, long-nailed fingers, "but for all that his existence, or if you have scruples about proceeding to extremities, his continued existence in freedom, can nevertheless be nothing but a perpetual menace, not only to that great and glorious work to which you have devoted your life, but even to your life itself. Is he not the one living link which connects the present with the past? He knew, as you have told me, of your escape with Martinez from the islands, for Martinez had told the whole story in his delirium in the boat. He was on the ship which picked you up, and therefore he must have known that your story about the shipwreck was false—that you were not cast-away sailors but escaped convicts; wherefore his story of the real shipwreck and your rescue would be quite sufficient to connect you with the man who was sent for life to the Chinchas, to say nothing of the necessary abolition of your sometime accomplice, Martinez. No, no, Señor, memory or no memory, he is a living menace to you."

"And, therefore," said Staunton, after a long meditative pull at his cigar as he watched the blue rings curling up towards the maple panelled ceiling, "therefore, with your usual thoroughness of policy, I suppose you are going to counsel the completion of the work which the hatchet would have finished there and then, if I hadn't been faint with hunger and thirst, and dizzy with delirium. Frankly, I don't like the idea. I suppose I have become, if not more moral, at least more fastidious since those wild old days came to an end. I fight with money, with my own and other men's brains, not with hatchets. They are too much like the savage's tomahawk. In other words, I suppose I have become civilised. No, no, we must not talk about abolition. I will have no bloodshed until it becomes absolutely necessary. Ah! wait a moment, we ought to have some of the reports by this time. This may be something."

The telephone bell rang softly as he spoke. He got up and took the transmitter from the hook.

"Very well," he said, after listening for a few moments; "kindly ask Mr. Morton to come here."

He put the transmitter back and said, as he sat down:

"I had an idea it was Morton. As I told you, as soon as I made that unfortunate discovery, I put him on to look up the Ellerton family history with a special reference to Master Wilfrid's doings since he came back from sea. There he is! Would you mind opening the door, Ramiero?"

Valdez rose and noiselessly opened the double doors.

"Come in, Mr. Morton," said Staunton, leaning back on his sofa and lighting a fresh cigar.

The Honourable Reginald Morton, close-clipped, clean-shaven, well-set-up, and perfectly dressed walked in, with glossy hat in hand, as Valdez closed the doors behind him.

As he will play no insignificant part in the present narrative the reader may as well make his acquaintance here as elsewhere.

He was one of those social products which have come into being since the aristocrats opened their arms and their houses to the plutocrats. He was the younger son of Sir Reginald Wriothesley Morton, a baronet of long descent and ancient

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A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE.

creation whose position in Society was rather too big for his means, and who was further burdened by the possession of three marriageable daughters who cost a great deal to keep in the social swim, and whose matrimonial prospects had remained at the vaguest for some four seasons. The elder son Wriothesley had inherited a nice little fortune from his grandmother and also occupied a very snug permanent secretaryship, and the two combined to raise him above the reach of financial temptation.

Reginald had begun the world with a good education, a very fair Oxford degree, perfect manners, a limitable assurance, and a very easy conscience. His leanings were towards finance, and his father's influence had got him a very decent berth in a big stockbroker's firm, and through this channel he had drifted into connection with Isolo Staunton, and so far now, as the world knew, he was one of the millionaire's confidential secretaries. As a matter of fact he was his social spy. His birth and breeding gave him the *entrée* to the most exclusive circles. He knew how to keep his eyes and his ears open and his mouth shut, and however unscrupulous he was in getting information it was part of his social creed to be absolutely true to his salt. At present the said salt was worth about two thousand a year to him, to say nothing of the good things he was always getting on to, the plums and currants, as it were, that were left behind when his employer had taken his own slice out of the financial cake.

"Good afternoon, Morton," said Staunton genially; "there's whisky and soda, help yourself and take a cigar. You've got some news, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Morton, putting down his hat and taking a cigar, "about the Ellertons, of course. Not very much that isn't generally known, I am afraid. They are not a family with secrets, you know. They are not old enough to have cupboards with skeletons in them. Sir Wilfrid makes no secret of his humble origin—rather glories in it, in fact, after the manner of self-made men who have had the good sense not to turn out misfits. I've traced the family tree back for three generations, and there the roots lose themselves in quite hopeless obscurity. Authentic history seems to begin with Sir Wilfrid and his son, and of course everyone knows who and what Sir Wilfrid is and was."

"Anything about the son?" asked Staunton carelessly. "I suppose he has not done anything to particularly distinguish himself yet, has he?"

"No," replied the spy, looking at the ash on his cigar; "his general reputation is almost monotonously excellent. His manners and breeding seem to point to some remote ancestry to which he has harked back. He's a sportsman, though, and does everything that a gentleman ought to know and do, a great favourite with women, whom he rather tolerates than worships, which is perhaps the only peculiar thing about him except the past."

"His past!" echoed Staunton, with a slight lift of his eyebrows. "Surely he is rather young to have a past, isn't he?"

"You've noticed that curious streak of white hair that he has over his left ear?"

"Yes," said Staunton, with a half-stifled yawn. "Has that anything to do with his past? I did notice it the other day, now I come to think of it."

"No, it isn't that, but it is connected with the only curious fact in the whole of my investigations."

"And that?"

"Well it seems that when he was quite a lad Master Wilfrid showed his independence in character by running away to sea. He got round the Horn and up to Valparaiso, and thence up to Callao and Peru, and then somewhere off the coast he got wrecked. He was saved with two or three sailors in a boat, went pretty nearly mad with hunger and thirst, and that's all he remembers, and he came to himself weeks afterwards in New York. He can't remember the name of the ship he was wrecked in or who got away with him in the boat. All he does know was what they told him on the ship that picked him up, that there was one man lying dead in the boat and another dying, and that he had a cut in his skull that would have let the life out of anything but a boy. When the cut healed, curiously enough the hair grew over it again quite white. The other fellow who lived was quite a harmless lunatic and remembered nothing. They lost him in New York. That was Master Wilfrid's little mystery of the sea. But anyhow, it is true because he told me himself."

"Thank you, Morton," said Staunton, with an air of boredom which was so admirably simulated that it looked as though he were trying to disguise it. "I'm afraid your investigations have not been very fertile, though, of course, you have found out everything that there was to find. Your last item is of course romantic, if unimportant, still it is interesting as a curious little bit of psychology. Did he tell you, by the way, whether anything had been tried to get his lost memory back."

"Well," replied the spy, "of course his father wanted all sorts of things done, but Wilfrid absolutely refused to have his skull fooled about with. He argued that, after all, it didn't matter having those few weeks cut out of his life. The episode was over, and everybody connected with it was dead, except himself. His brain wasn't injured—as it certainly was not seeing what he has done with it since—and the result has been that he has had his own way, and that is about the end of it."

"A wise decision," said Staunton carelessly. "I'm going for a couple of months' cruise, and if you care to take a holiday for that time in your usual social happy hunting ground I hope you will do so. And now, if you really won't have a whisky and soda I needn't detain you any longer."

FOURTH CHAPTER.

Sentence of Living Death.

"Well, friend Ramiero, what do you think of that?" said Staunton as Morton disappeared, and Valdez closed the double doors behind him, "there doesn't seem to be very much danger as long as my late shipmate adheres to that very convenient resolution of his, not to let the doctors make experiments with his skull. That I think relieves me from the disagreeable necessity of adopting your unpleasantly drastic proposal as to speedy and permanent abolition."

"I am afraid I cannot see eye to eye with you there, señor," said Valdez, meditatively rolling another of his everlasting little brown cigarettes. "My own opinion is the same as it was before, and if anything stronger."

"But how can that possibly be when the fellow has absolutely forgotten about everything that happened then?" exclaimed Staunton, a trifle impatiently.

"A danger that is only latent, señor," replied Valdez slowly, "is not a danger which has been abolished. What I mean is that this young man's memory of those few weeks, which means as he thinks so little to him, and which, as you know, means so much to you, may have been totally destroyed. On the other hand it may only be in abeyance."

"You mean, of course," said Staunton, with a faint echo of anxiety in his voice, "that if Master Wilfrid were to meet with another accident to his head, say a fall in the hunting field, rendering an operation necessary, the doctors might insist on operating upon that part now injured? Well, granted such a remote contingency might possibly come to pass, I don't see how we are going to prevent it, unless by means which I will really not consent to."

"There are others not quite so drastic," murmured the Spaniard in a gently suggestive tone. He paused for a few moments, but Staunton made no sign, and he went on speak-

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ing, now quickly and earnestly. "You must forgive my insistence, señor, but this, as you must see, is not a matter to be played with. Who is this young man, or what is his family to you or to us? His family are nothing. He is a constant source of danger. Think of it, I pray you. All the splendid promise of your life work, your liberty, perhaps your very life, depends perhaps upon the continued pressure of a little splinter of bone on that boy's brain. Even if he had a serious illness, say a fever of some sort, the injury would at once be aggravated. The doctors would at once inquire into the cause. For my part I am perfectly certain as to what they would find, and, therefore, as to what they would do, and Wilfrid Ellerton would rise from his bed with those few weeks put back into his life. What, I ask you, señor, in all earnestness, might be the possible results of such a recovery to you and to us? And then," he went on with a sudden softening and lowering of his tone, "there is the Señorita Mercedes. What would become of all the brilliant prospects that lie before her if Wilfrid Ellerton became able to tell the story of those two or three weeks, and if the Peruvian Minister in London demanded an inquiry? I need not remind you that once suspected, not even your millions would buy indemnity for the son of the man they still call the tyrant Zuarez."

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Staunton, getting on to his feet and thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets. "No, you are right. Whatever happens there must be no danger to Mercedes' future."

He began to walk up and down the room, his hands still deep in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the dull red Turkey carpet. Valdez rolled and lit another cigarette, and smoked in silence. He knew his chief's mind too well to interrupt the train of thought which he had set in action, and he was right, for Isolo Staunton was thinking quite as hard just now as he had done that day in the lanes and fields of Cricklewood. For him the whole world only held one human being whom he loved with the passion of absolutely disinterested devotion, and that was his beautiful nineteen-year-old daughter Mercedes, a child of a boy and girl marriage, born only a year before the heavy hand of the law had fallen upon him and thrust him into the living grave of the Chinchas. Her mother had died of grief and shame, and some had whispered of starvation, too, during his captivity, and it was not until ten years later, when the foundations of his mysteriously sudden fortune had been laid, that his agents had been able to trace her to the convent school of La Merced in Lima for orphan girls, and been allowed to take her away to the care of a father who was obliged to remain nameless, leaving a splendid contribution to the school endowment in exchange for her.

Every advantage that love could suggest or money could buy had been lavished on her since then. This season she had made an informal, but brilliant, entry upon the social stage. Next year she was to be presented by a Duchess and an aunt of a Cabinet Minister, and already her extreme beauty, enhanced if possible by the golden halo of her father's uncounted millions, had set busy tongues wagging as to the magnificence of the social future which might be hers if she chose. Certainly this exquisite girl, with her delicate and yet radiant Andalusian beauty, made more bewitching yet by the dash of Celtic fire, this daughter of the great financier who was also the friend and confidant of rulers and statesmen, might surely look high.

And for her, his beautiful, idolised Mercedes, to find herself banished from that brilliant-seeming world, whose confines she was only just crossing, as the daughter of an escaped convict and the murderer of his companions. For her to endure the agony of seeing him, the father whom she adored, and the father whom she honoured above all other men, as it were, stripped naked in the world's market-place amidst the jeers and laughter of his rivals and enemies, and taken from her for ever either to the scaffold or to the long despair of the living death—no, anything better than that. Don Ramiero had kept his best argument to the last, and he had got it home. Whatever there might be necessary to prevent it, that catastrophe at least must not happen. Of what consequence was this lad's life or a dozen lives for the matter of that in comparison with the present and future happiness of his Mercedes?

Mercedes' right hand was lying on the rails. Ellerton's hand fell gently upon it, and the next second his arm would have been around her waist.

He stopped opposite Valdez and said quietly:

"Yes, my friend, you are right, that must not be. Rather than risk any danger to her I would even go to the extremity you suggested. At the same time I must remind you that even with the facilities which we have at our disposal it is not the easiest thing in the world to arrange for the disappearance of the son and heir of one of the best known men in the country. We are not in Peru, you know, nor have we got him there. Mere assassination, I think you will agree with me, is not to be thought of in such an absurdly over-civilised country as this, and as far as I can see deportation would be every bit as difficult and just as risky. Have you any idea on the subject?"

"I have been thinking, señor," replied Valdez, after a few meditative puffs, "that it would not be altogether impossible to enlist this inconvenient young man in our company of submarine toilers up north yonder. They, as you know, are to be trusted utterly since faith with them is a matter not only of wealth and comfort, but, as they well know, of life and death, and once among them down yonder in the bowels of the earth, fifty fathoms beneath the bottom of the North Sea, he would be as safe as though the condors had already

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picked his bones at the bottom of one of the gorges of the Andes."

"Friend Ramiero," said Staunton, dropping on the sofa and again taking out a fresh cigar, "allow me to congratulate you upon a most excellent idea. If you could only see your way to carrying it out without arousing suspicions, you will have made me your debtor for life. Permanent exile in the home of our trusty Cyclops will meet the case much more decently than assassination. We could make him work too. They say he has quite a hereditary genius for engineering, and as for escape, he might as well try to get out of a diving bell at the bottom of the ocean. The only question is to get him there. Have you any idea on the subject?"

"It may be difficult, but it may not be impossible," replied Valdez musingly. "Of course the main point is to get him on board the *Isola* without the knowledge of any of his acquaintances. Then the matter would be as easy as taking him into one room from another. Or, stay, permit me a few moments' thought. I think I see a means of arranging his disappearance, which will be as satisfactory to us as it will be convincing to the young gentleman's relatives and friends."

For the next five minutes or so Don Ramiero sipped his wine, puffed at his cigarette, and stared with fixed pupils at a little gem of marine painting on the wall opposite to him. Staunton saw that his active, subtle brain was hard at work, and so he respected his silence. Presently Ramiero dropped his cigarette in the ash tray, moistened his lips with wine, and said as quietly as though he were proposing a most ordinary commercial deal instead of a project for destroying the happiness of a family and condemning a bright young life full of the promise of youth, happiness and usefulness to the misery of a living death, to a doom worse even than that of the felon in penal servitude:

"I think I have it. I know you have always believed as I have done that the boldest measures are after all the safest and the best. I propose, therefore, that you should put off our trip to the South for a little, as you can easily do since they have abundance of metal to work on down yonder, take the *Isola* round to Cowes for a week, and meanwhile, let the señorita send out invitations in your name for a trip afterwards, say to the Fjords of Norway, and see that Mr. Ellerton junior is one of the party. Our friend Morton can easily manage that for you. I don't think there will be much difficulty in getting a party for the *Isola*, especially with the señorita as hostess. Half London will envy those who are invited.

"If you will arrange that, señor, and leave the rest to me, I think I shall be able so to control circumstances, that one night there shall be a cry of 'Man overboard!' raised possibly by myself. At the same time, or soon after, there may be a little accident to the engines which will make it necessary for us to come to at our old anchorage for an hour or so. I need hardly say that the man had not gone overboard, he will be below in a certain chamber that I need not mention, being duly prepared for a little dive in his sleep—and when he wakes it will be in the under world which owns you for its master. I trust you follow me?"

"Yes," said Staunton briskly, "I do. You are a genius, Ramiero. We will do it."

FIFTH CHAPTER.

Love at Second Sight.

"After all it must seem even to you—you who have seen so much of the world and all the chances and changes of this transitory life, if I may say so without irreverence—that we should meet again under such wonderfully altered circumstances. You don't seem even yet to quite recognise it, but I can assure you that it really is so.

"You were the boy and I was the girl. Surely you remember that afternoon when the Chilenos sacked and burnt Chorillos—when the warships were firing from the sea and the shells were bursting among the houses, blowing their roofs off—not that they mattered much, for you must remember that it never rains there, and many of them were only thatched with reeds—and how the walls of the houses burst out as though a volcano had broken out under them as it did once at Arequipa, and how a scream came through the air, and you, yes, I am sure it was you, caught a little girl—that was I—round the waist and jumped off the pier into the water with her and swam back to the beach—and how we found afterwards that the shell had smashed everything into ruins and killed everyone just there on the promenade in the front of the Marine Hotel. They told me afterwards what a dreadful ruin it was. But surely you remember, don't you?"

"Remember, of course I do. As if anyone could forget a thing like that. Yes, I can see every detail of it now. I remember the dull, hoarse bang of the gun and the scream of the shells in the air—and you, were you really the little girl that I got hold of and jumped into the sea with, because I thought it was going to kill us?"

"Us! I don't—or at least I don't think I thought then, Mr. Ellerton, that you were thinking very much about *us*—"

At that instant the sentence was cut short by the sudden flashing of the electric lights along the promenade deck of the *Isola*, on which Mercedes Staunton and Wilfrid Ellerton were standing, leaning on the rails just under the port end of the navigating bridge as the yacht was swirling smoothly eastward and northward along the Hampshire coast with the Spithead forts about three miles behind her.

As the lights gleamed out about them their eyes met, and for the first time in his life Wilfrid Ellerton looked into the eyes of a woman and saw in their deep, dark depths that revelation which comes at least once in his life to every man, and Mercedes, as she looked up into his, saw that which comes, alas, not always to every woman.

The distance between two human souls is really greater than that between the planets or the stars, and yet in an instant it may be bridged over infinitely more swiftly than the ray of light can connect world with world or sun with sun.

Thousands of millions of human beings have lived upon earth knowing as little of each other and caring as little as though they had lived upon different worlds, and yet in millions of cases it has happened that two of these beings have been brought together, oftentimes from the uttermost ends of the earth—and instantly, as they have looked into each other's eyes for the first time, the distance that was between them has been annihilated, and their souls have come together.

Between man and man and woman and woman, this coming together is called friendship, between man and woman it is called love, the greatest and the holiest and most sacred of all those mighty mysteries with which this little commonplace, human life of ours is so strangely surrounded.

Had the revelation come to them under different circumstances; had they been walking over one of the lonely moorlands, whose bleak solitude and lonely beauty formed Wilfrid Ellerton's earliest recollections, or along one of the high dykes dividing the rice fields and the cane patches which make green the valley of the Rimac from the sea into the grey-brown, barren hills of the Andes, then what their souls had said to each other with their eyes would have been repeated by their lips both in words and in that more eloquent language of love in which the lips are silent.

But the sudden flash of the electric light along the deck, followed by the sound of laughter and conversation as some of the *Isola's* company came out of the big drawing-room on deck, made that impossible. In a few moments they had ceased to be alone and were part of this same company, for nowhere is solitude more difficult than on board ship.

Mercedes' hand was lying on the rails. Wilfrid looked at it for just a moment. The next his own right hand fell gently upon it. If they had been alone his left arm would have been round her waist, and many things about to happen would never have come to pass. As it was there was only time for a swift pressure and another glance from soul to

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soul through their eyes, and they had to leave the rail with the fateful words unspoken, so that Mercedes might join her guests and continue her duties as hostess.

For the next two days Wilfrid lived in a state of mental exaltation, which was no less wonderful than it was delightful to him. When he met Mercedes on deck the next morning before breakfast, she was walking arm-in-arm with Lady Maud Hyam, who, with her beloved young Hercules and several other members of Lady Medcalf-Mears' very exclusive set, were guests on board the yacht.

It was impossible, in view of her own recent experiences, for Lady Maud not to know the meaning of the swift half-shy, half-eager glance which passed between them as he raised his cap and said "good morning." She pressed Mercedes' arm ever so slightly, and as Mercedes turned and looked at her with a quick, bright flush and a startled expression in her eyes, she laughed, and said:

"Good morning, Mr. Ellerton, isn't this weather perfectly glorious? And what a lot of good it seems to be doing everybody. Just look what a lovely colour our charming hostess has got."

"Yes," replied Ellerton, rather awkwardly, for such a straight-spoken man, "but you see, Lady Maud, that if one couldn't look very well, and," he continued, after the briefest of pauses, during which he looked at Mercedes, "and, as you say, have a delightful colour, and feel as though this was really the best of all possible worlds, in such absolutely perfect weather, and on such a gorgeous yacht as this—where on earth or sea could you feel thoroughly fit, and therefore look it?"

"Just exactly my sentiments," said Captain Percy Iddison, who lounged up towards them just as this moment, tubbed and shaved and clad in immaculate flannels, careless, happy, and yet, though he knew it not, one of those unconscious instruments of Fate which, through the medium of just a few idle words, may alter the courses of other lives.

"Miss Staunton, and you, too, my lady," he began again, with a smile and a bow towards his radiant sweetheart, "I want you to allow me to take Ellerton away for a moment. "I have noticed that he is looking a little, well, flushed, almost feverish, in fact, and I have discovered a peculiarly soothing and generally delightful cocktail. The fact is, of course, that I want one myself, and I don't care to have it alone. It's a bad habit, you know, which one learns in those desolate places of the earth where it is sometimes easier to get a drink before breakfast than it is to get the breakfast itself."

"That, Percy," said Lady Maud, drawing Mercedes somewhat reluctantly aside, "is merely a specious excuse for quite unnecessary depravity. Still, I know it is not the slightest use trying to argue with a man on that subject, and so I suppose we shall have to let you go."

"And I hope you won't forget," said Mercedes, still laughing and looking first at Wilfrid and then at Iddison, "what they say in South America about cocktails."

"Dear me," exclaimed Lady Maud. "May I ask what *you* know about cocktails before breakfast?"

"Not guilty," laughed Mercedes in reply. "I have never tasted that form of refreshment in my life. It is only what I have heard my father say and there certainly seems to be a good deal of sense in it. It is this," she went on, with another look at the two young men, "one is enough, two are too many, and three are nothing like enough."

"Exactly!" said Ellerton. "Therefore, Iddison, it's got to be just one, and if we don't hurry up and get it the breakfast bugle will go."

Scarcely had the two young men strolled away, than Staunton and Ramiero Valdez came up out of the saloon and joined them.

If Staunton had only seen one of the glances that had passed between his daughter and Wilfrid during the brief conversation, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Another long instalment of this serial next week.

Your Editor Chats.

This week another adventure which befell Miss Sara Gillespie, in her flight from her pursuers, is related. Northampton is the scene of the episode, and all citizens of the famed boot-making town will be, I am sure, delighted with the photographs that are reproduced.

From all sides I have received intimations assuring me that great interest has been aroused in this series, and in letters from readers, there often recur the words "I only hope that the coming instalments will be as absorbing as the opening ones." Now, of course, I have had the privilege of already seeing the future episodes, and I can unreservedly say that nobody need have any fear that the realisations of their hopes will suffer in comparison with their anticipations.

Sara will relate in our next issue what happens to her at Leicester. There is no need for me to say anything in recommendation of this instalment, but I can promise you that it is a splendid one.

I have now an announcement to make which is of especial interest to residents in Leicester and district.

I want readers of that town who feel sufficiently interested in this series to help to make it known in their district, by handing a few leaflets to their friends. As an inducement for you to do so, I will offer a Gramophone to the Leicester reader who makes the best use of his leaflets, and a charming little gold-plated pencil case to *each* of the *twelve* persons who show the next greatest amount of ingenuity in the distribution. You may personally hand each leaflet to a friend, with a remark about "The Pursuit of Sara"; you may place the leaflets in conspicuous positions; you may push them through letter-boxes or doors; or you can do exactly as you think wisest and best. The prizes will go to those readers who distribute the leaflets in the most novel and helpful way; the number you get rid of is not of so much consequence. To obtain them, drop a postcard, with "Leaflets" marked in the top, left-hand corner, to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C.

Our Gramophones are beautiful pieces of mechanism, and one of these musical instruments would be a boon to any household. They are fitted with a concert sound-box, and accompanied by two records.

Come, Leicester readers, make a good bid for that Gramophone, and the special consolation prizes. All of you have equal opportunities.

On page 560, the new serial story from the pen of Mr. George Griffith commences. It is a powerful romance, in which masterly crime plays an important part, crossing, as it does the path of love, totally contrary to the expectations of Isolo Staunton, criminal millionaire. It is an old adage that says that "the course of true love never runs smooth," and our new serial is an excellent illustration to its truth. As the story continues, the plot becomes stronger and stronger, till the great climax is reached. "A Criminal Millionaire" should appeal to all who enjoy reading good literature.

I will announce, as soon as possible, and I expect it to be at a very early date, the result of the recent "Juggled Letters" Competition.

Your Editor.

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A Wilful Girl.

Relating How She Won a Young Doctor's Heart.

"This can't last!"

Doctor George Gordon sprang from his chair with the words, and began to pace his office floor from wall to wall.

It was a miserable, drizzly November day, but Doctor Gordon's vehement exclamation had no reference to the weather. It was directed towards the unfortunate aspect of Fate in general, and his own affairs in particular.

Three weeks ago, full of hope and energy, he had started his practice in this little quiet street, and had begun his professional career. That is, he would have begun it, had any requisition for his services been made; but, with the exception of one or two cases, no hint or shadow of practice had fallen in his way. His funds were running low, his sturdy patience seemed to droop, at last, and hope no longer answered his misgivings with a smile. Worst of all, a terrible loneliness had fallen suddenly upon him—the forerunner of despair.

"It can't last!" he repeated desperately, pushing his fine white hands through his brown curling hair. And at that instant the door-bell rang.

Hastily opening a heavy volume or two, to convey the idea that his studies were suddenly interrupted, and assuming a calm, professional air, Doctor Gordon proceeded to the door.

This time it was neither peddler, book-agent, nor machine oil, but a lovely young woman, in a blue waterproof, with chestnut hair in glossy rings on her white forehead. She held a little boy by the hand—a boy who had evidently been crying loud and long, and was still in good condition for an indefinite continuation of the exercise.

"Doctor Gordon?"

The doctor bowed, and the young lady lowered her umbrella.

"I am glad we have found you in," she said, smiling, and disclosing two distracting dimples. "My little brother has crushed his hand. I want you to examine it, please. We feared there might be bones broken—it has been so painful."

"We shall soon find out," answered the doctor briskly, his elastic spirits rising wonderfully as he ushered in his visitors. "I was about to make a call or two" (which was true—he had intentions of going out for a cigar and a newspaper), "but nothing very urgent. Be seated, please. I will let in more light. Now, then, my little man; will you come here to me?"

"Tommy, dear," said the young lady, very gently and tenderly, as Tommy leant his head against her and began to sob, "let me see now how brave you can be. And doctor won't hurt you—I am sure he won't"—with an eloquent glance at the individual in question.

"Not one bit, or so very little that you won't mind it at all."

"And Dora will stay by you"—putting her arm round his neck and drawing him gently towards the consulting chair. "That's my own good boy. And to-morrow you will be ever so much better. Now, doctor, see, he is going to be splendid!"

To Doctor Gordon's credit be it said, he conducted his examination with coolness and cleverness, albeit this pretty creature hung over him enveloping him in her exquisite magnetism, and thrilling him deliciously now and then, as the folds of her dress touched him or their fingers met accidentally in their mutual attention to the case.

When the bones were declared to be intact, and the hand dressed and bandaged, then came the story of the accident's happening—in fact, almost half an hour of bright, pleasant talk; then thanks and gratitude, and—"How much must I pay you, doctor?"

The idea of paying him for this gleam of warmth and sunshine that had come into his blank and dreary life!

But he mentioned his modest fee in a business-like manner, and received it with professional ease. Such a dear little purse and such a slender, pretty hand, and such a kind, innocent, charming face! It was hard to think he might never see her again.

At parting he made an effort. As she opened her umbrella again and the blue eyes looked at him smilingly from a background of rain and mist and dreariness, he observed in an off-hand way:

"Please bring the boy in to me in a day or two. I shall want to examine his progress. Let me see—Wednesday—well bring him on Friday. Oh, not at all? I think he will do nicely now. Thanks—good-bye."

And as he looked after the trim little figure of his visitor he suddenly realised that he did not even know her name, except that part of it was "Dora."

It never rains but it pours. It both rained and poured on this eventful evening. To his surprise and deep thankfulness, the doctor received two other calls before midnight, and on the following day three more. He began again to feel of use and importance in the world. The blue waterproof, the dimples and smiling eyes, had brought him what the gamblers call a "streak of luck," or so he firmly believed.

When Friday arrived he was quite in a flutter of expectation, and sported a new necktie for the occasion. At half-past ten the office bell rang. It was the advent he hoped for.

"Oh, good morning!"

Fresh as the morning itself she looked, in a pretty costume of brown cashmere, with a sweeping feather in her hat, a bunch of sweet violets at her belt, and a world of light and sweetness in her eyes. Tommy, at her side, nodded quite tolerantly in answer to his share of the doctor's greeting.

"Such a lovely day. Did you expect us?" (Did he?) "Oh, yes, so *much* better. It is quite easy now—Tommy, isn't it? We are glad we came to *you*. Our old doctor—Doctor Briggs—was ill, and we did not know where to come—

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did we, Tommy? And I said, let us try here. How do you do, doctor. Are you well?"

By this time they were in the office, and she was regarding him with a friendly, somewhat thoughtful, scrutiny.

"Quite well, thanks."

"I thought you did not look so very well that other day, you seemed so pale. I suppose you work too hard. All you doctors do."

"When we are fortunate enough to have the chance. I believe I have grown pale longing for work. I am only just beginning here, you know."

"Ah," with a glance full of interest. "Are you a stranger, then?"

"Quite a stranger. I came from Somerset. All my people are there. I sometimes think it was a wild venture of mine to come to London to begin my profession."

"All your people? Oh, that is dreadful! Have you no friends here—*no* one?"

"I am entirely alone."

"How strangely you must feel. I should think it would be terrible to live like that"—with another long, thoughtful look. "Oh, well," breaking into a smile, "I am sure you will make a practice here. You will not mind it so much when you have plenty of business. *We* will do what we can to help you, and we know lots of people. Tommy, darling, take your hat off. Come here to me. I'll undo the bandage. Now, let Doctor Gordon see. I don't think he will lose the nails after all."

"Very satisfactory indeed," said Doctor Gordon. "I can see that you have followed my directions."

"Oh, yes; of course"—lifting up her earnest face. "He was very good about it. He let me bathe it and dress it, and I know it must have hurt him."

"He had a very gentle nurse."

The doctor was busy over the wounded hand as he made this remark.

"I tried to be as gentle as you were," was the quick response. "Your hands seemed so light and kind. It must be beautiful to be able to help people and relieve pain."

"Pain that can be relieved—yes," said the doctor, feeling quite charmed that she had noticed his hands, which, indeed, were well worth noticing, and accustomed to receive a good deal of his own attention. "If we could only reach mental suffering as easily."

"Ah! I know very little about that"—she shook her head with a pretty seriousness. "I've never had real trouble yet. It frightens me when I think how happy I've been."

"Frightens you? Why?"

"Because all my suffering is yet to come."

"Oh, mine isn't!" said Tommy, nodding with an air of triumph. "I've had lots of pain. I sprained my ankle once, and I fell down the cellar stairs, and a boy gave me a black eye, and the ear-ache and the mumps, and no end of tooth-ache. But this hand—that was worse than all. I think I am getting all *my* sufferings now."

"You and I, Tommy—we know what it is to have afflictions," said Doctor Gordon, with his hand on Tommy's shoulder. "Happy people, like your sister, can only wonder at us. It must be very nice to be so—so content and at peace with Fate."

"Don't you feel happy, too?" she asked, with womanly pity in her tone. "I should think you would love your profession."

"I do love it certainly; but it is not *all* my life. I want other things—friends, companionship. The struggle with poverty is dreadful when one is alone."

"You are not married?"

This question was asked with delightful straightforwardness, the candid eyes looked frankly into his.

"I have not that good fortune—yet."

They both flushed slightly; the young lady glanced away, and said quickly—

"Well, you will not *always* be alone, unless you wish to be. And I know you will succeed in your profession; your manner is so pleasing and sympathetic, you inspire confidence at once. And I am sure—I am very sure—you must be clever."

"Oh, thanks, you are too kind," murmured the doctor, as much astonished as pleased by this innocent, delicious flattery. "I owe you my heartfelt gratitude for your kindness—your encouragement. I was almost despairing. I shall always believe it was my good angel who sent you—and Tommy—to my rescue."

"It was *our* good angel, perhaps, who showed us how to find *you*," was the smiling, unembarrassed answer. "I felt an interest in you at once. I told mamma about you as soon as I went home, and she is coming to see you too. But now we must go. I will leave you my card, though, because"—with an arch look—"you don't even know my name yet. And I want to leave you this little bunch of violets, too, if you will accept them. I think there is such companionship in flowers, if one feels lonely or sad."

She disengaged the little bouquet from her belt and the doctor took it, and the kindly hand that offered it, into his own an instant.

"I don't know what to say to you—I can't express my sense of your goodness, so undeserved."

"Oh, that's nothing! I love to give flowers to people who care for them—that is one of my pleasures. Well, good-bye. Shall I need to bring Tommy in again—or is it all right?"

"If you could let me see him in three or four days from now," returned the doctor, with gravity. "It is not absolutely necessary, but if you have time, you might bring him in, and—a—a——"

"Very well. Some time next week then. Good-bye. I do hope you'll gets lots of patients—of course, I don't hope that people will be ill, poor things; but I mean that if they must be ill, I hope they will send for you. And don't feel lonely or depressed, remember. I *did* think you looked *so sad* that first day. Good-bye."

As soon as he was alone, Doctor Gordon took up the little square of pasteboard from the table and read, "Dora Hartley, 98, West Street, Kensington." He actually put it to his lips. Then he threw it down quickly, and hastily drew from the vest pocket above his heart a girl's photograph, at which he looked long and fondly.

"You would not mind, Clara, darling," he murmured, half aloud. "She is such an utter child."

The apology which Doctor Gordon offered so fervently to the portrait of his soul's idol, in extenuation of a kiss bestowed on Miss Hartley's printed name was merely the first of a long series of such apologies and protestations. During the next four weeks Clara's picture was in constant requisition. He bestowed on it confessions and explanations that would have astonished the original, to whom his semi-weekly letters conveyed no hint of the existence of "Dora."

But in the life of Doctor Gordon, Dora was an accomplished fact, and a wonderfully bright and important one. She recommended him right and left among her friends, and sent him some excellent paying cases, in which his usually superior skill made itself apparent. She even persuaded her mother, whose health was uniformly excellent, that she needed medical advice, and at once Doctor Gordon was summoned—the

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result, his instalment as family physician, and a pleasant revenue from Mr. Hartley's purse. Added to this, he was petted and made much of by the entire family. But Dora remained his special ally and friend. She used to run into his office on all sorts of pretences—sometimes escorted by one of her brothers (of whom there were five), sometimes by the huge Newfoundland dog, sometimes only by her own innocence.

Doctor Gordon had begun by declaring that Dora was "an utter child." Before long he discovered a certain tact and womanliness that astonished him. She would discuss his affairs with him in the gravest way, and make little practical suggestions, full of commonsense; give him hints as to the foibles and weaknesses of certain of the new people she introduced, and in innumerable ways, help and strengthen him. She made "tidies" for his chairs, pillows for his sofa, painted vases for his mantel, mended his gloves, darned his handkerchiefs, objected to his neckties, criticised his linen, in short, surrounding him with an intoxicating atmosphere of femininity that fascinated and bewildered him. Through it all she preserved her direct, child-like manner.

"You would not believe," she would say to him, with her elbows on the table beside him, and hands clasped under her white chin—a favourite attitude. "You'd not believe how much I liked you that first day. It seemed so odd—the very first time we met. Somehow I felt as if I had always known you, and oh! I knew very well we were going to be friends! At least, I made up my mind about it"—and then, without the slightest change of tone, "Do you think those curtains look all right? I imagine they ought to be fuller. If I were you I'd have dark-red ones. I saw some in Stewart's the other day." Or else, rushing in, flushed and smiling, she would say, out of breath: "Oh, dear, I can't stay, but I thought I *must* run in for a minute! I have brought you some oranges for your cold—they are lovely and sweet. I was just carrying some to old Mrs. Shannon—she's the dearest old thing, and her cold is terrible, worse than yours. Do, please, take care of yourself. I sha'n't have any peace till you are better—both of you."

Then in a flash she was gone again. She seemed especially anxious lest he should feel too keenly the loneliness of his life, and tried constantly to brighten his solitude with a thousand gentle cares and attentions.

He felt deeply touched, and blessed her from his heart for all her goodness, but his mind was full of uneasiness as he found himself forced to the conclusion that Dora was falling in love with him very fast indeed.

As their acquaintance progressed he could but notice a growing change in her manner—a sort of wistfulness and almost sadness at times, and his conscience smote him terribly that he had withheld from her the fact of his engagement. It seemed daily more impossible to divulge it without making himself seem like a villain, and yet to deliberately continue to conceal it was a villainy in itself.

As to the nature of his feelings for Dora, he was in a state of bewilderment. Her warmth of heart, her impetuous temper, her sweet, wilful, lovable ways, her very faults, were charming to him.

She was a constant study and delight; and yet, even if he were free—if he had never seen and chosen Clara—would Dora be the sort of woman he could wish to marry? He could not tell.

He only knew that the spell of her presence was upon him, and every meeting made the spell more strong.

Her family, too, seemed quite to accept him as their own, and to look upon his interests as their especial care. It was so pleasant to have friends of good standing, to feel himself no longer a waif and a stray in the great community.

But the price he paid threatened to be a hard one—the loss of his own self-respect. A time came when his conscience faced him with stern accusation, and commanded him to be true.

* * * * *

It was his birthday. Early in the morning there had come from Dora a pair of embroidered slippers and a lovely bunch of roses, and from each of the others some little token. His room was bright with pretty souvenirs, and the happy recipient sat brooding at his desk, wretched, penitent, torn with conflicting emotions—looking at Clara's photograph, and thinking, as usual, of Dora.

She had been so kind to him, so gracious and tender and generous, and now he must wring her guileless heart and stab her maiden pride, and lose her for ever!

He had at last made up his mind to write and tell her all—the paper lay spread before him, and he sat silent, thinking his miserable thoughts, and listening to the rush of the rain and the long, sweeping sigh of the wind.

He was trying to picture Dora as she would look when she read his letter. The sorrow and amazement in her sweet face; the blue eyes filled with passionate, regretful tears, or flashing scorn and anger; the little kindly, ministering hands clasped and trembling——

"Dora!"

Roused by some slight sound, he had turned and saw her in the room beside him. She was clad in the blue waterproof he had learnt to love.

The rain glistened on her hair, and her face was very pale; but she smiled a bright greeting.

"Don't scold; I *had* to come! I ran in by the alley. I was afraid some one might be here. It is just lovely to find you alone!"

Doctor Gordon looked at her with a sudden flush on his fair face. He rose; he could not trust himself to touch her hand.

"Take off that wet cloak," he said abruptly. "It is a terrible night for you to come out. What is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Something is going to happen," she answered quietly, loosening her cloak and hanging it over a chair. Then with both hands she smoothed back the damp waves of her hair, and sat down in her favourite low chair beside the doctor's desk. He stood near her irresolutely a moment, but finally seated himself in his usual place.

"You look very pale, Dora. Are you ill?" He made a great effort to speak in his usual manner, but his voice trembled slightly.

"I am well enough—quite well; but," she pressed both hands against her heart. "like Hamlet, I can say, 'You little know how ill all's here.'"

Their eyes met in a long look, and a deep blush rose to her cheeks, but she did not avert her gaze.

"I—I was just thinking of you as you came in," the doctor murmured. It was not at all what he meant to say, but the truth has a habit of speaking itself at times. "I wanted to thank you for your beautiful flowers, and for—so many things. Dora, you have been more to me than I can—than I dare express. I wish you could know—could understand——"

"Do you think I have been good to you? Have I really made you a little bit happier? I longed to,—because I—because you—— Oh, Doctor Gordon, you must let me speak to you and tell you!—my heart is so full. Don't think me wild or reckless, but there is something I must tell you!"

"Dora, Dora!" He caught her hand fervently in both his own. "I, too, have a confession to make. For weeks I have waited."

"Let me speak first," she said imploringly. "I came for that purpose. Doctor, I am going away from home; I am going in a few days—not to come back any more."

"You are going away?"

"No one knows of it—not even my own precious mother. I am going away—to be married."

The hand he had held so tenaciously was suddenly released.

"Married, Dora?"

"I did not tell you of my engagement. I thought perhaps mother had spoken of it. Yes, I have been engaged nearly five years; and I liked you first because your eyes are so like his—like Will's, you know. He is a doctor, too. He went away from London over a year ago to begin practice, just as you came here; and when you told me about being all alone, my heart went out to you so. I thought of my own poor

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boy; I knew how to sympathise with you and I longed to be your friend. I thought at once, 'If any one would take an interest in Will, and pet him and cheer him up and help him, how I *could* love that person!' And so I wanted to do everything I could for you. And I liked you so much, I *couldn't* go away and never tell you, nor say good-bye. Please—please don't look so sad! Are you angry with me? Do you think I am very wrong and wicked?"

"I! Ah, Dora, how much do you care for my thoughts of you *now?*"

"As much as ever," she said eagerly. "I have no friend in the world dearer than you are—you must know that. And will you tell mamma—will you talk to her? It is so dreadful to go away in this manner, but it must be done, sooner or later. If I should wait till Doomsday, they would never give their consent. Of course, when it is all over, they will forgive me and love me just the same. And you will coax mamma—won't you, doctor?—and say a good word for Dora when she is far away?" Her voice broke slightly, but she smiled bravely as she gave him her hand.

"Why must you go, dear?" he asked forlornly. "And what will become of *me?* I shall miss you so terribly, and you don't care at all. I can see by your eyes how happy you are."

"I am happy at heart," she answered earnestly—"very, very happy! I am glad I have decided. Surely, you must acknowledge my first duty is to Will, because I love him so dearly. He asks me to come to him, and it is my duty and my heaven to obey. My people will love him, too, bye-and-bye, when they know him better. They only oppose the marriage because they love me too much. I am sorry to leave you all, but I am, oh! *so* glad to go to Will!"

Doctor Gordon, holding the little hand between his own, looked regretfully in the little friendly face. Half an hour ago he was sorrowing for the pain he was about to inflict on this confiding innocent heart; and now the spectacle of her bright contentment wounded and angered him; his pride was terribly hurt. He had told himself passionately that he would make any sacrifice, almost, to secure her happiness, and now that, without requiring the slightest sacrifice from him, she was supremely happy, he felt much injured and aggrieved.

"You mustn't be sorry," she said, very gently. "Of course you will miss me and I shall miss you—that is only natural; but we can write to each other, and as soon as I am forgiven I will come home on a visit, and I shall see you all!"

This and much more she told him in her gracious, kindly voice, trying to heal the wound that she began to think might have been deeper than she could have dreamt.

When it was time to part, she lifted her face and kissed him frankly and willingly, with a whispered: "God bless you, dear!"

For an instant Doctor Gordon's arms were round the damp waterproof and the slender figure beneath it, pressing them impartially to his heart. And then Dora was gone.

He sat quite a long time. Somehow, he had no need of Clara's photograph to strengthen him in his trial. He would not feel exactly at home in expressing his emotions to that calm and placid image.

Madeline Bridges.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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A JUSTIFIED BURGLAR.

A Story with a Moral to Husbands.

ARNOLD TODD must have become accustomed to it, for periodically burglars relieved him of all his pocket-money, diamonds and other personal *bric-a-brac* without ever being caught in the act or leaving any clue to their discovery. Nothing was ever taken belonging to Mrs. Todd, but, as that woman pathetically said, she had nothing they could take except her wedding-ring, which was on her finger, or her clothes, which would not have repaid the effort. For Mrs. Todd was a veritable household drudge. Her husband had houses and lands, as well as money in several banks, but he never gave her any of his wealth, and she had to beg for enough money to buy shoes and stockings for the children. Their clothes she made over from her own and their father's worn-out garments, and in making Mr. Todd's trousers into jackets for the little Todds she always managed to work the knees that bagged into the under side of elbows.

The burglaries did not worry Mr. Todd—if the truth were told—as much as they did Mrs. Todd. He usually waited until the stolen goods could not be recovered, then he purchased a new outfit and, after hiding them carefully every night for a few months he would grow careless and the burglars would give him another call. Mrs. Todd consistently promised to lie awake and watch, but she declared she must have been chloroformed, otherwise she would never have closed an eye.

"I should think, Mary," her husband complained, "that your anxiety about the children would keep you awake. Think what an effect it would have on them to see a burglar in their room!"

"But the burglars never go there," said Mrs. Todd faintly. "Children never have any valuables—at least ours don't," she added with unconscious sarcasm.

One night the unexpected happened. It was the turning-point in Mr. Todd's destiny. At the hour when he should have been sleeping the soundest he suddenly awakened and saw by the dim night light a strange figure in his room—that of a man muffled in a black cloak with a slouch hat drawn over his face and a silk muffler round his neck and chin. He was rifling Mr. Todd's pockets. Mr. Todd did not own a revolver. He would not have killed a man to save all his wealth, much as he loved it. He lay still for a moment, thinking how to surprise the burglar, then, having made up his mind to a plan, he put it into immediate execution. He leapt from the bed with a bound that took him into the middle of the room and pinioned the burglar from behind. A terrific scream rent the air. Todd held in a mighty grasp a limp, trembling form from which he tore the disguising cloak, revealing the partner of his joys and sorrows, Mrs. Todd.

"Mary!" he gasped. "Mary, you?"

"Yes, Mr. Todd, me." She turned and faced him. "Oh, you needn't be surprised. Where did you suppose I got any money if I didn't either steal it or beg it, seeing that you never gave me any. If I wanted a penny to put in the contribution box on Sunday I had to ask you for it, and explain what I was going to do with it. You never gave me a sovereign in your life without expecting nineteen shillings back in change."

"Mary!"

"It's the truth, and you know it, Arnold. Instead of making me a regular allowance, as any husband ought to, you make me save and scrimp and go without everything but food. Many a time I've left my empty purse lying about hoping you would take the hint and fill it. And you never did. And all the time you carried gold, silver and notes in your pocket—and bought what you wanted."

"You might have taken it without disguising yourself as a burglar, Mary."

"You would have suspected me, and how long could I have kept the money? No, the burglar was more welcome to it than I would have been. But I never dreamt that you would wake. I meant to jump out of the window if you did see me. Now, I do not care for myself—I am only sorry for you. The man who can drive a woman to such straits is to be pitied. I have as good a right to the money as you have—I helped to make it, and there is no law to convict a wife for stealing from her own husband."

Mr. Todd was seeing things past and present, and in those few moments of time as the dying do—clearly and without prejudice. He took his wife in his arms.

"You are nervous and tired, dear," he said. "Lie down and compose yourself to rest. I see, Mary, that I am the real burglar—I have robbed you of your earnings and your lawful dues. Before I sleep you shall have a bank account in your own name, and I will never ask what you do with the money. And you can give up being a burglar for good and all."

Henry Haines.

"AND you permitted this strange man to kiss you?" "No, mamma; he didn't give me time."

"IF you had no idea when you could get married, Tom, why did you propose?" "To tell the truth, dear, I had no idea that you would accept me."

MR. HIGHLIFE: "My dear, I'm going to turn over a new leaf!" Mrs. Highlife: "That's right. James says when you came out of your club last night you turned over a couple of pages."

"JOHN," whispered the good woman in the dead of the night, "there are burglars downstairs!" "You go down, dear," replied John, sleepily; "they wouldn't dare to strike a woman."

ARDENT SUITOR: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I didn't know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much, but it takes very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

AMBIGUOUS.—MRS. GRUE: "Henry, do you think you would ever marry again?" Grue: "What! After having lived with you for eleven years? Never!" (Mrs. Grue would give something handsome if she only knew just what he meant by that.)

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The possibility of Catarrh extending to the lungs is described in the last issue of the

REVIEW OF EAR, NOSE, AND THROAT DISEASES.

Anyone interested in the subject can obtain a free copy of this Medical Journal by addressing The Editor, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

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It Requires Practice.

Angela (to whom Edgar has been proposing): "Tell me, Edgar! Did you ever say anything like this to any woman before?" Edgar (in a burst of honesty): "My dear girl, do you think it could be done like that the first time?"

He Was a Bit of a Bore.

Reggy: "Do you really believe that absence makes the heart grow fonder?" Miss Brady: "Oh, yes, indeed. I think twice as much of you when you are somewhere else."

He'd Cause for Remembrance.

"Isn't it sad," asked the young lady romantically, "to think of the roses of yester year?" "It is," replied the young man emphatically; "I have an unpaid florist's bill for £10."

Worth the Trouble.

Cleverton: "Miss Twilling rejected me the other night, but she let me kiss her before we parted." Dashaway (reflecting): "I think I'll go round to-night and propose myself."

Well Experienced.

Paterfamilias: "And could you support my daughter, sir?" Her Lover: "I have two strong arms." Paterfamilias: "But can they support her?" Her Lover: "They often have, sir."

There Were Others, Too.

Mr. Gillis: "Surely, Miss Gray, you haven't forgotten me already? Why, I proposed to you at the seaside last summer." Miss Gray (much puzzled): "Can't you recall some other incident?"

And Ethel Blushed Vividly.

Tommy: "Yes, cats can see in the dark, and so can Ethel, 'cause when Mr. Wright walked into the parlour when she was sitting all alone in the dark, I heard her say to him, 'Why, Arthur, you didn't get shaved to-day.'"

Economical Wifey.

Husband: "Have you done your best to economise this month, Mary, as I requested?" Wife (brightly): "Oh, yes; I spoke to the grocer, the butcher, and the landlord, and got them to put off sending in their bills till next month."

He Has a Wife Now.

She (insinuatingly): "Are you looking for anybody, Mr. Johnson?" He: "Yes, I am looking for my wife." She (coquettishly): "I didn't know you had a wife." He: "No; that's just why I am looking for her." And he found her there and then.

Those Girls Again.

May: "He's awfully inquisitive. He tried his best to find out how old I am." Fanny: "Yes, he admitted that to me." May: "And just for fun I told him I was thirty-four. Did he tell you that?" Fanny: "No, but he did say you were the most truthful girl he had over met."

A Very Convenient Arrangement.

Miss Manyseasons: "No, Mr. Bloom, I cannot be your wife, but I will be a sister to you." Mr. Bloom (youthful adorer): "You are very kind, and I know my mother will like that arrangement. She has often said I would have been a better man if I had had an elder sister to look after me. When will you begin your duties?"

So It Seemed.

Jack: "Does Miss Smythe return your affections?" Simon (tearfully): "The unopened envelope seems to indicate it!"

A Satisfactory Arrangement.

Miss Riche: "One can be very happy in this world with health and money." Suitor: "Then let's be made one. I have the health and you have the money."

Symptoms of Distress.

Mr. Jones: "That young Snodgrass seems like one of the family." His Only Daughter: "How so, papa?" Mr. Jones: "Why, he looks scared when your mother's anywhere near."

Drew His Conclusions.

Sandstone: "Weren't you dancing with Miss Calloway last night?" Fiddleback: "Yes; how did you know?" Sandstone: "I saw her going into a chiropodist's this morning."

Would Cause Excitement.

New Hubby: "I'm sorry, but I really can't let you see my wife if you wear that beautiful new hat. She's quite ill, and the doctor has expressly said that nothing must be allowed to excite her."

Then They Recommenced.

Wife (repentent after a little breeze): "If I were to die, Phil, what would you do?" Phil (sulkily): "I'd be nearly crazy, of course." Wife: "Would you marry again?" Phil: "No; I wouldn't be as crazy as that."

Worse Luck Impossible.

Patience: "Did you say Daisy is about to take her thirteenth husband?" Mabel: "Yes, I did." "Isn't she at all superstitious?" "Oh, yes; but she knows her thirteenth can't be any worse than the other twelve."

Expenses Not Allowed.

"Come, my darling," said the impatient lover at the foot of the ladder. "It's no use," replied she. "The elopement's off." "Why? What has happened?" "Papa absolutely refuses to advance the money for our travelling expenses."

"Popping" the Question.

"Did Miss Flyppe receive many proposals when she came out?" "Many? Why, receiving proposals got to be a habit with her. In a very short time she couldn't even hear a soda-water bottle pop without exclaiming 'This is so sudden!'"

Considerate Boy.

Stern Parent: "Your mother tells me you have been naughty again, and, therefore, I shall be obliged to punish you." Troublesome Son: "Wh—why can't ma punish me herself, dad? I don't s—ee wh—why you should have to d—do all the odd jobs!"

Speaking from Experience.

Mr. Hardnut: "I admit, sir, that my life has not been what it should be, but I truly and unselfishly love your daughter, and if ever I give her a moment's pain I hope I'll be made to suffer torture for it." Old Gentleman (warmly): "Oh, you will. You don't know her."

No More Love Letters of 'Liza.

She was doleful—oh, so very doleful. "John," she said, "I don't believe you ever really loved me at all." "Why?" he demanded. "Because," she replied, "I've been over all your old love letters, and while they seemed all right at the time, they actually aren't worth publishing in a book."

She Altered Her Decision.

"And so," said the young man, "you say you cannot marry me because I am too young?" "That is my reason," averred the girl. "Surely you do not mean me to understand that you consider yourself too old to marry me?" he murmured diplomatically. Looking at it in that light, she concluded that she had been too hasty.

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21/- **Lady's** solid gold **Keyless Watch**, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 **Fashionable Long Neck-chain**; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 **Organ Toned Melodeon**; magnificent **26/-** instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 **Necklet** with **Heart Pendant**, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 **Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette**; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Morning Vision.

"H. S. I. F." writes, "I meet on the way to business every morning a young lady whom I much admire. I have not yet had courage to say more than 'good morning' to her. What is my best way to get into further conversation?"

* * * * *

If you have got so far as to say "good morning," I do not see why you should not take an early opportunity to remark on the weather. Then perhaps she travels by a certain train, or 'bus, in which you might accidentally find yourself sometimes. If you get so far as to be on speaking terms with her, you should try to get to know her relations. How to do that must depend on circumstances, and if you have any mutual friends. You will best be able to judge that yourself.

❦❦❦

Too Effusive?

"DOUBTFUL" is very hard to please. She has kept company with a young man for three weeks, and finds him very demonstrative. He constantly goes to see her, and wishes her to become engaged to him. He is in a very good position, and his family are wealthy. This all seems most fortunate, yet "DOUBTFUL" is haunted by fears. "Can his affection," she asks, "be true and lasting, when he is so demonstrative? Would she be wise in becoming engaged to him?"

* * * * *

I do not see, "DOUBTFUL," why his affection should be any the less sincere because he seems able to show it visibly. Don't consent just yet to an engagement, as you evidently have not made up your mind whether or not you love him. Ask him to wait awhile and repeat the question later, when you will be more certain on the point. Three weeks is not a long time to have known him, and you should see how long his affectionate manner lasts.

❦❦❦

Etiquette in Calling.

"I MET two very nice girls at a party recently," writes "EDWARD." "Their mother was present, but I was not introduced to her. We got very friendly, the girls and I, and on parting, one of them said to me: 'You must call and see us when in our direction,' giving me their address, which was in the country. Now is that a proper invitation, seeing that I do not know the mother?"

* * * * *

It would have been better if you had met the mother, and got the young lady to confirm the invitation in her presence. You could then have suggested a suitable day to call, if convenient to them, and made the arrangement on a formal social basis. As it is, you might find it awkward to call only on the girls' invitation, especially if they were not at home. In your present position, I should write to one girl, an ordinary chatty letter, and leave it to her to confirm the invitation on behalf of her mother.

Wanted, a Chaperon.

"LONELY BACHELOR" lives in rooms by himself. He knows several girls, but of course cannot invite them to tea, while he often visits them at their homes. How could he invite them to his home without breaking strict etiquette?

* * * * *

The best thing would be for my lonely correspondent to ask his sister, mother, or aunt to stay with him, and then to invite his lady friends when she is there. It would not, of course, be quite right for him to ask them without some such chaperon, though people who call themselves "Bohemians" have long ago discarded such formalities.

❦❦❦

A Fickle Girl.

"JACK" had kept company with a girl for six months, and during that time found her everything that could be desired. After three months' courtship, however, she gradually seemed to change. He has since found out that she was constantly meeting other young men without his knowledge, and when he remonstrated with her, she passed it off as "mere jealousy on his part," and continued the intimacy with them. "JACK" now feels that he no longer loves her, but only likes her. He can no longer rely on her being true to him.

* * * * *

I imagine the girl has grown tired of you, "JACK," and that being the case, you had better let the matter drop. As you find you no longer love her yourself, I should cease to try to bind her, as she is evidently a bit of a flirt.

❦❦❦

Should He Marry?

"T. L." writes: "I am a tradesman, earning 28s. a week during the summer, but my trade is very bad in the winter, when I only earn £1, and sometimes I am thrown idle. I have met a girl who is an orphan, and very poor, and I would wish to marry her. Should I ask her to wait till I am in a better position—perhaps a year?"

* * * * *

If she is not dependent on you for support, "T. L.," it would certainly be better not to marry until you are in a better position. But if the girl is very poor indeed, and you would have to help her in any case, I think you would find that it would be better to marry soon. With economy, you should be able to make both ends meet even on your winter income, and no doubt a good wife would help you to do so.

❦❦❦

A Trivial Offence.

"SOME months ago," write "MARIE and MADELEINE," "we met two young men of our own age, and kept up an acquaintance with them for some time. They said they had no professions, and, without any intention of offending them, we said we thought every man ought to follow some profession. We think they must have taken offence at this, as their manner became very cool towards us both, and they now only bow and pass on when we meet them. Would it be forward for us to stop them and explain that we meant no offence? We both grew very fond of them, and they used to take us about a lot."

* * * * *

Yes, I think no harm whatever would be done in your speaking to them next time you meet. What you said was quite true—every man ought to have some occupation, and I don't think men who are absolutely idle ever make good husbands. If they were offended at your saying so, they must be very sensitive. However, explain your intentions by all means, and leave it to them as to whether they care to resume their intimacy with you. It seems a trifle to have separated you, in any case.

Cynthia

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These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.
Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.
This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.
The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.
Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.
At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt (President of the United States), Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton, the late Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.

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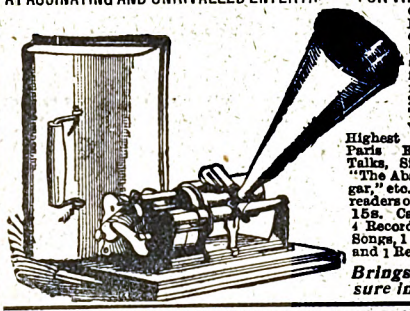

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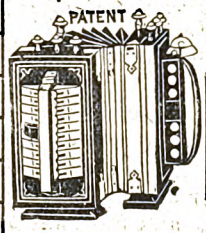

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No. 775.] Week ending November 7, 1903. [Price One Penny.

"He held out a paper. It offered £100 reward to the person who arrested me!"

(A Very Striking Incident from "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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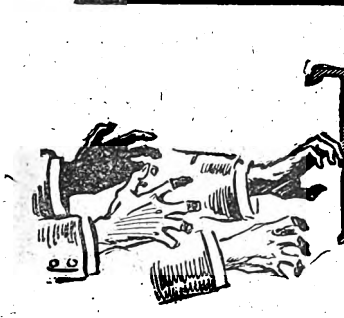

The Pursuit of Sara

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl namep Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

While strolling in Abingdon Park, Sara encountered a villainous-looking man with red-hair.

She was told that he was a keeper in a lunatic asylum, and later she found out that Noel was detained as a patient in that asylum!

Madly she intreated for his release, but all in vain! Then the red-haired man told her that he would aid Noel to escape, and told Sara to be on the racecourse the next morning at five o'clock.

Thence Sara went. Suddenly she was seized from behind! Before her, she saw Noel gagged and bound! A man was holding a pistol to his head, and a voice exclaimed:

"Tell me where the papers are before I count ten, or—your lover dies!"

The speaker was Harrington Shackell!

Suddenly she saw a man on horseback galloping towards her. How could she gain time, till her possible rescuer could reach her? "Help," she screamed.

"Eight," said Shackell, and the trigger of the pistol held to Noel's head was raised.

The horseman spurring his steed drew nearer.

"Nine! Is he to die?" cried Shackell.

Sara tried to answer, but her voice was strangled in her throat. Only a hoarse murmur came from her lips. She could not speak; she could not even make a sign.

A second, but a second, and her love must die!

Ten—and the fatal shot was to be fired!

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

HEMMED IN AT LEICESTER.

At the last moment with the word—that fatal "ten," the signal for my lover's death—trembling on Shackell's lips, a conviction, strange and startling, came to me. Something, perhaps a turn of his head, maybe a look in his eyes, or, as I like to think, the intuition of my love, laid bare the fact that the man at whose head the pistol was pointed *was not Noel!*

With a cry I broke from my captors.

"Fire!" I shouted; and again "Fire! That's not Noel Masterman, whoever he may be!"

For a second a blinding fear that after all I was mistaken, sent the world spinning. The next, Shackell turned on Noel's substitute and reviled him.

The other, throwing the loosely knotted cords from arms and chest, replied in kind. The two had almost come to blows, when Shackell, suddenly remembering, missed me.

"Where's the girl?" he yelled, striking at his men who stood about, idly regarding him. Then, as he caught sight of my vanishing figure, "Hurry, make haste, she must not get away. Confound you, why don't you run, you miserable idiots!"

Heading the chase he raced across the turf. Swift he might be, but I was lighter-footed. The horseman I had seen in the distance came nearer, closer, stopped.

"Up you get, missie!" Jim Goodman's strong arm swung me lightly to the saddle before him. "Now, then, Tom," to the boy who ran beside him, "get back and tell my girl the lady's safe. Off!" He waved his whip, shook the reins on the brown mare's neck, and like the wind we tore away, until the shouts of Shackell and his crew grew like the yelping of a pack of hounds in the far distance.

"Maggie was bothered about you," he explained, when at length he judged it safe to draw rein and take a breathing space. "At five in the morning the race-course is a queer sort of place for a girl to go to, and she scented danger. She came down to me at the stables, roused me up, and started me and Tom off after you. I'm glad I came, too, they were a roughish-looking lot of chaps for you to be amongst, missie."

"I can never thank you enough for coming. You and Maggie."

"It's nothing," he remarked, as though he had rescued persecuted people from his birth upwards. "I'd do more than that, for anyone who'd been a good friend to my Maggie."

"Where do you think I had better go, Jim?" I asked.

"You mustn't come back to Northampton, that's certain," he answered, "unless"—his voice grew hard—"unless you ride straight to the police-station and give those chaps in charge."

"I can't do that," I faltered. "I *daren't!* It may seem strange to you, but indeed it's no wrong or shameful reason that stops me. Maggie knows," I added, "and she approves."

"If she thinks it's all right, missie, I won't say any more. All the same it would be a deal simpler to go to the court and have 'em put in gaol, than to run away. The chances are they'll find you out again, so I understood Maggie to tell me, and then what are you going to do?"

"I can do nothing but hope and, and—fight," I answered, my voice shaking. "It's not for my own sake, Jim, but for my sweetheart's. I have something belonging to him, something I took—or, as they say, stole—from his enemies, the people who pursue me. I daren't go to the police, all I can do is to fight on and on until he comes back. Until——" A sudden fear made me start and all but overbalance.

"The papers, Jim!" I gasped. "I left some papers with Maggie before I came out."

"Here they are, missie, all safe and sound. Maggie gave them to me the last thing. If you don't mind, I'd rather she didn't have the keeping of them any more, miss. What I can do for you myself I will, but if *she* should come to any harm——"

"Don't worry," I interrupted. I promise you Maggie shall run no further risks."

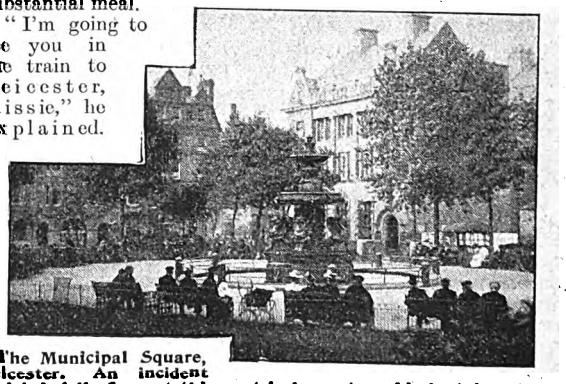
Jim murmured his thanks, and tried somewhat awkwardly to excuse himself for his anxiety. I did not aid him in his endeavours but let him flounder in a sea of apology. I acknowledged the justice of his request, but I was hurt none the less on its account. It seemed as if I were destined to be a sort of female Ishmael, outcast and alone.

At Jim's suggestion I dismounted at a little country inn some miles out of the town, where, he said, I might in safety spend the rest of the day.

"The landlady knows me and Maggie," he explained; "as a friend of ours she'd be pleased for you to stay. I'll tell her you've been travelling and want some hours' rest."

I was shown to a room at the top of the house, and, flinging myself on the bed, fell into a deep sleep, from which I did not wake till close on six o'clock. At seven the faithful Jim reappeared, and under his care I descended to the coffee-room and partook of a substantial meal.

"I'm going to see you in the train to Leicester, missie," he explained.



The Municipal Square, Leicester. An incident which befalls Sara at this spot is in next week's instalment.

"I'd advise you to go to a hotel for to-night, it will be safer for you than lodgings. The bigger the place the more people in it, and the less chance for anyone to kidnap you. Meanwhile, here's five pounds from me and Maggie, which you can pay us back when better times come. It'll keep you going for a bit. If you want more you must let us know. You'll write to Maggie?"

"Of course; directly I get to Leicester. Do you think it wise to go to such a large place?"

"Much safer than a smaller one. Besides, from Leicester you can keep in touch with us. Maybe a letter will come from your sweetheart, and we should want to bring it on at once."

I thanked him for his kindness, and sent many messages of love and gratitude to Maggie. At any rate I left Northampton less forlorn than when I came. I had found friends, faithful, loving-hearted people to whom I could turn in distress, sure of help and sympathy.

It seemed a long run from Northampton to Leicester, and in spite of my day's rest I felt terribly fagged when, dazed by the clatter and din of the big station, I found myself at my journey's end.

Mindful of Jim's instructions, I appealed to the porter, who seized on my bag with the avidity of a bird of prey, and asked if he could recommend me a hotel.

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He glanced me up and down, and after a moment's thought, suggested that there was a temperance hotel opposite the station.

Visions of "Pearce and Plenty," eminently clean but to my mind inhospitable, rosebefore me.

"I don't much like temperance hotels," I faltered.

"There's the George, but"—he paused, "you're very young," he said with a fatherly shake of the head; "you'd better go to the Temperance," and shouldering my bag—Maggie's last gift—he led the way up many flights of stairs out into the street, across the road, and into the hall of the hotel.

I was located in a room at the top of the house, at the extreme end of a very long corridor. Furnished in the approved fashion of hotels, lit by a dim gas burner, the surroundings were not calculated to rouse my drooping spirits. However, I felt better after supper, and lay down to rest with a quieter mind than I had hoped to enjoy.

I awoke some hours later, my heart beating violently, my nerves a quiver, my whole being stirred by the sense of danger. I started up, crouching on the side of my bed. What had roused me? In what subtle fashion had my nerves been quickened to a consciousness of peril?

In the silence of the night, far, far down the corridor, I heard a soft, shuffling sort of tread. Nearer it came and nearer, each second hastening its approach. Frozen with the fear that comes in the night watches, I shivered, clasping my fingers round my throat that I might feel the contact of warm, living flesh.

What was it, man or beast? that shuffled down the corridor. My room—the last—lay at the end of an abrupt turn in the passage, and was some yards distant from the rest. As I realised this I remembered with a dismay so sharp as to cause physical pain *that I had not locked my door!*

I could not move. A wild fear that even as I reached the door and grasped the key, *the thing* would fall upon me, kept me still.

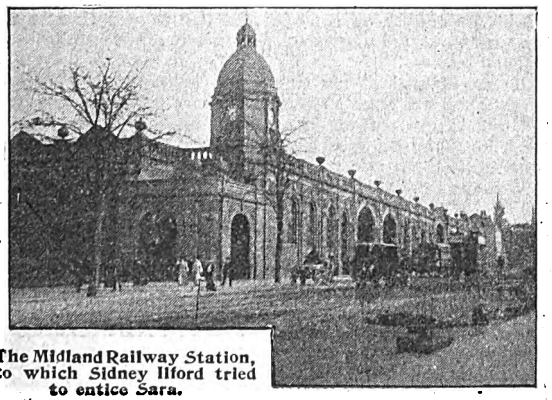
Slowly the curious, halting feet came along the corridor. Another minute they will reach my threshold; and then——?

I glance round for the bell, to reach it I must cross the room. It hangs upon the other side of the fireplace. I cannot stir. I cannot!

With the last effort of a rapidly paralysing will, I throw myself off the bed. Turning the key, I grasp it tightly and creep back, hiding under the clothes.

The steps pause outside my room. The door is softly tried, and in the silence I seem to catch the murmur of an oath at its resistance. Then comes a scratching on the paint. I throw back the bedclothes, and cautiously sit up. The dim light that streams through the window is suddenly intensified. The moon emerging from a cloud illumines the sky, and casts its beams with lavish splendour on the earth. In the clear, cold radiance the door shines silver. Fascinated, I watch the beams fall lower, lower till they reach the floor.

And there, ghostly and lean in the strange light, beneath



The Midland Railway Station, to which Sidney Ilford tried to entice Sara.

Granby Street, to which Sara went in order to dispatch a telegram to Maggie, telling her of her arrival.

the lintel of the door, curved upward, inward, like the talons of a bird of prey, stretched the *four fingers and a thumb* of a man's right hand.

It seems to my excited fancy that the door rises with the strain, that the fingers pressing with such cruel strength will lift it from its hinges. I hardly dare to breathe, the slightest sound may thwart my purpose.

Noiselessly and with infinite precaution I make my way to the dressing-table and feel for a dagger-shaped hatpin, which, sharp as a knife, is a valuable weapon of defence.

This hand that seeks to steal my lover's property—for that I feel is responsible for its appearance—shall not go empty away.

I stoop down by the door, poising the weapon carefully. And then with a quick movement stab the fingers with my pin. Bleeding and maimed, they are withdrawn, the footsteps shuffle back along the corridor—I am alone.

Reflection decided me that I had better keep silence as to my midnight adventure. Once again I must refrain from seeking help against my pursuers. Two attempts had already been made upon my life, as many upon my, or rather Noel's, property. All had failed. But the next—I sighed, my heart grew heavy. I decided not to leave Leicester, despite my fears. Hitherto I had fled before my enemies. This time I resolved to reverse my methods. I would stay in Leicester and defy the firm of Templeton and Co. to do their worst.

It was evident they did not intend to summon the law to their assistance; had they contemplated appealing to the police I should have been under arrest long since. They seemed to rely upon their strength and cunning to regain possession of the documents. It remained for me to defeat them by the power of love.

From the hotel I found my way down Granby Street, populous and bustling, to the Post Office, where I dispatched a wire to Maggie telling her of my safe arrival. My next call was at Wheeldon's, a large stationer's, with well stocked windows. My errand was to ask for employment. In a town like Leicester there must surely be a demand for typines. I was a skilled operator, and ought not to find a difficulty in getting a situation—until Noel returned.

The assistant stared somewhat at my request, and assured me there was no opening in that establishment, nor so far as he knew in any other.

Much depressed, I was turning to leave the shop when a customer at the other end of the counter came forward.

He had overheard my question. If I would forgive his interference he thought it possible he might be of use!

This, punctuated with smiles, and bows and flourishes of neatly gloved hands.

Very tall, with a slight, willowy figure, a fresh coloured face and a neat black moustache, despite his good looks and ingra-

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This is "The New Walk," Leicester. At this spot Sara had a most exciting adventure with Templeton himself, which will be fully described next week.

tiating manner the stranger did not favourably impress me. I looked him up and down, however, searched in vain for any trace of a likeness between him and one of the three partners, and finally decided he was well-meaning, if effusive.

"I heard only yesterday that Messrs. Cooper Corah, the big manufacturers, had a vacancy in their establishment for a young lady clerk. You might call at the office and inquire," he bowed again. "You might be successful, at any rate, you could try. I suppose," he tapped his left palm with the slender fingers of his right. "I suppose you have references and all that sort of thing?"

"I can offer the highest testimonials," I replied in the words of a ready letter writer. "There need be no difficulty as to that."

The stranger smiled severely, offered me his card, and bowed himself into the street. I followed, gazing absently after his tall figure.

The card bore the name of Sidney Ilford, and the address of a London club. I put it in my pocket and turned my steps in the direction of St. Margaret's Works.

Progress was necessarily slow; the Corporation was engaged in electrifying the tram service, and the roads for the time had become trenches filled with workmen, digging, hammering, clanging iron against iron in one continuous shriek.

The footpaths, encumbered by rubbish, were barricaded by huge mounds of gravel, and piles of timber. Round the clock house the din was at its height. Groups of pedestrians fascinated by the scene watched from the pavement, a solid mass of humanity—blocking the traffic, through which one had literally to fight a way.

From Granby Street and Gallowtree Gate I turned up Church Gate, exchanging the tall, prosperous buildings, wide thoroughfares, and bustling air of life for the stereotyped rows of red brick dwellings sacred to the artisan and operative.

I did not take the quickest route to Cooper Corah's factory. I missed my way, forgot my directions, and finally found myself in the middle of Abbey Park, within sight of the factory chimneys, but separated from them by winding paths and waving trees. A charming spot, the Park has an individuality that marks it out from kindred places of recreation. In the centre of the most populous part of the town, it is environed, by a forest of chimney stacks, that—over the flower beds, bright with many-coloured blossoms, over the water sparkling iridescent in the sunshine—breathe heavy clouds of smoke. The air throbs with the pulsation of vast machinery, the wind is charged with odours strange, indescribable, vaguely reminiscent of burnt leather—yet neither smoke nor the close proximity of toil can wholly mar the green quietness of this place of peace. Wrested from the encroaching tide of commerce, it lies tranquil and serene, held in the heart of the city's turmoil.

After some little trouble I arrived at Cooper Corah's, a large, white looking factory busy with the hum of many voices. I was directed to the counting-house, where I inquired if the firm were in need of a careful and accurate typine.

The gentleman interviewing me shook his head and assured me there was no vacancy of the kind in the establishment.

I pleaded that he might have overlooked the fact that such assistance was desired, but his denial was even more emphatic.

I left the place depressed at my failure, and irritated that I should have been sent on a fool's errand. What object could the smiling idiot in the stationer's shop have had in telling me such a string of falsehoods? It was evident he had invented the whole story. Love of interference would not explain, nor yet a malicious turn for joking. Could it be—

I stopped short. It was impossible he could have any connection with Templeton and Co. There was nothing to be gained by sending me to Cooper Corah's, *they* at any rate were not in league with my former employers.

By this time I had reached the churchyard of St. Margaret's, through which there lies a footpath. The beautiful tower of the old church rising above the sad discoloured gravestones loomed dark and stately against a background of blue sky.

The stillness of the scene took hold of me; here, in this place of the dead, the fact that I had life seemed, for the moment, wonderful enough to balance all my troubles. And then, out of the stillness that surrounded me, there came the sound of dragging footsteps that shuffled softly down the path.

Where had I heard the tread? My heart contracted, I felt again the terror of the night. That soft and stealthy step had passed down the hotel corridor, had paused outside my door.

With a cry I turned and faced—Sidney Ilford!

"Were you successful in your application at Cooper Corah's, Miss Gillespie?" he said, smirking.

"How do you know my name?" I asked, moving away.

"For a very sufficient reason," he returned. "I will give you full particulars if you will grant me a few minutes' conversation."

"I have not time," I answered, catching at the first excuse. "I am in a hurry, I wish you——"

He stayed the word upon my lips. Gripping my arm with his left hand—he had good cause to spare his right—he bent his head so that his face was level with my own.

"If you are wise you will hear me now," he said.

"I do not know you," I answered. "Let me go," I raised my voice. "Help!" I cried, urged to desperation. "Help!"

"If you call again, as Heaven is above us, I'll whistle for a constable and give you into custody. On what charge?" he laughed insultingly. "The police will know, at all events," he sneered. "Such an accomplished thief as yourself cannot hope to escape recognition."

As he stopped, he took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to me, still keeping a tight grip on my arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document, in a printed notice, there stared at me a hideous and distorted likeness of myself! With a cry I grasped the paper tight, and read, my cheeks aflame, the description of my face and figure that succeeded.

"Height 5ft. 6in., broad shoulders, slim waist, small feet and ankles. Red hair, green eyes, large mouth, good teeth! Anyone giving such information as will lead to the apprehension of the above will be rewarded with £100."

"This bill——"

"Is one of many," my companion interrupted. "Before to-night they will stare at you from every hoarding, face you at every railway station, haunt you in every street. Go—if you like"—he loosened his grip upon my arm, "but if you do, before to-night you will be lodged in gaol."

"Who are you?" I asked again. "What have you to do with me?"

"I will answer both your questions, but not here. It is impossible to converse on weighty matters in the middle of a public footpath. Let us sit down," and he pointed to a seat close to the wall, against which, ranged in solemn fashion, a row of tombstones reared their heads.

It was futile to combat the suggestion; I must know where I stood in regard to this unexpected ally of my enemies before I could hope to defeat his attack.

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"I suppose you are employed by Templeton and Co.?" I asked, seating myself as far as possible from him.

"I am an agent of the firm," he answered cautiously, "and as such, I have heard of the disappearance of their late typine—with notes to the value of a thousand pounds."

"You will, if you please," I answered promptly, "drop this style of conversation and speak plainly, or not at all. I took the notes, also the paper that Noel Masterman was entrapped into signing. You know I took them, as you know also why I did so. You are aware, no doubt, that Messrs. Templeton and Co. have tried to murder and to rob me. They have failed as you"—I looked at his right hand—"have failed also. Don't trouble to deny it!" I cried angrily. "You tried to break into my room last night. Proof?" I laughed scornfully. "There," I answered, and struck at the fingers of his right hand with my glove.

"You shall pay for that," he snarled, the mask thrown off. "I vow you shall pay——"

"You waste time in threats," I interrupted. "Let us come to business. What are your—terms?"

"Either you deliver to me the bank-notes and the document signed by your lover, or you return with me to London to await Templeton's instructions."

"If I refuse?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Before night, I again repeat, the town will be flooded with these bills."

"I don't believe you. It would be too great a risk for the firm to have me arrested. I know too much."

He grinned maliciously.

"To have you arrested on the charge of stealing the notes and the document would be a foolish proceeding of which my employers are not capable. The charge preferred against you would be that of misappropriating some £5 of the money given to you for office expenses. In other words, embezzling the petty cash. How does that strike you, Miss Gillespie? What sort of defence would you, an absconding clerk, masquerading under false names, have to offer? Whatever charge you brought against your late employers would redound to your discredit, not to theirs. Besides"—he gave me a side look from his crafty eyes—"besides, nothing you said could be proved. It's not likely you're such a fool as to carry the papers about with you," he paused, and I felt his glance burn into mine. Not by so much as a tremor did I betray the anxiety the question caused me. If he gained a hint that at that moment I had the papers, he would—I knew it—close with me in a frantic attempt to gain them.

"No," I said calmly, "I'm not so silly as that. I'm like an advance agent, always a town ahead. I left the papers"—I paused as if confused, and bit my lip.

Mr. Sidney Ilford made a note of my slip, and no doubt decided to communicate with the firm's representative at Northampton, so soon as he was through with me.

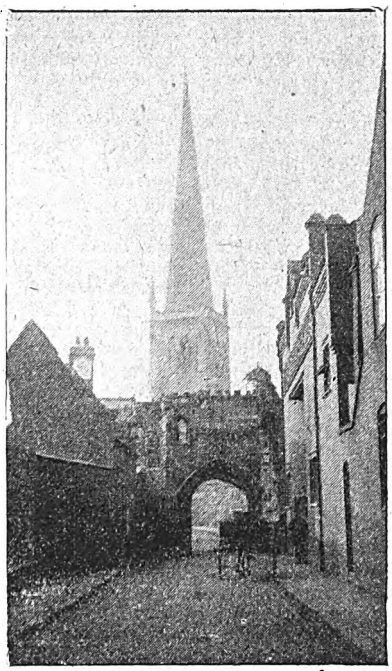
"Am I to give you in charge or not?"

"You haven't the power," I answered, fighting desperately. "I can prove you were not my employer."

"Pardon me," his suavity of manner had returned, "you are mistaken. As it happens I am a director of the company that employed you, and as such I can have you detained on suspicion. Once you are in confinement, if only for four-and-twenty hours, the game is ours. We know all your movements, where you went, with whom you stayed, since you left the office. We shall discover the whereabouts of the papers almost immediately. Meanwhile you will be committed for trial on the evidence of the respected man of business, Mr. Templeton, found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment."

"Against that you suggest I should accompany you to London? What advantage should I get from the latter course?"

"You would be spared the ignominy of a trial, and the disgrace of imprisonment. You know enough of the firm, Miss Gillespie, to understand that when I say you will be found guilty, such will be the case. There is, however, a third alternative; give me the notes," he stretched out his maimed right hand, "you can make better terms with me than Templeton. Tell me where the notes are to be found. And, and"—his face worked convulsively, his eyes shone with cupidity—"you can keep the paper," he said hoarsely. "I don't require that, it's the notes I want. Give them to me, and I will tell you where you can find your lover. It's the last chance you'll have, Miss Gillespie. Where are they?" He brought his face close to mine. "Only tell me and you shall be with Noel Masterman this afternoon."



Church Gate, at which point Sara made a daring and successful attempt to escape from Ilford.

The temptation to yield was terrible. All that I had endured, the terror, the pain, the agony of fright, the apprehension of discovery combined to weaken me. After all a thousand pounds was a small price to pay for happiness. Noel would not grudge ten times that amount. Should I consent? The eager face watched mine.

I turned upon my tempter fiercely.

"I will not give you the notes," I answered hotly.

"Then——"

"Neither will you give me in charge," I interrupted. "I have made my choice. I elect to go with you to London. Come," and I rose prepared to accompany him.

My decision seemed to surprise, not to say disappoint him, and he wasted some time and eloquence in trying to induce me to accept his terms. At last, with a bad grace, he resigned himself to the inevitable and leaving the churchyard, linked his arm in mine, and led me in the direction of Granby Street.

"We'll go by the Midland," he said, "there's a fast train to London about one, I think."

It wanted but a quarter to the hour, yet he did not seem to hasten, and I judged he was in some perplexity how to act. It struck me as possible that Templeton might not be best pleased at the turn things had taken. Probably he was not in London; he might be engaged in some transaction in the provinces, which he would not care to leave.

In that case, I thought, it would be doing my former employer a kindness were I to make good my escape. That I had not the slightest intention of accompanying Mr. Ilford to London, I have, I trust, made sufficiently plain. I only watched my opportunity to break loose from my captor and take refuge in flight.

The opportunity came quickly. At the corner of Church Gate our progress was stopped by a dense mass of men and women watching the men at work upon the tram-lines. It was the dinner-hour, and every one curtailed their leisure to inspect the progress of the alterations.

In the middle of the crowd I threw my whole weight upon Ilford with such a sudden jerk, that, staggering, he involuntarily threw up his hand. Snatching my arm from his

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grasp, I flung myself heavily among the crowd around us. Rushing, dodging, I forced a way until I reached the front rank of the throng and essayed to make my way along the street.

Immediately Sidney Ilford yelled out the cry of "Thief, stop thief!" A thousand throats took up the cry, eager for pursuit as a pack of wolves. At the cry I changed my course, and, doubling like a hare, fled across the road; over the stones, the rails, the rubbish that made the way all but impassable I fought a path, until I reached the pavement on the other side.

There—Heaven bless him—some kind Samaritan made way for me, and tried to stop the chase, that, yelling at all top speed, came after me. Down Gallowtree Gate, the road growing clearer and my pursuers closer. Gasping I fled, Noel's name on my lips, Noel's paper at my heart.

Down Market Street, barely escaping the clutch of greedy hands, over the cobble stones into the Market-place, thronged with stalls. It was Saturday, and end to end they stood, loaded with meat and vegetables, sweetmeats and cakes—and everything the busy housewife wants to buy. My heart in my throat I dodged between the stalls, overturning bales of merchandise in my mad flight. There never was a busier market than Leicester upon Saturday. The place was packed, one could walk upon the people's heads. The chase let loose, charged marketers and stalls with a great rush so that neat, well-adorned barrows, thrown helter-skelter one against each other, collapsed and fell with a crash on the ground.

Meanwhile with panting breath I crept behind a large capacious stall hung with lace curtains of all sorts and prices. The proprietress, a stout comely woman, took pity on my frightened face.

"Here," she said shortly, and pushed me underneath a pile of goods stacked in a corner close against the awning By this time the pursuit had cooled; faced by infuriated hucksters, the friends of "justice" felt their enthusiasm abate. They slunk off rapidly, leaving Sidney Ilford to continue his search alone.

Once or twice I thought I heard his voice, and felt a chill run through me. Gradually, however, my apprehension died away, I emerged from my hiding place and sought my protector.

In the middle of my earnest thanks, a shout arose from the neighbouring streets.

"Fire," screamed the crowd. "Fire!" The cry was taken up, repeated on all sides. With one sweeping movement the crowd, gathering at the cry, poured down Gallowtree Gate and Granby Street, to where a thick cloud of evil smoke darkened the sky.

Yielding to the attraction wielded by the very name of "Fire," I abruptly left my shelter and hurried from the market to the blazing pile—a shoe factory in Campbell Street. The building was well alight. Luckily there was no fear of loss of life, all the hands had left the place an hour ago.

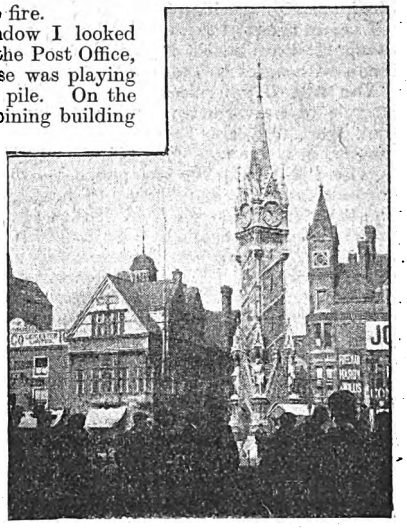
At last, however, a fire-engine made its appearance; ladders were run up against the building, and some attempt made to subdue the flames. By this time another engine appeared, and under the direction of a grey-bearded official, whom the crowd greeted as Superintendent Ely, the pumps were got to work.

But the fire had too firm a grip upon the place to give way easily. The air was dense with smoke, the flames shooting through the roof were fanned by a strong breeze, that cast the charred fragments of slate and brick upon the crowd below. The place was getting all too hot for safety. It occurred to me that from the back windows of the hotel I could command a safer view than from the street.

Pushing a path through the crowd, that somewhat stolidly lined the road, I made my way back to the hotel. The house was in an uproar, the factory was in too close proximity not to raise a feeling of alarm.

The corridors were dripping with water, exuding from the pipes that had been pressed into the service of the brigade. Through a landing window the glare in the sky was frightful to behold; I hurried up the staircase, fled down the corridor, into my little room—hot with the raging of the fire.

From my window I looked over the roof of the Post Office, from which a hose was playing on the burning pile. On the roofs of the adjoining building men stood shouting directions to the firemen. A huge sheet of flame, red-hearted, yellow-tipped, hung like a curtain between earth and sky. The water playing from all sides, seemed to have no effect. I thought the factory doomed. Engrossed with the sight, I hung over the window-sill, and oblivious of all save the burning pile, did not hear soft steps outside my door. Not till the grating of the key in the lock *from the outside*, warned me of danger, did I realise what had happened. Sidney Ilford had traced me to the hotel and had fastened me a prisoner in my room!



The crowd watching the men at work on the tram lines.

For a moment I hesitated whether I should peal the bell and summon the assistance of the servants.

Ilford had possibly left the hotel either to communicate with Templeton or to fetch the police. My chance of escape lay in his absence. If I called for help it would mean a delay in leaving the place.

There was a telegram lying on my table. It read:

"Important news for you. Coming to-morrow.—MAGGIE."

News—that meant news of Noel. Maybe he was in England. Perhaps we would be with me to-morrow, nay this very afternoon. In a passion of joy, I kissed the precious words.

I was a prisoner in my room. Useless to try and force the lock, futile to ring the bell. There remained but one way of egress—the window. From a great height I looked down on slanting roofs of slate, slippery with water. To the left the factory blazed on high, to the right—I drew back, a scream of horror broke from my lips. From an adjoining building two men were manipulating a long ladder in the direction of the hotel. In the confusion of the fire, fearing that theirs would be the next house attacked, none paid heed to the doings of frightened householders, men pumped water, erected ladders, directed a hose as pleased them best. The ladder that slowly but surely was approaching the direction of my window was supported by a tall, square-shouldered man, under the directions of a man some years his senior. And in the two I recognised Richard Templeton and Harrington Shackell!

The ladder which reached my window was steadied into position. Try as I would I could not displace the iron that rested on the sill. A slight boyish figure set his foot upon the lowest rung. Rigby was coming towards me.

A sudden burst of smoke clouded my view, so hot, so close were the flames that they scorched my cheeks and seemed to burn my eyes.

When I looked again Rigby was nearer. I caught the gleam of a weapon in his hand.

"Help! Help!" I scream, and know no help can come.

And then, with blind fury I throw myself against the figure clambering now into the room.

(The Leicester episode concludes next week.)

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Faint Heart and Fair Lady.

How a Man Pleaded for his Friend.

ONCE Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore were bosom friends. Something happened; they were never seen to speak again and they cut one another dead whenever they met. This is the curious story, never before related, of their estrangement.

One evening Tiverton sat in his sanctum—called by courtesy his study. He was a reader, a voracious reader, but chiefly of the lighter forms of literature. What life lacked for him in romance he found between the covers of novels.

Unannounced, as usual, Ridgemore entered. They warmly shook hands, and Tiverton pulled forward a second armchair. There was clearly a more than common understanding between them.

"You've been quite deserting me, Jim, of late."

"I've not dropped in this week, if that's what you mean."

"Nor last week either! What's been amiss?"

"I'll tell you. It's nothing very serious, but—let me light up first!"

Satisfied that his pipe was alight, Ridgemore continued:

"Something has occurred, Harry, which I reckoned entirely impossible."

"You've come into a fortune?"

"I suppose I have—a piece of good fortune anyhow."

"You're promised a rise at the office, eh?"

"Nothing so material! It's a trifle hard to tell you, old friend. Got a good novel there?"

"My dear chap, you make a statement that raises my curiosity to boiling point, and then calmly suggest taking up a book."

"I didn't mean that, Harry. You're a novel reader. You know something of the hearts of men—and women. I think you will understand me."

Tiverton looked at his friend with a perplexed air. His manner was mysterious and slightly nervous.

"I don't know you, Jim, in this serious mood."

"Nor I myself. The whole thing has just turned me upside down. The fact is—I am in love."

The candid and unexpected announcement caused Tiverton to edge his chair a couple of inches away in surprise.

"Don't shun me as though it were measles," the other humorously observed.

"You've astonished me—I confess it. But my congratulations are none the less sincere, Jim." He held out his hand. "When did the engagement take place?"

"I never said a word about an engagement. The two things don't naturally follow in the least. You shouldn't jump to conclusions."

"I see. The course of true love not running entirely smooth, eh, Jim?"

Ridgemore nodded. His pipe had gone out. He paused to relight it.

"I wish I could help you, old fellow."

"Probably you can, Harry. I don't understand girls—have never pretended to. If I'd had a sister of my own it might have been different."

Tiverton looked sceptical. He had four sisters of his own, and they did not help him one whit to understand the sex. He kept silent.

"My case is just this, Harry. I love the girl, but don't know in the least her feelings towards myself. The usual advice in such circumstances is to go in and win, but I'm a nervous, backward chap and simply can't move without knowing a bit first how the land lies. It's in that I think you can help me."

"My dear Jim! Why, I don't even know the girl!"

"Yes, you do."

"It's not—er—one of my sisters?"

He advanced the idea with a certain timidity.

"No, don't look so anxious, Harry. I've no designs in that quarter. But you're pretty warm. It is a relative of yours—your cousin, Nellie Mayo."

Tiverton's pipe dropped from his mouth into his lap, then on to the floor. He did not trouble to brush away the ashes which were distributed over his clothes in its fall.

"That little kid!"

Ridgemore looked slightly huffy.

"She's not so very little."

"It seems only yesterday she put up her hair and took to long frocks."

"She's twenty-one next year, Harry, and only half a head shorter than myself."

"I beg pardon, but I've always looked upon her as a youngster. And to think that you're in love with her!"

"Is it so very queer?" Ridgemore's tones were not very conciliatory.

"Forgive me! I did not mean to put you out; it was the surprise. Well, she's a decent girl and pretty, very pretty, some people have said."

The other's face wreathed itself in smiles.

"You're right, Harry. And she's good, isn't she?"

"I believe so. But how can I help you? It's hardly in my line."

Ridgemore pointed to the rows of novels.

"And you've devoured all those. I simply want you when you meet her next to find out how the land lies. You will do the thing tactfully, I know. Introduce my name in conversation and get to know somehow what she thinks of me."

"But what good will that do?"

"It will encourage me to proceed. She has rather a shy manner; I'm shy, too, and can't get behind it. But when I know that she really does care for me, I sha'n't be nervous any longer."

Tiverton looked reflective.

"It's rather a queer thing to ask, Jim. You don't wish me to disclose your feelings towards her?"

"By all means if you think it will help matters."

"But if things miscarry?"

"They won't. You're far too level-headed for that. Well, Harry?"

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Thank you no end! You're the best friend I ever had. I shall owe you everything if all goes right. Let me know, won't you?"

* * * * * *

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"It is good of you, Harry, to bring me here."

"Not at all! I'm glad you are enjoying yourself."

"It doesn't seem to you a waste of a precious Saturday afternoon?"

Tiverton thought of his important mission.

"I could not employ it in any better way, Nellie."

They were seated in Hyde Park on the banks of the Serpentine. Before them the water, smooth as a mirror, gleamed in the sunshine. On its surface several boats were gliding, but the weather was too hot for energetic rowing. The fresh green of the trees showed up against the blue sky, hardly flecked by a cloud. It was a perfect day and Nature was in her most sentimental mood.

Tiverton congratulated himself. He had come to the very spot to open the subject engrossing his mind. He felt himself burning with zeal for the success of his friend's suit. Ridgemore was a fortunate fellow.

"One might be twenty miles from anywhere instead of in the heart of London," Nellie Mayo dreamily observed.

"If you listen very attentively, you will hear the roar of 'buses at the Marble Arch."

"Don't be horrid! This is fairyland. Perhaps you will take me for a row presently, Harry."

"Perhaps—when the sun goes down."

"Ah, you're lazy."

"No. But I want to have a good talk with you first. One can't chat properly when toiling with the sculls."

In her cousin's eyes, Nellie had acquired a new importance. He scanned her features. They were far prettier than he had ever imagined, and in this summer costume—a white dress and a pink sun hat—she looked absolutely bewitching. Perhaps, after all, the fact of Jim being "gone" on her was not the wonder it seemed.

But it was time enough to open proceedings.

"Do you know something, Nellie?"

"What do you mean? Oh, isn't this place a dream?"

Ignoring her second question, Harry replied only to the first.

"Why, Nellie, that you're getting quite pretty."

"Nonsense! I wish you would be sensible."

Yet she could not disguise the pleasure in her eyes.

"But you are. There, I shouldn't be at all surprised if some fellow fell in love with you."

"You are too absurd, Harry."

"I mean it, though—every word of it."

His glance lingered on her head. What pretty ringlets of hair! What a well-shaped ear, like an island in their midst! How delicate and white a neck, and what a rosebud of a mouth! He involuntarily began to hum the tune, "Lucky Jim."

Nellie checked him.

"Hush, Harry! I mean, don't spoil the beautiful quiet." A pause. "I say, you weren't chaffing just now?"

"I'm not given to chaff. You *are* pretty, and I know a fellow who——"

He stopped. Wisdom dictated more cautious progress at this juncture. Too sudden a disclosure of Ridgemore's ardour for her might upset the girl.

"Well, what?" She could not wait for him to proceed.

"Thinks a tremendous lot of you."

"Oh, Harry, who?"

But he only laughed.

Nellie was growing visibly excited. There was a fine colour in her cheeks, and her eyes glistened. Tiverton felt more and more interested in her. A surfeit of sentimental novels had worked its way into his youthful blood. He began to draw upon his recollections of various episodes in them.

"Ah, Nellie, when love seizes a fellow, it lifts him up to the skies."

"I know the feeling a little bit."

"You do? Then I needn't explain."

"Oh, please do! I like it!"

"Well, you feel warm all over and most awfully jolly. And you vow to be such a decent fellow—to be worthy of her, you see."

Nellie's lip was trembling, and the colour in her cheeks matched the shade of her hat. Tiverton drew further and further upon his imagination.

"You sleep with her photograph under your pillow, and kiss it half a dozen times directly you wake up in the morning."

"I haven't had mine taken—er—since I was quite young."

"Then you must at once, Nellie. You don't know how someone would appreciate it."

Suddenly Harry felt a small gloved hand gently pressing his own. It was evidently Nellie's way of showing her appreciation of his gratifying remarks. Ridgemore's success was assured now; she was a girl with a heart.

"Oh, Harry, why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I? How could I?"

"I don't know. But it would have been nice to have known before."

A man came up and demanded twopence for their seats.

Tiverton paid the money and was glad to see his back, Nellie played with the handle of her parasol. She was evidently brooding deeply over something.

"Harry!"

"Yes, Nellie!"

"I wonder if you saw *Scrappy Bits* last week."

"It doesn't often come my way. What was in it?"

"It was so silly. I didn't agree with it in the least."

"What did it say?"

"That first cousins shouldn't marry."

"Gracious goodness! Nellie! You don't suppose—why——" He stopped, speechless.

"No, Harry, it's all right. As I said, I don't believe it a bit. You know I've loved you for years, don't you, dear?"

He stammered something which she construed into assent.

* * * * *

When Ridgemore came down to breakfast on Monday morning, a bulky letter from Tiverton lay on the table. For a minute or so he fingered the envelope. What had caused Tiverton to write so lengthy a communication? He nervously broke the seal.

There was a long preamble, apologetic in vein. Why could not Tiverton, with such hazards at stake, come more quickly to the point? He read impatiently on.

An uneasy suspicion took root in his mind.

"I implore your forgiveness, Jim, for what I am going to tell you," the letter read. "You know the interview with Nellie was not of my own seeking; I sought it out solely on your account. All, as I imagined, was proceeding so nicely for you, when there was a stunning revelation. Prepare yourself for a shock, old man! Nellie told me that she loved *me* and had done so for a long time. We are now engaged to be married."

Incredulity—dismay—anger flitted across Ridgemore's face in rapid succession.

He tore the letter to bits and threw it into the grate.

As he brushed his silk hat for the City, he said to the cat:

"There, if you want a thing done properly, you always have to do it yourself."

The cat blinked.

And that is why Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore, once bosom friends, never now speak to one another.

Herbert Jamieson.

MISS PASSEE: "I should like to see a young man try to kiss me." Miss Young: "You cruel thing!"

SHE: "Shall I sing 'Then You'll Remember Me'?" He: "Yes; but, Ethel, don't forget that I want to remember you as kindly as possible."

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A Girl's Boast.

How Joan Mortlock Tried to Carry it out and what Came of the Attempt.

"SHE ought to have been a boy!"

Richard Mortlock thought of the words of the head-mistress of the Mount School for Girls as he watched his nineteen-year-old daughter romping about the lawn with her great dog. The very picture of health, youth, and exuberance of animal spirits! Dark hair, sparkling eyes, cheeks with a touch of carmine, well-rounded figure scarcely above the medium height, and full of natural grace and suppleness. Richard Mortlock thought of the bygone days when his wife and Joan's mother had appeared to him as the central figure of a picture that had much similarity with that upon which he was gazing, and his eyes grew moist.

"No! It's wrong!" he murmured. "Miss Jevons doesn't understand. Joan has as much roguishness in her composition as most boys, and she dearly loves a little fun, but to say that she ought to have been a boy is wrong! To turn such a charming piece of humanity into a member of the opposite sex would be a mistake! Although I say it as shouldn't, as the village people remark, Joan will perform a greater and better duty as she is, by bestowing her wealth of affection and energy upon some worthy man, and urging him on to greater things than he would be able to accomplish without a wife, or with one who has less mischief in her composition than Joan!"

He smiled, and the moisture that had crept into his eyes was gone. His smile deepened as he saw her racing the dog to the end of the lawn and away to the spot where a small river flowed past the grounds of Mortlock House. Then he saw her gather her skirts together and he uttered an exclamation of anxiety. He made a step forward as if to pass out of the window in pursuit, but stopped immediately. The girl and the dog had made a leap and had alighted on the opposite bank, where Joan faced about and waved her hand airily towards her father.

Mortlock answered the greeting, then turned back into the room and seated himself in a really easy-chair. That trifling escapade had caused a change in the train of his thoughts.

Joan's animal spirits might cause her to run the risk of bodily harm. Might it not also happen that her mischief-loving propensities, in conjunction with her unsophisticated ideas, would lead her into other dangers—dangers of the heart or soul?

"I should not have the slightest misgiving if she were—if she saw things as clearly as some girls do, but she is somewhat too trustful!" mused Mortlock. "I ought to have a feminine relative here with her, but I don't care to damp Joan's spirits by tying her to the society of someone much older than herself!" He sat staring at the carpet for several minutes, then he shook himself and arose with a laugh. "I am foolish! Joan has enough wit to take care of herself and not permit her boisterous energy to lead her into any madcap act!"

The object of Richard Mortlock's solicitude certainly seemed able to take care of herself, but how far this confidence was justified will be seen in the sequel.

On the following day there was to be a gathering in the Abbey ruins, a kind of garden party, where the Rector would have tea served and the young people would enjoy themselves. Joan was looking forward to this afternoon's pleasure; it was something to do, and there would be an opportunity to see the Rector's guest, of whom she had heard much from her friend, Edith Graham. That young lady, some two summers older than Joan, called at Mortlock House in the morning to ascertain if Joan were *sure* to be there, and it was that call which caused the trouble to commence.

"Of course I am sure to be there!" declared Joan emphatically. "It will be grand. I am dying to see this handsome stranger, naturally! What is he like?"

"Handsome! That sums it all up!" replied Edith with a laugh. "He has just one defect; he is coldly polite to ladies, and rumour has it that he is invulnerable to the charms of feminity!"

"Is he?" cried Joan, laughing in her turn. "Well, he must not think that he is so superior a being and that the members of our sex are so inferior!"

"Oh, he isn't at all like *that*! But he appears to be one of those men who—who are not easily captivated!"

"Wouldn't it be fun to see him a captive to the charms of one of us!" cried Joan, clapping her hands. "I wish——"

"One of *us*!" echoed Edith. "Why, you haven't long left school."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself!" said Joan truthfully. "I was thinking of the others. And yet," she continued in a tone of mingled vexation and jest, the former sentiment having been caused by Edith's rather sarcastic observation, "why shouldn't even poor little I be capable of doing it? I should like to do it just for the fun of the thing! It would be grand to make this invulnerable man surrender at discretion! I have a good mind to try!"

"You might as well spare yourself the trouble; you will not succeed!" said Edith Graham coldly.

Joan's eyes flashed; those words were really a challenge, and they aroused all her spirit. The idea was one calculated to afford scope for her mischief-loving propensities, which was another inducement to carry it out. Without fully estimating the significance of her words, Joan burst forth with:

"I'll do it! I'll bring him to the proposing point, or I'll forfeit my next Christmas box from papa in favour of the county hospital!"

Edith Graham laughed a trifle hysterically because, as she gazed at the flushed face and small figure, she could not prevent herself from inwardly acknowledging that Joan stood as good a chance as anyone of accomplishing such a task. They separated with a friendliness which, it must be confessed, was not quite genuine, and Joan set her lips firmly together, shut out all misgivings, and prepared to carry out her boast! Yes; it was a boast and she was wrong to have made it, but she would go through with it!

The afternoon was an ideal one for such an occasion. The sun shone on the hills and dales of the ground which had once been the domain of saintly men and, prior to that, a castle fortress. Wild flowers grew at the foot of the ruins of ancient walls, ivy-covered some of them, forming themselves into shady nooks, the grass of the flat land was velvety, and here and there divided by a parterre of cultivated flowers. Seats were fixed about the ruins for those who desired to rest without sitting on Mother Earth.

Joan was full of gaiety; her lithe form moved swiftly about the grounds and attracted general attention. Joan had been briefly introduced to the Rector's guest, who had bowed in the

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most polished manner, but had otherwise not been much interested in her, to judge by appearances.

Mr. Frank Spencer had disappeared; he seemed to be one by himself and was probably enjoying a pipe in some quiet nook. "From which I shall promptly haul him!" murmured Joan with determination; "a man mustn't think that he can escape the civilities of society in that way!"

Quite suddenly, in turning a corner, she came upon him; in fact, she nearly tripped over his foot as he sat with his back against an ivy-covered wall and his legs stretched at full-length. She hastily apologised, and he, not in the least disconcerted, lazily informed her that she "needn't mention it!"

"I have mentioned it!" said Joan. "I always think that it is rather absurd to tell people not to mention this or that when they have done it!"

"I shouldn't think so deeply if I were you! It's hard work and causes wrinkles!" he returned imperturbably.

She looked at him searchingly, but he gave no trace of his feelings, and she could not make up her mind whether he was quietly chaffing her or not.

"Thinking again?" he inquired, as she did not speak, and Joan was piqued to find that her eyebrows had contracted in meditation.

"I was thinking that you would make a good picture of——" She stopped herself abruptly, before the acid little speech was finished.

"Laziness!" He finished it for her nonchalantly. "You were going to say that, weren't you?"

"I intended to say 'indolence.' It's more polite!" she returned, with a mischievous twinkle in the expressive eyes which he did not fail to notice.

"It is very comfortable here!" he said, with an attempt to excuse himself. "I cannot ask you to sit down, as there is no seat. Pity, isn't it? I am sure we could pass a few minutes very agreeably in conversation; we understand each other tolerably well, do we not?"

Joan opened her lips to reply, checked herself, and then decided to say it, which she did with an air of defiance.

"Most gentlemen, less indolent, would have made another suggestion; but I can understand that it would require too much energy on your part!"

"By Jove! That's an arrow-pointed little speech, Miss Mortlock, but I'll own that I deserve it!" He sprang to his feet. "May I walk with you for a minute or two through these lovely grounds? I will not bore you long with my presence!"

Joan felt her face grow crimson. He would think her very forward! She must check her capacity for making a quick retort!

"I can't refuse, since I have really asked for it!" thought Joan, feeling uncomfortably warm.

So they strolled about the grounds for nearly half-an-hour together, till they came upon the Rector and a small party who engaged them in talk, and Joan contrived to slip away.

The half-hour with Mr. Frank Spencer had been a very agreeable one; she had forgotten her discomfort and they had chatted and bantered one another in true friendly fashion. He had received a brilliant education and she was by no means a vapid schoolgirl.

They met every day for the next week, either at some social gathering or while out on an errand or taking a constitutional along the country road. Somehow, Joan felt that she looked forward to these meetings, and she was disappointed on the one occasion when they did not have a minute or two in private conversation. She wanted to tell herself that she was pursuing her plan, but this was not exactly tasteful to her; and when she tried to examine her sentiments and find an explanation for this desire to see Frank Spencer, the answer that came to her mind caused her to blush at her own reflection in the mirror, and to call it "an absurd idea!" So she continued to look for the time when she would meet him, and to refuse to understand why she did so!

He met her one day about a mile from home and they walked together in the direction of Mortlock House and the Rectory. When those two commenced a quiet chat it was like knocking flint against steel, for sparks would fly very quickly. Spencer took a delight in exciting sharp retorts from this impulsive girl, and she tried to galvanise him into life, as she said.

"Don't you think I have idled my time away quite sufficiently here, Miss Mortlock?" he asked quizzically. "I ought to be devoting myself to some more useful occupation, eh?"

But Joan did not reply. Her power of speech seemed to have deserted her for the moment. Her face was averted, or he would have seen that it went pale, and afterwards became more red than before. Going away? She thought she heard him say that he was going away to-morrow! And what about her boast? No, it wasn't that which disturbed her. It was—nothing, nothing, nothing! How silly she was!

"I shall be sorry to go," he was saying. "It has been very pleasant here, but I must return. It isn't fair to leave a sweetheart so long. I am afraid I haven't treated her fairly, as I promised to be back about a week sooner. I wonder if she is capable of jealousy? Hardly, I think! I feel sure that she would like to see you, Miss Mortlock. I have to——"

"That is father's trap," interrupted Joan in a shrill voice, that was not at all like hers. "I can ride home now, thank you!"

Richard Mortlock came up at a trot and exchanged cordial greetings with the young man.

"I can give you a lift if you are going straight back," he said. "I think we can squeeze three persons on this seat!"

Frank Spencer looked at Joan and waited for her to second the invitation; it struck him that he would not object to the squeezing if she would only glance at him with that roguish flash of the eyes! But there was no answer to his gaze.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mortlock, but I prefer to walk this morning!" he said politely, but he could not altogether repress the ring of disappointment which struck Joan's ears very strangely.

Joan, much to her father's surprise, complained of a wretched headache and did not come down from her bedroom after lunch. On the following morning she did not look at all well, and Mortlock was much concerned, but Joan would not let him send for the doctor. "I shall be all right again by to-morrow, papa!" she told him. Mortlock wondered and wondered at the cause, and his heart grew a trifle heavy with the suspicion that it was a love trouble.

It is questionable whether any girl ever felt more wretched than Joan. She had faced her trouble squarely and she had realised the truth.

She had deliberately set out to bring this man to her feet with no more praiseworthy object than that of carrying out a boast born of her own love of fun and the vague challenge of an envious girl. She had been caught in her own trap, for—she loved Frank Spencer! Why should she conceal it from herself any longer? She had grown to love him with an ardour that almost startled her now that she recognised it. And he? He had fought her with her own weapons. He had made her love him, and he must know it, and yet he had a sweetheart at home!

She would lose her £10 note, and be laughed at into the bargain, but what was that compared with the loss of Frank? How dreary life would be in the coming days without him! She shivered as if the cold grip of winter were upon her, but the next moment it seemed as if the air of the room would stifle her, and she went out into the spacious grounds.

The Joan who walked wearily through the garden and into the shrubbery beyond was a different being from the merry, emancipated school-girl who had tripped so lightly along those very paths three weeks or so previously. This Joan was more of a woman, with a woman's emotions and knowledge of some of the bitterness of life. Love had caused the transformation, and the disappointment of a love wrongly given had occasioned the fuller knowledge of the fact that

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life is a serious journey along the unknown. And Joan began dimly to realise that the joys of life are made greater by contrast with its sorrows.

She reached a small opening, a circular space of about a dozen feet in diameter, on one side of which a seat had been placed by her father. It was so quiet there, and Mr. Mortlock liked to retire to this spot occasionally and smoke his pipe. Joan threw herself on the wooden form and leant against the hedge at the back; she closed her eyes and tried to imagine what life would be without Frank. In utter weariness she must have fallen asleep, for she was awakened by a touch. She opened her eyes and saw Frank Spencer trying to balance her hat neatly on her head without rousing her.

"Now, you should not have moved!" he observed reproachfully. "It fell off and you were exposed to the sun, so I was trying to put it on without disturbing you. You have spoilt the picture by jumping up in that fashion!"

He was looking at her with such evident admiration that the girl's face grew red at his heartlessness.

"How dare you come here?" she asked, trying hard to repress the tears of vexation. "You have no business here!"

"Oh, haven't I?" he said imperturbably. "I think I have. I've come on very serious business! I should like to know why you treated me so shabbily yesterday, when your father came up!"

"I treated you no worse than you deserved!" she retorted.

"Two blacks don't make a white," he returned, not in the least disturbed. "If I had treated you shabbily, which is not the case, it didn't right matters when you followed a bad example, or thought you were following it. Now I want to know why!"

"I shall not tell you!" she cried fiercely.

"You must!" he said, approaching her.

"I shall not!" cried Joan again. She tried to get away from him, but the seat was in the way; and, somehow, she did not care to remind him of what he had said. "Please leave me!"

"Not till you have told me that you love me as madly as I love you, Joan!" he said, all his assumed coolness gone.

She felt his arms grasping her; she struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless, and in a second he held her captive, his eyes gazing into hers, his lips close to hers.

"May I take a kiss to seal the compact?" he asked passionately.

She bent her head still further back, and, in desperation, gasped: "Wait till you see your sweetheart at home!"

He relaxed his grasp in sheer surprise, and she released herself, standing erect before him, defiant though in tears, and panting for breath. She was a perfect picture, and his amazement and annoyance melted away under the spell which her appearance cast over him.

"There is some blunder!" he said gravely. "It is very stupid of me to call her my sweetheart, but I never thought that it would lead to such a scene as this. Joan, surely you didn't think me such a rascal as to make love to two women at once?"

Joan grew more confused than ever, but Frank came to her relief.

"It was all my fault, Joan, of course. Sit down here with me, and I will explain. My widowed mother has been wanting me to marry for the last three years, but I have never felt the slightest inclination to fall in love with anyone. But the dear mother insisted every little while that she would like to see me settled with a good wife. I always laughed it off, and one day I told her, just to tease her, that I should always regard her as my sweetheart and should never want another. And I have kept up the fun ever since, calling her sweetheart so commonly that I say it unconsciously, much to the amusement of my friends.

She felt his arms grasping her. She struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless.

"So, Joan, you see that my sweetheart at home is my mother! And I can assure you, dear," he added tenderly, "that she will be most happy to resign the title and position in your favour."

He placed his arms round her once more, and Joan, all blushes and repentance, was yielding to his embrace, when a horrid thought crossed her mind.

"Oh, I cannot!" she moaned, burying her face in her hands. "What will they say? They will think me a designing creature and call me horrid names, and tell anybody that I didn't love you one scrap, and that I married you to carry out a boast, and——"

"Dear me! What dreadfully bad grammar you are using, to say 'and' so often," he interposed in a droll tone, "Better tell me all about it, because I am not going to lose you if I can help it."

Thereupon Joan unburdened herself, with half-averted face, and told him what had passed between Edith Graham and the mischief-loving girl that Joan Mortlock used to be.

"Oh, is that all?" he inquired, with a smile. "Well, we won't worry about that! I think we had better say that the result of the battle was a compromise, and that we will make the donation to the hospital jointly. It seems to me that such a proceeding will disarm all who might desire to say unkind things. So we will call it settled, and now, as we have cleared away all obstacles, I'm going to have that kiss!"

And he had it, followed by others, so that there should be no mistake about the binding character of the compact!

Geo. Day.

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AN INTERRUPTION.

Telling Why a Girl Altered Her Mind.

THE many exciting and merry features of the long day that had just passed had tired the passengers of the s.s *Imperial*, and one by one they left the saloon to seek their bunks, to dream of the Old Country, whose shores they would be able to discern when they rose in the morning. In a short time the saloon was empty but for two.

A young woman, as fair a specimen of her sex as the most exacting critic could wish for, who was seated at the piano, situated at one end of the cosily-lounged, white-and-gold decorated room, playing a soft melody, and a man tanned with two years' wear of war, and exposure to a strong African sun, who was leaning over her, watching the deft fingers manipulating the keys.

The last few notes of the air sounded on the piano, and the player leant back on her stool, and looked up at the man with a smile. He did not say a word, but with a strange, tense look flashing across his face, suddenly bent his head, and kissed the red lips so near his own. For one moment of awful tension Alison Cartwright gazed at him with an expression of horrified amazement, and with a look in her eyes as if something had just been revealed to her that cut her heart in two.

Then of a sudden she leapt to her feet, and stood facing him with a countenance like marble, so still and stony was it.

"How did you dare, Mr. Carstairs?" she gasped with an effort. "You coward!"

The man's face went ashen, and he opened his mouth as if to speak, but a look in the girl's eyes kept the words from coming. His head slowly dropped to his breast, as if he acknowledged the truth of the epithet that no one of his own sex could have rightly bestowed upon him.

There was another dead silence for an instant, then the woman turned on her heel, and ascended the broad staircase leading to the berths, with not so much as a glance behind at her companion, who had thrown himself into a lounge, with hands covering his face.

He remained in this attitude of dejection, while the marble clock on the mantelpiece ticked away half-an-hour, when there came a loud shout of horror from above, followed by a crash that shook the liner from end to end. Rushing on deck Carstairs saw the great outline of another vessel just disappearing into the darkness.

A loud sucking noise below, and the smashed bulwarks on the *Imperial's* port side told a silent tale of what had happened. In the darkness some other vessel had collided with her, to what extent he knew not.

The truth was soon out, for with a calmness that did much to soothe the terrified passengers, the Captain gave orders for the boats to be manned. Quickly they were released from their thwarts and lowered to the water level, and the passengers took their seats.

Dick Carstairs was about to get into one of the boats, when a thought entered his mind that seemed to run through his veins like molten lead. "Where was Alison Cartwright?" She had not entered the boats; he could swear to that. She must still be below!

Caring nothing for the risk he was running, he rushed along the deck, and down the stairs. At the bottom he stumbled over some prostrate form, which was lying full length at his feet. It was the girl, and to all appearances she had fainted.

Gathering her up in his strong arms Carstairs tore up the stairs again, and along the deck, but except for that terrible sucking noise there was no sound, and Carstairs' heart almost stopped beating as he realised that they were alone on a sinking ship.

For a moment the terrible fact robbed him of his senses, but the noise beneath the deck was becoming more threatening every minute, and some quick action was imperative. The words of one of the A.B.'s that had been addressed to him only that morning occurred to him at this juncture. "Yes, sir," the man had said, "them there seats 'ull float like a cork, but they 'll only 'old one of your size."

He had been speaking of the seats on deck which were built on the pontoon principle, and would act as a life-saver in a case of extreme emergency.

There was one thing to do, and Carstairs did it. Laying the senseless form of the girl upon one of the seats, he lowered it gently into the water, then plunged in beside it. Guiding it with his two hands, he kicked out strongly with his feet, and gradually pushed the miniature raft away from the doomed vessel. They had drifted fifty yards when a deafening hissing report came from behind, and a violent commotion of the waves announced the fact that the s.s. *Imperial* was no more.

"Poor old girl," murmured the swimmer. "Her death was a sudden one, but it looks as if two of her passengers were going to make up for it in the matter of time."

This view of the matter was grim, but only too near the truth, for the wind had risen suddenly, and the waves were beginning to get more choppy and more boisterous with every rise and fall, and though Carstairs tried hard to steady "the raft," as he inwardly termed the floating seat, the waters were too strong for him, and it began to rock in an alarming manner.

The see-saw motion and the occasional lapping of spray over her face restored consciousness to the feminine passenger; a low shuddering sigh shook her form, and Carstairs heard her whisper freely: "Oh! how could he? And I thought him such a gentleman,"

Though his tan deepened somewhat, Dick took no heed of the reproach, but placed his wet hand on her forehead. The cold touch roused her thoroughly, and she turned her head towards him, and opened her eyes.

"Mr. Carstairs! Oh, where are we?" she asked fearfully.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Cartwright," he said, in as soothing a tone as possible. "The *Imperial* collided with another boat and sank in ten minutes."

"But the other passengers?" she asked quickly. "My uncle and aunt. Where are they? For pity's sake do not say that they are drowned."

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Cartwright, they are not dead," Dick answered cheerfully. "All the rest of the ship got away safely in the boats, but I——"

He paused, puzzled for the minute to describe the incident correctly, and over the girl's face flashed a quick look of understanding."

"*You came back for me*," she whispered, in a hushed tone.

Carstairs saw a glistening drop in each of her eyes, and the sight paralysed his tongue, so he said nothing.

The moon was rising now, and in her pale light, Dick looked about him. But on every hand there was sea, sea, nothing but sea, and a lump came into his throat at the sight. Not for his own safety, he had risked that many a time in the land he had been coming from—was not his name embellished with those coveted symbols, V.C.?—but for the safety of the girl on the feeble raft, that was floating beside him.

He said a few gentle words of hope to her, and besought her

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to get some sleep, but she refused even to try, and wanted to insist upon him having a rest on the fragile seat, while she swam beside it for a distance, a suggestion which he laughed at.

Slowly the long night wore on, while the waves grew higher every minute, and Dick found it more difficult to keep his frozen fingers on the arm of the seat as time went on. Now and again the misery of this endless bath in the cold ocean prompted the thought within him to let go and sink quietly into the waves and end it all, but the woman seemed to divine his intention. Whenever it rose in his mind a look from her beautiful eyes would banish the thought. One of these looks seemed to Carstairs to hold more than a reproach, and his eyes brightened as he swam nearer to her side.

"Miss Cartwright," he said quietly, and though he tried hard, his voice would shake slightly. "Have you forgiven me for the insult I offered you last night?"

The answer came softly to his ear above the hiss of the waves.

"Yes, Mr. Carstairs, freely."

"It was a coward's trick," he said hoarsely, "but something made me do it—Miss Cartwright—Alison—if—I—we live through this, will you be——"

In his excitement he had loosened his grip somewhat, and with a roaring gurgle a giant wave seized him. He struggled hard to free himself from its grasp, but the long hours that he had been submerged, and the power of the wave, crushed the remains of his strength, and the last glimpse the girl on the raft had of him showed his face white and despairing under the moonlight, yet with a look of great hope in his eyes.

* * * * *

"Good Heavens! Surely it can't be! By Jove, it is though! Carstairs, old man, where the dickens have you sprung from? Why, do you know that all England has been mourning you as dead? Poor old chap, how bad you look!"

Dick Carstairs, with no tan on his face now, but with an alabaster colour in its place, smiled feebly at the speaker's remarks, especially as they had been uttered in a tone that the whole thoroughfare could hear distinctly.

"I don't expect that I look the picture of health now, Deering," he answered, as brightly as his feelings would allow. "You see, I've been ill for the last six months."

John Deering looked sympathetic, and his jolly face grew longer than it had been for many a month. Suddenly it relapsed again to its usual joviality, and he gave Carstairs a thump on the back that reminded that individual of the collision on the *Imperial*.

"I know just the thing to pick you up again, old man!" he roared excitedly. "Come down to 'The Denes' with me. You know the mater will be delighted to see you, and our Bedfordshire air will brace you up again in a twinkle. Now don't say 'No.'"

Deering spoke the last sentence in a most piteous tone, and Carstairs felt he could but do as his friend asked, moreover, he had experienced some of the hospitality of the Deerings before, and he knew none to excel it.

A couple of hours later and he was chatting to a beautiful, silver-haired old lady in the drawing-room of her home. Deering's mother had greeted him in so excited a manner as to puzzle Carstairs. To his mind it seemed as though she had some mysterious delight in knowing that he was not dead.

She would not allow him to be carried off to dress, but banished her son alone to the dressing-room with the plea that she had something for her guest's private ear. When the door had closed the old lady seized Dick by the arm, and leading him to the conservatory, thrust him inside with a chuckle of glee.

Carstairs, with a feeling of bewilderment, looked around him, and the sight of a figure in a basket-chair beneath a huge palm set his pulses throbbing heavily. At the sound of the door closing the figure looked up, then sprang to her feet with a gasp.

"Mr. Carstairs—is—it—you?"

The conservatory was dark, and Dick could only see the outline of a slim figure dressed entirely in black, but he knew the voice. He had last heard it half a year ago, when he and its owner had been together on the bosom of the waves of Biscay.

"Miss Cartwright! Oh, thank Heaven for its mercies!" he said fervently.

Then, striding across the floor towards her, he looked into her face as if to satisfy himself that he was making no mistake. The girl returned his gaze, her eyes were shining with a deep thankfulness.

"I never thought to see you again, Mr. Carstairs," she said softly. "Will you tell me how you escaped?"

He bade her sit down again in her chair, and drew up another beside it.

"It is not a very long story," he answered, "but how I am alive now is beyond explanation. That brute of a wave seemed to knock all the strength out of me, and all my efforts to get back to you were unavailing. Yet somehow or other I managed to keep afloat as long as I can remember. But I must have lost consciousness, for I woke again to find myself in a pretty little bed in a house on the French coast, as I learnt afterwards. I had just time to see two people beside the bed and to hear a joyful exclamation in French, when darkness came again.

"I was ill for weeks, good old Madame Pautier and her husband told me later, and when I recovered my memory had gone. These good people kept me there for six months, until everything came back to me suddenly two days ago. They said that I had been found insensible on the beach, but of you they had seen or heard nothing.

"I thanked the good peasants for their great kindness, and got back to England as fast as boat and train could bring me, and John was the first friend that I met. That is all the story, but it is a miracle that I am still alive. Can I hear yours, for since I recovered my memory, I have been half mad to know whether you were alive or dead."

The girl nodded consent.

"When you disappeared," she said gently. "I felt inclined to drop into the sea and stop there, but the hope that you would still live kept me on that dear raft until daylight came, and a homeward bound liner sighted me and picked me up. When it reached port I made inquiries everywhere about you, for I owe you my life, but no one came forward with anything to tell, and after a time I had to think that you were d—dead."

A quiver seemed to run through her frame, and insensibly she touched her black dress. Carstairs felt his heart leap within him, and he bent forward and took one of her hands.

"And you wore black because you thought I was dead?" he asked hoarsely.

She did not answer him, and Dick rose from his chair and knelt beside her.

"Do you know what question I was going to ask you, Alison, when that wave separated us?" he asked in a whisper.

A swift flush crossed the girl's face, and she lowered her eyes before the expression in his.

"I—I think so," she murmured weakly.

"And if I were to ask you that question again, darling, would you give me the answer I long for?"

Her lips scarcely moved, yet a word came to Carstair's ears that for all its weakness of sound, meant more to him than aught else in the world. It was "Yes."

Arthur Edwards.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

No. I.

THE AWKWARD PREDICAMENT OF EDWARD CLEMENTS.

(A Prize of One Guinea is Offered for the Best Way Out of the Difficulty. See "Your Editor Chats.")

It was a prematurely warm day in February, and pretty Kitty Treloar, full of the insolence of youth that takes life, sunshine and flowers as its right, came along a field-path leading away from the newly "exploited" suburb of South Dealing.

She could hardly keep her feet from dancing, and her voice from singing, so full of joy did the spring fill her.

"Come on Rover, now for a race."

And away they flew, the one as joyous as the other. But with a sudden recollection she stopped and, straightening her hat, said:

"I hope that ridiculous Ted Clements is not waiting at the next stile."

Sure enough at the next stile, there was a young man, to no outward appearance ridiculous except in so far as he was young enough to blush immoderately at the advent of a charming, mischievious girl.

"Why, Mr. Clements! How you startled me! It is curious I should meet you on this lonely walk."

Ted would have liked to reply that since he knew it to be her favourite walk, he had met her there, on an average, three times a week, but he had not the courage, so only stammered something about its being "the only real country walk about there."

"Do you love the country also?" she said. "It is very beautiful to-day, and I, and the birds, and Rover, are all enjoying it. Hark!" she continued, well content to make the conversation and let him admire her—"hear how they sing, and see how the primroses are all coming out, for all the world as if we should not be hiding our blue noses in furs next week, and seeing everything black and shrivelled with the frost."

Her laughing face confuted the pessimism of her words, and Ted, casting about in his mind for suitable words with which to introduce the avowal that had been trembling on his lips for weeks, began (how many proposals have been ushered in by these lines?):

"*In the Spring a brighter iris gleams upon the burnished dove,*
In the Spring——"

But Kitty interrupted:

"Just so."

"*In the Spring a young man's fancy, lightly turns to thoughts of love.*"

"The secret of happiness is, take everything lightly, whether 'tis measles or love."

Ted's sentimentalism vanished, as she meant it should, but a righteous wrath arose in him at her sacrilegious words.

"Miss Treloar, are you never serious? Do you not believe a man's destiny is to love, to find the only true happiness in giving his whole heart unreservedly and for ever to some beautiful and noble woman?"

For all answer she sang mockingly:

"*Oh, love for a year, a week, or a day,*
But alas for the love that loves alway."

"At least it would be 'alas,' if anybody ever did it, except in poetry and novels. It doesn't work in with present-day life."

Ted was boyish enough to feel exceedingly annoyed at her teasing words, which he took as a personal insult, feeling sure that "he loved as never man loved before," and so, being annoyed, he forgot to be shy and spoke out like a man.

"Miss Treloar, *I* love *you*, with all my heart; and as I love you now, so I shall to the end of my life."

Somewhat abashed at his earnestness, Kitty stammered a little, though she replied saucily:

"That's a bit rash—you have not got to the end of your life yet."

"Oh, you may mock at me if you please," he cried, reckless in his wrath, "you don't know the strength and unchangeableness of a man's love, but I think you might give a man of my age credit for knowing his own mind."

Ted was young, but Kitty was younger, and she could not help admiring him in this mood more than in his former bashful stammering attitude toward her, so nineteen murmured softly to twenty-one:

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings—I—I beg your pardon."

Her unwonted humility brought him tumbling down off his high horse, he turned suddenly and seized her hands, saying in a trembling voice:

"Kitty, Kitty, do not beg *my* pardon, it is I who beg your pardon, and your love. You are the most beautiful and charming girl in the world, and I do love you so much. Can you not love me a little bit? Oh, Kitty, darling, say yes," and in his eagerness he tried to draw her to him.

For a moment it seemed as though she might yield, but she recovered herself and said:

"I can't say yes, because I—I don't love you."

"But you will?" he interposed eagerly.

"No, I sha'n't," she replied, shaking her head obstinately.

"You might wait a bit and try," he urged, hope dying out of his eyes. "Lots of girls don't love fellows at first."

Kitty, now quite mistress of herself and keeping him at arm's length, had quickly made up her mind.

"I don't think I should," she said dispassionately, "and I am not going to try. I don't want to love anybody yet, I want to enjoy myself a bit longer."

An older man who knew the world would have seen an unconscious pathos in these words, Ted (with whom she had flirted for some months) saw only selfishness.

"Enjoy yourself!" he cried, and then lashing himself into a fury, as she smiled and nodded, he went on, "Yes, go on enjoying yourself, go on leading more foolish men to love you, and then laugh in their faces; go on exacting admiration and attention from all and giving nothing in return; go on enjoying yourself, and let *me* go hang!" and he turned quickly and walked off in the opposite direction.

The words were bitter, but he had some cause to feel bitter as even Kitty herself acknowledged as she gazed after him with tears in her pretty eyes.

"Poor fellow, he was very rude, but he seems to feel it more than I thought he would."

A week later she heard he had gone to join a brother on a banana plantation in Jamaica, and the feeling grew gradually upon her that life was very blank now that he was gone.

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and she wished he had been in less of a hurry to put the ocean between them.

A year passed, eighteen months passed, and Ted Clements taller, broader, and manlier, but thinner, and more tanned, was seated in his brother's cool verandah, smoking and reading home letters.

One, from his sister, contained the following words:

"By-the-bye, your old love, Kitty Treloar, has been quite ill. She has had at last to go away to some foreign cure place, but has come back looking rather worse than better. Mrs. Treloar, who is completely wrapped up in her, seems very upset about it."

He let fall the paper.

"Kitty ill! It does not seem possible. That bright, merry little girl!"

All his resentment against her had died out with his love, and that was no more than a tender recollection at the end of a year. For some months he had thought life held nothing more for him, that his heart was broken, and that all women were frivolous, light-minded creatures, not worth an honest man's love. But change of life and scene and plenty of work worked wonders. First he found comfort in work, then beauty in the world, then joy in living, and lastly a certain Miss Elsie Braithwaite had caused him to doubt the truth of his heresies about women.

Now, therefore, he thought condescendingly:

"Poor little Kitty! Well, I was very angry with her once, but I am not sure now that she did not do me a good turn after all. She was quite right, she was too young, and so was I. Ridiculous! What do nineteen and twenty-one know about life? Now, it is different with twenty-two and nearly twenty-three. Those are ages when one is really competent to choose one's life partner," and he went off into a not unpleasant reverie.

At last he roused himself.

"Hullo, here's a strange handwriting, but with the old postmark, South Dealing. Who can it be from?"

He opened the letter and glanced at the signature, "S. M. Treloar—Kitty's mother, by all that's wonderful! What can she be writing to me about, and he read as follows:

"DEAR MR. CLEMENTS,—*I fear I am going to do something very unusual, but I feel I can dare anything for my daughter's happiness—it may be her life. Still, before I go any further I must beg you to believe that I am writing this letter quite unknown to her. To continue, I hope you will excuse my saying that I am aware that my daughter refused you last year, and I must add that I did not think she treated you well in the matter, as we had all thought she intended to accept you, and no doubt you thought so also. Surely one can forgive such a mere child for not knowing her own mind. Ever since you went away so suddenly, she has drooped and pined—nothing does her any good. The doctor says she has something on her mind, and unless we can remove the trouble he is afraid the consequences may be most serious. I think I am justified in saying she would give you a very different answer now, if you were to ask her again. Oh! Mr. Clements, to one of your constant nature, I feel I need not apologise for writing what will bring about your happiness as well as hers.*

"*If it is impossible for you to come over at once, perhaps you would write to her, or to her distracted mother,*

"S. M. TRELOAR."

"Here's a go," said Ted, staring moodily out into the brilliant sunshine beyond. "Ask her again—but I have no desire to—and then there is Elsie Braithwaite. Hang it all, I can't. My constant nature—and it's not more than a year ago. The old lady seems so sure I shall still feel the same and no doubt Kitty does too. When I remember what I said to her I feel an awful cad to have changed so soon. 'Pon my word I'm in a beastly hole which ever way I look at it. If I say I still love her and want to marry her, I shall be telling a lie, and if I refuse to do so, I shall be acting like a cad. Good Heavens! What is a fellow to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

"THE PURSUIT OF SARA" is causing a great deal of excitement. The very novelty of the revelations has appealed to thousands of people, and especially is this the case in those towns directly connected with her flight. All will admit, too, that Miss Gillespie is gifted with the power of describing her experiences graphically, and this is, of course, another important factor in the great popularity of the series.

She herself is highly delighted that her narrations are so entertaining, but when she called to see me in my sanctum the other day, she mildly rebuked me on the ground that I had flattered her in this column by calling her a heroine. Such is modesty!

THIS is just a reminder to readers in Leicester and district, in which locality the episode told in this number takes place, that a splendid Gramophone and *twelve* charming gold-plated pencil-cases are offered them as prizes in a simple competition.

I have had printed some very pretty leaflets, on one side of which is a reproduction in colours of this cover, advertising "The Pursuit of Sara."

Now what I want Leicester readers to do is this. Write me a post-card, addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C.," with "Leaflets" marked in the top left-hand corner, asking me to send you a small supply of this advertising material. Then you must, in the most ingenious manner you can think of, distribute these to the best advantage. It does not matter *how* you get rid of them as long as the way is helpful to the cause.

When you have distributed your leaflets, write to me and explain your method of doing so. *No replies must come later than first post Wednesday morning, November 11th.*

I WILL then decide, and, of course, my decision is final, which reader's attempt has been most beneficial to the paper. To the best one I will award the Gramophone, and to each of the *twelve* next a gold-plated pencil-case. I should advise you to apply for the leaflets early.

ON the opposite page appears an Unsolved Love Problem, the first of a series.

I am offering *a prize of one guinea* to the reader who sends me, not later than Friday, the 13th inst., what I consider the best way for Edward Clements to get out of his dilemma. The solution should be written in about one hundred words.

State as clearly as possible *why* you believe your solution is the right and honourable thing for him to do, and back up your statement by good, lucid arguments. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only.

Mark your envelopes "Love Problem" in the top left-hand corner, and address them to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C."

Do not forget that the last possible day on which I can receive replies to Problem No. 1 is Friday, the 13th of this month. All arriving after that date will be disqualified.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home!" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on the other's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

Both Isolo Staunton and Wilfrid Ellerton were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.

The latter was another blue-blooded Spaniard, and he was the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

To this plan Staunton agrees and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who rescued her from death once, many years ago in Chili.

"Do you remember," says Mercedes, "that afternoon when the Chilenos sacked and burnt Chorillos—when the warships were firing from the sea and the shells were bursting among the houses, blowing their walls out as though a volcano had broken out under them as it did once at Arequipa, and how a scream came through the air, and you, yes, I am sure it was you, caught a little girl—that was I—round the waist and jumped off the pier into the water with her and swam back to the beach—and how we found afterwards that the shell had smashed everything into ruins and killed everyone.

"They told me afterwards what a dreadful ruin it was. But surely you remember, don't you?"

"Remember, of course I do. As if anyone could forget a thing like that. Yes, I can see every detail of it now. I remember the dull, hoarse bang of the gun and the scream of the shells in the air—and you, were you really the little girl that I got hold of and jumped into the sea with because I thought it was going to kill us?"

"Us. I don't think, Mr. Ellerton, that you were thinking very much about *us*——"

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

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SIXTH CHAPTER.

Soul to Soul.

THE rest of the day passed just as pleasantly as one would expect a day to pass, afloat on a summer sea on board what was, perhaps, the most luxurious craft in existence. But there was no chance of a renewal of even that unspoken intercourse which had been so strangely and unexpectedly established between Mercedes and Wilfrid Ellerton. Still less was it possible that their lips should translate into words what their souls had already said to each other through their eyes.

To begin with, the little incident that had taken place before breakfast had a very natural and decided effect on Mercedes Her instinct told her that Lady Maud had divined the secret which so far she had scarcely dared even to confess to her own consciousness, and the knowledge of this discovery had at once set her maidenly pride in arms. She felt that she had allowed the dearest secret that a woman can have, to become known even before she was quite certain that she had the right to possess such a secret at all; and therefore when, soon after breakfast, Lady Maud laughingly asked her whether she might congratulate her, she somewhat unexpectedly cut her short with a quick little gesture of frankly girlish petulance, and said, almost coldly:

"There is nothing that I know of, Lady Maud, that you or any other can congratulate me upon except, perhaps, upon the fact that I happen to be the daughter of the kindest and most generous of fathers, and that—well, in short, that I have the happiness of being Mercedes Staunton and the pleasure of being your hostess."

There was no possibility of mistaking either the tone or the meaning of the words, spoken as they were with that indescribable dignity that perhaps only Spanish blood can give to speech. Lady Maud at once saw that she had made the grave mistake of treading on what was evidently, for the present at least, forbidden ground, and so, being a young woman of more than ordinary common-sense and social experience, she begged pardon very prettily and in a quite non-committal way, and there the subject dropped.

Naturally the effect of her ill-timed remark was to produce exactly the opposite result to that which she would have wished for. When Mercedes met Ellerton about half-an-hour later she received him with an almost chilling reserve which astonished him almost as much as it hurt him, and so the words which he was so eager to speak remained unspoken, and once more a few trivial words carelessly uttered became, as it were, wheels in that vast machine which so remorselessly spins and weaves the web of human destiny.

It was again the Honourable Percy Iddison who, quite innocently and with the best of intentions, constituted himself the instrument of the Fates by getting up sports after the manner of passengers on ocean liners; and these, on the suggestion of Don Ramiero Valdez, were followed by a concert and dance in the evening, and so, during all that fateful day there came no opportunity for that little explanation whose results might have been so momentous.

But Lady Maud, still true to her conviction in spite of her hostess' almost studied avoidance of Ellerton, had made up her mind to undo, should that be in her power, the somewhat grave error which she now felt more than ever guilty of, and to this end, in the interval between the concert and the dance, she enlisted the by no means disinterested services of an almost equally responsible offender.

"I am perfectly certain, Percy," she said, in a low but nevertheless quite impressive tone as they were leaning over the after-rail, "that this is a clear case of love at first sight, which it is the bounden duty of people in our position to do our utmost to bring to its only proper conclusion, especially as I have an idea that both of us have already done something, quite unconsciously, to hinder, or at any rate to divert the course of true love—I, by a very foolishly premature remark I made this morning on the subject of congratulations, and you by making everybody so busy over these precious sports that the necessary *tête-à-têtes* were quite out of the question."

"All right, Maud. What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, it's only quite a trifle, but I want you to be careful, because its consequences may be very important, and, if the action of the little comedy isn't timed exactly, the plot may fail altogether. That sounds a little mixed, but of course you see what I mean."

"So far, yes," replied the other unconvincingly, "and now suppose the sweetest of conspirators reveals her plot to her most devoted accomplice."

"Don't be silly, Percy, it doesn't suit you," said Lady Maud in a superior tone, but at the same time slipping her hand through the arm that was resting on the rail. "You are never such a hopeless failure as when you are trying to make pretty speeches. Please don't forget that you would never have got through a certain proposal if I hadn't been shameless enough to help you."

In an instant he was seized by powerful hands, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

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"It's very simple, dear, but it must be done carefully, and we mustn't raise any suspicions. When the dance is over I am going to inveigle Mercedes up on deck for a breath of sea air. You must watch us and manage to get Mr. Ellerton on the same part of the deck a few moments later."

The Honourable Percy entered heart and soul into the plot, and although the veriest novice at any sort of intrigue which could not be carried out on a battlefield, played his part so well and with such apparent unconsciousness that even Mercedes herself did not suspect anything till Ellerton, who had managed to direct their stroll to the same part of the deck, now happily vacant, on which their unspoken declaration had been so strangely made, stopped and said with such sudden seriousness that it took her completely by surprise, and for the moment compelled her attention:

"Mercedes, you remember what our hearts—our souls, I hope—said to each other here last night?"

The glow of an electric light just above them showed the flush that sprang into her cheeks and the flash in her eyes as she turned them swiftly up to his. She took a step aside to the rail, half turned and faced him, and began in a voice which she vainly tried to keep steady:

"Mr. Ellerton, have I ever given you the right——"

"That is exactly what I have felt myself in honour bound to ask you," he interrupted in a tone as low as hers, yet vibrating with such an intensity of passion that its force instantly swept away the little artificial barriers which Lady Maud had so unwittingly raised for the moment between them. "Unless my love, or, perhaps my presumption, had completely blinded me, your eyes said so last night, and surely they would tell the truth?"

"They did," she whispered, moving towards him ever so little. "Yes, they did, and why should my lips deny it? It was only something that Lady Maud said this morning that, well, vexed me because I thought she had found out, and so——"

"Oh, don't bother about explanations now," he interrupted again, speaking very gently and once more laying his hand on hers as she rested it on the rail. "No doubt you were quite right, though it hurt me a bit; still it was worth a thousand times that to hear you say those two words and to know—what I think I know now. Confound those lights," he added, with sudden inconsequence.

"Why, what is wrong with them?" she asked innocently.

"I want either solitude or Egyptian darkness for about five minutes," he whispered, closing his hand over hers again. "Surely you know why. Heavens! how lovely you are, my beautiful Mercedes!"

"Am I? Then I am glad of it—for your sake," she murmured, her warm Spanish blood flowing swiftly up from neck to brow. She leant back against the rail and laughed softly:

"And so that is why you want the solitude or the Egyptian darkness? What a very unconventional wooing, though! Of course you did begin years ago in the strictly conventional way by gallantly saving my life?"

"Here comes Papa along the deck with Don Ramiero. You won't say anything about it to-night, will you, Wilfrid? There's plenty of time. Let us keep our secret to ourselves for just a little. You know it's a luxury that I, at least, haven't enjoyed before."

"Of course—darling! Is not your wish law now? But if I don't get a kiss soon I shall——"

"No you won't, whatever it is. You have made me feel quite shamefully forward enough for the present. Now please talk about something sensible."

They sauntered on towards Staunton and Valdez, who were puffing slowly at their cigars and talking in low-toned Spanish. It may have been that the Spaniard's keen eyes saw something that escaped his master's as Mercedes and Ellerton strolled past them, chatting about odds and ends of happenings at Cowes. Possibly he did, for he there and then resolved that what had been decided on as to Ellerton's departure to the under-world, should be accomplished without further delay.

The new-made lovers continued their stroll—changing the subject of their conversation the moment they got out of earshot of the other promenaders—until four clear double-strokes on the bell under the navigating-bridge warned them that it was midnight.

"Heavens! Is it as late as that?" exclaimed Mercedes. "I must go below at once or papa will be coming to look for me. Come—Wilfrid, I really must. Why, we nearly have the deck to ourselves."

So they had, at least the after part of it behind the "Council Chamber," and Ellerton was not slow to grasp the possibilities of the situation.

He stopped and the next instant she felt his arm stealing round her waist. For a moment she recoiled, for it was the first time she had felt a man's caress save her father's. Then she remembered that she had already spoken her surrender, and so she yielded.

"Then we will say 'Good night' here," he said, in a whisper as he drew her close to him. "Good night, Mercedes—my darling!"

"Good night—dear!"

She looked up at him, her eyes shining in the moonbeams and her face transfigured in the clear white light, and then their lips met in that eloquent silence in which alone soul speaks to soul.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Imprisoned Below!

When Wilfrid Ellerton had said good-night to Mercedes at the entrance to the saloon, he took a long cigar out of his case, lit it, and strolled away aft again to think as quietly as his thrilling pulses would let him about this new-found glory of happiness which had so swiftly and unexpectedly shone into his life, and to wonder dimly what he had done to deserve it.

He had always looked upon himself with perfect modesty as a quite ordinary young man to whom the kindly Fates had given it to be born the son of a millionaire, and therefore with far brighter prospects in life than the son of a poor man would have had. For all he had known so far, his friends and acquaintances had just about the same opinion of him, and yet here without, so far as he could see, the slightest merit or desert on his part, the first love of such a girl as Mercedes Staunton had been suddenly, almost without warning, bestowed upon him.

He had perfect health, unsullied youth, an education which was by no means covered by his brilliant school and University career, and the crowning advantage of his father's name and vast wealth; and yet, such was his worship for his strangely-found love that, even with all this in his favour, he looked out into the future with a diffidence which he had never experienced before.

"Good evening, or, I suppose it would be more appropriate to say 'Good morning,' Mr. Ellerton," said a low, softly-modulated voice at his elbow as he was leaning on the after-rail, looking out over the glittering sea-path towards the rising moon and dreaming of unutterable happiness. "A very lovely scene, is it not? And yet those who do not know say that there is no beauty to be found in these northern latitudes of yours."

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A swift whiff of smoke from a very excellent cigar accompanied the words. He turned with a feeling of almost fierce resentment at the interruption of his delicious reverie, and saw Don Ramiero standing beside him.

"Oh, yes, very pretty indeed," he replied, not very graciously; "but for all that I was just thinking that it's about time to turn in."

"Then, in that case, I trust that you will be inclined to defer your thoughts for a few minutes," replied the Spaniard pleasantly, "for, truth to tell, I have just come from our host, who is at this moment with the Captain on the bridge, to ask if you will do him the pleasure of joining him in just one more liqueur or a brandy and soda and a cigar in his own private sanctum here, which I do not think you have yet visited. If you will come with me he will join us in a minute or two."

Under other circumstances Ellerton would have been inclined to make a polite excuse on account of the lateness of the hour, but in view of the interview which he intended to have at no very distant date with his host, that was, of course, quite out of the question, and so he tossed his half-smoked cigar into the sea and said with very real pleasure:

"Thanks, that is exceedingly kind of him. I shall be delighted. After all, one need not be very particular about hours on such a delightful cruise as this. I was only wondering this evening what this place was," he went on, looking at the structure under whose shelter Mercedes had given him his first kiss.

"It is the one apartment in the yacht that our host reserves for his own use," replied Don Ramiero, as he led the way to the door, looking the while keenly about the now deserted decks, "and I can assure you, Mr. Ellerton, that it is not all of his guests who are invited to share his privacy in it."

"Then, of course this is an honour which I shall most highly appreciate," laughed Ellerton.

"The Señor, as we of his intimates call him among ourselves," murmured Don Ramiero, as he opened the double doors by means of the lever handle and an invisible spring, "no doubt has the best of reasons. He is not a man who makes mistakes in the choice of his friends. Will you do me the honour of going in first? The doors are a little difficult to manage."

"Thanks," said Ellerton, as he stepped over the high combing or threshold which is intended to keep the water out of deck cabins in heavy weather.

Just as he raised his foot from the outside deck the Spaniard gave him a sudden thrust forward between the shoulders. He lost his balance and stumbled with an exclamation of angry surprise into the dimly lighted apartment. In an instant he was seized by two powerful hands on each side, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

He struggled and tried to shout, but as his assailants forced him over on to his back, the rug, where it covered his face, was drenched with a pungently sweet-smelling liquid. As it soaked through he gasped once or twice for breath, gave one more desperate struggle to free himself, and then his limbs grew heavy, all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his head for a moment and flow back again as quickly; his breathing grew longer and quieter in spite of his will. Then came a swiftly fleeting dream of Mercedes and her melting eyes and trembling lips—and then darkness and oblivion.

A few moments later Don Ramiero's high tenor voice sounded shrilly along the deserted deck, shouting:

"Man overboard! Man overboard! Help! get the boats out! Stop the ship! For God's sake, stop the ship! Mr. Ellerton has fallen overboard!"

Almost instantly his words were echoed, not as an appeal, but as an authoritative command by Isolo Staunton, who had flung the door of the Captain's room under the bridge open and rushed out on deck.

"The bridge, there!" he shouted. "Dead slow—stop! Mr. Marshall, have the hands on deck and get the boats out at once. Great Heavens, how can that have happened? Valdez, come here and tell me about it. Steady, there, men. Not too much noise. We don't want to alarm the ladies. You can pick him up before they know anything about it if you're smart. A hundred pounds to the man who gets hold of him first. Handy now, with those boats!"

While he was speaking the telegraph had tinkled imperatively in the engine-room, and a swift shudder ran through the beautiful fabric of the yacht as the propellers slowed and stopped, and her twenty knots were reduced to ten, and five, and two, and nothing, until she began to drift slowly astern.

Meanwhile the soft "pad, pad" of many naked feet

She laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and looking him full in the eyes, said: "Is that true, father? Is he really—dead?"

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sounded along both sides of the deck, orders were given in low, clear tones; the davits swung outwards, the crews climbed like so many cats into the boats, the falls whistled through the blocks, and they fell almost simultaneously into the water. The tackles were unhooked, and away the four boats sped astern on their eager search for what they would never find.

By this time Don Ramiero was telling Staunton, the Captain, and the First Officer in agitated tones how Mr. Ellerton, leaning too far over the stern-rail to watch the smooth action of the turbine propellers, had overbalanced himself just at the moment that the yacht gave a little pitch aft, and, before he could put out a hand to save him, had disappeared into the foaming wake that the flying yacht was leaving behind her. Then he had shouted for help—to stop the vessel—and that was all. Everything had happened with such appalling suddenness that he was still half-stunned and could hardly realise the calamity.

The recital was a perfect piece of acting, and Isolo Staunton never thought Ramiero Valdez a more valuable ally or a more accomplished scoundrel than he did while he was making it.

The sudden slowing-down and stopping of the yacht had, of course, aroused the guests on board who were going or had already gone to their berths, and a few of the men and one or two ladies who had not yet retired came up on deck to ask what was the matter. But, for quite essential reasons, discipline was as strict on the *Isola* as it was on board a man-of-war, and so, in accordance with Staunton's hurriedly-whispered instructions, the Captain came to the saloon-entrance where they were gathered, and said in his most genial tones:

"Nothing serious, I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen. Only a heated bearing which will take about half an hour to put right. Just the sort of accident that may happen every day even to one of His Majesty's ships, and, as our time is our own, it is, of course, the merest trifle. Pray don't allow it to interfere with your night's rest."

The officers and quartermasters within hearing heard the glibly-spoken lie without moving a muscle, and so the guests were satisfied and went below again.

Only Percy Iddison wondered why a triple-engined, turbine-driven yacht should be stopped for a single heated bearing, and only he happened to notice that four of the boats were missing. It immediately occurred to him that one of the sailors might have fallen overboard, and that their considerate host did not wish to frighten his lady guests. Of course the rescue would be a matter of no difficulty with such perfect equipment and in a smooth sea, and so, being accustomed to discipline himself, he concluded that it was no business of his to interfere, wherefore he held his peace and went below again with the rest.

But the next morning the truth, as Don Ramiero Valdez had arranged it, had to come out. Wilfrid Ellerton did not join the guests as usual in the before-breakfast promenade on the upper deck. Inquiries were made for him and by some mysterious means—no one quite knew how—it became known that his berth had not been occupied during the night. Then Iddison, with something like the feeling that he remembered from his first battle, thought of the missing boats, which were now all in their places again, and of that curious stoppage of all the engines for one paltry heated bearing.

As a matter of fact, he had been looking for Ellerton, with whom, in virtue of the little plot in which he had taken part the night before, he felt that sympathy which between men is akin to friendship, in order to invite him to the early morning cocktail, and not finding him, he had had it by himself.

As he came out of the smoking-room he saw Staunton and Don Ramiero, looking very serious, coming from the direction of the saloon entrance. He took three or four long, quick strides towards them and said abruptly:

"Mr. Staunton, Ellerton is not to be found anywhere on board, and I hear that he did not sleep in his berth last night. Is that true? Has anything happened to him?"

It so came to pass that just at this moment Mercedes strolled past with Lady Maud, to whom she had been apologising for her "foolish rudeness" the day before, and also imparting the most interesting information that one engaged young woman can tell and another hear. They heard Iddison's question and instantly stopped. Lady Maud looked at Mercedes. She was white to the lips. She stared wide-eyed at her father and began to sway a little from side to side. Lady Maud at once flung her arm round her and drew her close to her side. Then Staunton spoke.

"I most deeply regret to be obliged to say, Captain Iddison," he began in a tone whose emotion was most wonderfully simulated, "that last night we deceived you—I hope you will allow me to say with the best of intentions, especially as regards our lady guests—when we told you that our stoppage was due to a slight accident to the engines. The sad truth, which I am now compelled to tell you and my other guests, is that Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton fell overboard shortly after midnight, almost within reach of my friend, Señor Valdez, and that all our best efforts to save him were in vain. You will, I am sure, forgive the deception, for we hoped——"

Before he could utter another word Mercedes had shaken herself free from Lady Maud's arm. She crossed the deck with rapid steps, laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and, looking him full in the eyes, said in a whisper that everyone could hear:

"Is that true, father? Is he really drowned—dead?"

For an instant he looked at the lovely, piteously pleading face of the only being on earth that he loved; and, as he did so, the fatal truth struck home into his soul. His face blanched and his eyes fell before hers. But there was no going back now. What was done was done, and so he replied as steadily as he could:

"Yes, Mercedes, most unhappily it is true!"

"Merciful Heavens!" she murmured. "My life was his, for he saved it—and I loved him—and we only knew last night—and now he is dead—so soon dead!"

And before he could catch her in his arms, she had fallen fainting at his feet.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

.. In the Council .. Chamber.

As Mercedes fell to the deck her father stooped and lifted her in his arms. For a moment his eyes met those of Valdez, already blank with amazement and fear, in a glance so full of horror and involuntary reproach, that his accomplice shrank away from him for the moment like a criminal suddenly faced with clear proof of his crime. Then he turned and walked rapidly away towards the saloon entrance, saying that he would call Miss Staunton's maid and summon the doctor.

He seemed to pass through an eternity of terrifying emotions during the next few minutes, but they were more of fear for the consequences of his crime than horror of its callous and inhuman wickedness. He knew now that his keen instinct had shown him the truth. He knew that the doomed man loved the daughter of the Lord of the Underworld. That of itself would naturally have been of no moment to him whatever—but the brief, yet terrible scene which he had just witnessed had also told him that Wilfrid Ellerton's love either was already or sometime would be returned. Knowing this, he had deliberately hastened the fate which

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Isolo Staunton's own statement in the presence of his guests had made irrevocable. What would be his fate if this tyrant Croesus, who never forgave even a mistake, came to know of this knowledge?

It had all passed in a few moments, and yet, when they came to compare notes afterwards, it turned out that that swift exchange of strangely-meaning glances had been equally noted by both Lady Maud and her lover.

While she and Lady Medcalf-Mears went to the assistance of Mercedes, Iddison ran a long wicker-chair across the deck, and they laid her in it. By this time Don Ramiero had returned with the maid and Staunton's private physician, who always accompanied him on his yachting trips.

Like all the intimate associates and servants of this despot of an unknown domain, Dr. Eymar Billaud was a man of great ability in his own vocation, who possessed few, if any, moral principles which did not happen to harmonise with the interests of his employer. Isolo Staunton was wont to say in confidence to those who fancied that they were his trusted friends, that all he wanted was talent—genius, if he could get it. But he had no use for principle.

He was a Frenchman born in England and a graduate of both French and English Universities. A man who could pass in the society of both countries as a cultivated citizen of either, and who, save for his whole-souled and utterly heartless devotion to his science, was about as much of a man as he was a chimpanzee—to which poor relation of humanity he bore a quite suggestive facial resemblance.

He felt Mercedes' pulse, slightly raised one of her eyelids, and then, turning to Staunton, he said imperatively and in perfect English:

"Your daughter, sir, is suffering from a sudden and, I fear, very severe mental shock. She is only just alive. Let her be taken to her room at once and put to bed. I will prepare a restorative and make a further examination as soon as possible."

Without another look at his patient, he shuffled off to his own rooms on the main deck, and Mercedes was at once carried below. Lady Maud, who, among her many accomplishments, numbered a highly-trained genius for nursing, at once constituted herself head-nurse and saw that everything needful was done in preparation for the doctor's anxiously awaited visit.

Meanwhile Staunton, by a heroic effort of his imperious will, had regained sufficient composure to be able to say calmly, and yet, as Iddison could not help thinking, in a curiously strained, indeed, almost unnatural tone, to the dozen or so guests who were offering their politely expressed and wholly sincere sympathies:

"I need hardly assure you, ladies and gentlemen, how thankful I am for the sympathy which this sudden and utterly unexpected double catastrophe places me so much in need of. As you know, my daughter is not only my only child, she is all I have in the world, for she is motherless." His voice broke here with genuine emotion. There was a respectful silence for a moment, and he went on:

"Of the tragedy of last night I can hardly trust myself to speak. I will only say what I am sure you are all thinking—that a continuation of what was begun as a pleasure-cruise is now impossible, I and the yacht are entirely at your service, but I think that I shall be best consulting your wishes if I land you at the nearest British port, which I believe will be that of Edinburgh, from which I can telegraph the sad news to Sir Wilfrid Ellerton."

"I am quite sure, Mr. Staunton, that we all entirely agree with you. There is really nothing else to be done," said Lady Medcalf-Mears, to whom common consent had given, as it were, the social mothership of the little party.

Just then the head steward came and announced that breakfast was ready, as, of course, no bugle could be blown. The meal was a mournful function, made yet more so by the anxiety of waiting for the doctor's report. Staunton had shut himself up with his own bitter thoughts in the Council Chamber to wrestle with the ghastly situation which his deliberately-planned and ruthlessly-executed crime had created. He had given orders for Dr. Billaud to be sent to him the moment that the examination was concluded, but more than half-an-hour of torturing apprehension, mingled with impotent raging against the unforeseen penalty which had so strangely fallen upon him, passed before Don Ramiero opened the double doors and brought him in.

"Well, doctor," he said, in hard, strained tones, as they entered. "What is it? Brain fever? I may as well know the worst at once."

"My dear sir," replied Billaud, "I regret to say your daughter is suffering greatly. I cannot even tell you what the effects will be until they begin to develop."

"Not even what they may be?" asked Staunton, in a tone of almost pitiful anxiety.

"I do not care to prophesy," replied the doctor. "But from what I have seen the best that I can promise you is that there will be a period of acute delirium following the present condition of collapse, and that will be succeeded by a period of great weakness and depression, which will also be the period of the greatest danger. Fortunately Miss Staunton has an almost perfect constitution, and I have little fear of getting her through. There is, however," he continued, noticing a sudden look of relief in the hitherto dully staring eyes of his employer, "another contingency for which it will be necessary for you to be prepared."

"And that?" asked the millionaire, with a nervous start.

"It is quite possible," Billaud went on, the ghost of a smile flitting across his thin, almost ape-like lips, "that the ultimate development of your daughter's case, sir, may be this. I should first give you to understand that brain lesions resulting from severe mental shock——"

"Good Heavens, man, do you think I want to sit here and listen to a medical lecture?" exclaimed Staunton passionately, as he got up from his chair and began to walk up and down the room with quick, jerky strides. "Come to the point, please, and tell me straight out what more there is to fear."

Dr. Billaud was, not unnaturally, somewhat offended by the abruptness of the interruption, but he knew his position too well to resent it openly. Still he did not forget a prompt revenge.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said deferentially, "you will see that only my extreme interest in the case was leading me into technicalities, quite out of place here, as I admit. To be quite brief, then, it is possible that there may be a very great similarity between the mental condition of Miss Staunton when she recovers her physical health and that of the young gentleman whom, for the present, I suppose I may call my other patient."

The words were quietly, almost gently spoken, and yet they went home into Isolo Staunton's consciousness like so many hammer-strokes. There was no mistaking their meaning; but after one terrible look at Valdez which sent a shiver into his soul, he stopped in his walk and, stooping over Billaud with clenched hands as though he were going to strike him, said in a hoarse, shaking voice:

"What do you mean? Explain yourself clearly, can't you! Don't torture me any longer!"

"My dear sir," said the Frenchman, shrinking back a little into his chair, "nothing, I assure you, could be further from my thoughts. I will express myself in the plainest words. I have reason to fear that when your daughter recovers, although her physical and mental health will probably be quite perfect, the effects of the shock will be found to have completely erased the events of this morning from her memory, and that she will return to reason in absolute ignorance of the untimely decease of Mr. Ellerton which you so feelingly described to your guests before breakfast."

For a few moments the three men looked at each other in silence. Dr. Billaud sat with compressed lips and frowning brows, something like a judge who has just delivered a weighty decision. Staunton stood motionless, leaning against the table, gripping the edge of it with his hands. Then Don Ramiero crossed himself and murmured in Spanish:

"Heavens! if that is so, it will be the act of God! Señor,

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Señor, cannot the wrong be undone even now? He is down yonder alive and well. Can we not——"

"No!" shouted Staunton. "No, we cannot, thanks to your meddling! Was not the affair first arranged for to-night? Where was your authority to do it last night? Had you any reason? Did you suspect that there might be love between them? You have been a good and faithful servant, Ramiero, but if I thought you had done that without telling me, by Jupiter! you should go down yonder with *him* and never see the light of day again!"

Dr. Billaud turned and looked at Don Ramiero. His swarthy complexion had turned almost grey. His lips were trembling and his pupils were dilated by fear—for he had seen that underworld of which Isolo Staunton was absolute lord, and he knew how awful such a fate might be made. By a supreme effort he managed to steady his shaking nerves, and exclaimed, with a note of reproach in his voice:

"No, Señor, no! How could you think such treason of one whose life is lived only in your interests? No! On my faith and honour, I knew nothing of this!"

Fortunately for him his master was too heavily stricken for the moment to take much notice either of his words or the manner of their utterance; but Billaud never took his eyes off his face, and his keen eyes saw that he was lying. There was little love lost between the Spaniard and the Frenchman, who was by no means displeased by his discovery, which might possibly be useful later on.

"That will do, Ramiero," said Staunton, in an altered voice, as his sudden passion died down. So far as he liked and respected any man, he liked and perhaps, to a greater extent, respected his father's faithful friend and counsellor, and already he repented his outburst of fury. "I am sorry! No doubt you acted to the best of your judgment. But, alas, I fear that there is no repairing what you have done. Will there be no cure for my daughter, Billaud, should she prove to be afflicted as you fear?" he went on, turning quickly to the other with a glance which for such a man was almost pathetic.

"My dear sir and most generous patron," replied the Frenchman with an admirably simulated note of emotion in his voice, "there is only one thing that I would not do in your service, and that is knowingly deceive you."

He looked hard at Valdez as he said this, as though he would add: "as others of your faithful servants do," and continued, "But, pray remember, I have not said that this result is inevitable. I only fear it, and therefore it was my duty to tell you of my fear. But if it does come there is only one possible remedy for it—and that is impossible."

"The possible impossible!" echoed Staunton eagerly. "How can that be? Surely you would not indulge in paradoxes on such a subject. What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," answered Billaud slowly, "that the only cure for such a malady would be that Miss Staunton should again meet and talk with a man who, by your own statement and your own judgment, is already as good as dead."

"My God, yes, that is true!" Staunton gasped as the pitiless logic of the physician's words was irresistibly borne in on his brain. "Was there ever such a hideous tangle spread for the feet of man? No, no, Billaud, you are right. It is cruel, deadly cruel, and to my own darling, too! But there is no help for it!

"Yes, it is done!" he continued, in his old imperious tone as though in this moment he had already risen from the depths into which he had been stricken. "As we make our fate we must accept it, good or evil. She shall forget him, even as the world will."

"Then I presume, Señor," said Valdez, rising with a very distinct feeling of relief, "that you wish the original plan to be duly carried out?"

"In every detail," replied the despot in his usual cold, even tones. "We are now heading for the Firth of Forth, which we should reach this evening. My guests will land at Leith, and I shall do the same, as I intend to convey the—ah!—the sad tidings personally to Sir Wilfrid. You will remain in charge as usual, Ramiero, and to you, Doctor, I shall intrust my daughter. You shall have the two best trained nurses that money can hire in Edinburgh, and then you will, of course, prescribe a sea trip and complete isolation for your patient. The *Isola* will then proceed to the Anchorage, where you, Ramiero, will get rid of your charge and then bring away any cargo that may be ready for you."

And so, in these few words, spoken as calmly as though he were issuing the most commonplace of sailing orders, Isolo Staunton, so far as lay in his power, sealed the earthly fate of the only man on whom his beloved Mercedes had looked with the melting eyes of love.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Suspicions!

When the *Isola* reached Leith, which, thanks to her great speed, she did on the evening of the same day, Lady Maud parted very unwillingly from her charge, who, after Doctor Billaud had managed to administer the restorative he had prepared, had lain in a state of semi-consciousness all day.

In common with the other guests, she could not help thinking that the proposed arrangement was a somewhat strange one, especially in view of the fact that their host had decided to leave his daughter while she was in such a critical state, in order to carry the news of Wilfrid Ellerton's death personally to his father.

She had offered—nay, so far as the conventions permitted, she had almost asked—to go with her on the sea-trip which the physician had prescribed; but Staunton had declined so decisively, albeit most cordially, that she felt it hopeless to press the point. "He had the best of reasons for having every possible confidence in his friend Doctor Billaud," he had said; "and as he had made a point of having two trained nurses under him, Lady Maud would see that it was not only unnecessary, but impossible for him to avail himself of her most kindly and generous offer." After which, of course, there was nothing else to be said.

"I don't half like it, Maud," said the Honourable Percy, after a long pause, as they were strolling about the next morning enjoying the glorious view from the summit of Arthur's Seat.

"You don't like what, my dear Percy?" she asked. "Are you thinking about poor Mr. Ellerton and Mercedes?"

"Yes," he replied decisively, "and about our late host and the yacht and—well, about lots of things."

"Yes," she said; "I suppose that is only a natural thing for all of us to do under such terrible circumstances. For my part, I confess I have done nothing else since yesterday morning. But you have not answered my question. Surely you don't suspect anything—anything wrong, do you?"

"I can't say that I do or I don't," he returned, after another pause. "But for all that there are two things that I can't get over. In the first place, that fellow Valdez, who, for all his fine Spanish manners, I can't bring myself to like——"

"No, neither can I," Lady Maud interrupted quickly. "I'm rather glad we think the same on that point. Well?"

"Well, his story was that Ellerton, a young fellow who is not only a very good athlete, but who has been a sailor for some years, overbalanced himself and fell overboard like a baby or a drunken man from the deck of a yacht in a perfectly

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smooth sea. Now, does that strike you as being very likely on the face of it?"

"N-o, I can't say that it does, now that you put it that way," she replied in a somewhat awed tone, "but surely you don't mean there could be a possibility of anything like foul play. What earthly reason could there be for such a thing?"

"Then there was that look which Staunton gave Valdez when he picked his daughter up. Now, I've seen men stalking each other down like wild beasts; I've seen them blazing away at each other at close quarters; and I've seen them struggling together for dear life on the top of a precipice; but I tell you that I've never seen more concentrated hate and fury in one man's eyes, or more abject fear in another's, than I did yesterday morning in Staunton's and that Spaniard's. I've had very good reason, I can assure you, to know that men don't look at each other like that without some very good cause."

"Percy," said Lady Maud with a faint little smile, "there's one thing quite certain. You are distinctly in earnest on the subject."

"Yes, I'm what my young friend Fenning Brandon, the American Minister's son, you know, would call in dead earnest on this business.

"I've lots of friends here in England and all over the place, and the Governor and dear old Rollo and Queenie; —by the way, I wonder why *they* refused this mysterious millionaire's invitation on what I know to be absolutely false pretences, now I come to think of it?—have tons of influence and all that sort of thing, and I'll work it for all it's worth. Of course there may be nothing in it, but there'll be the sport of the hunt, anyhow, even if we don't kill in the end."

"My dearest of big boys and heroes!" exclaimed Lady Maud, stopping short and looking up at him with a dazzling smile, which made him wish fervently that the place was not quite so public. "That's splendid; and I believe you're right—I believe that there *is* something in it, and, as *my* American friend, Cora Kesteven, would put it, 'I'm right there with you all the time, if you think a woman's wit will be of any use and you'll have me?"

"Well, as we're going to have one another for better or worse before very long, and as you're several thousand times cleverer than I ever learnt how to be, we'll just make that another compact between us, and," he went on, taking her by the arm, "in a more suitable time and place we'll duly sign, seal, and deliver it. And now I'm hungry, and I don't think we shall be much more than in time for lunch."

"If there is one thing that I like about you more than another," she laughed, as she freed her hand from his arm and turned towards the sloping path, "it is that magnificent appetite of yours. I consider it a most happy augury for the future. It is almost impossible for a man with an appetite like that to be ill-tempered as long as it can be satisfied—and I hope I shall always be able to do that."

"I hope so," he said, as he pulled her hand through his arm, "you have no idea what a pig I am when I'm hungry. Hullo! Look down yonder, Maud, over the water. Is that our friend got away already? By Jove, he's been pretty quick about those nursing arrangements and the rest of it. Money again, I suppose. Let me have a look for a moment."

She took her hand from his arm and he got his field-glasses out of the case and put them to his eyes.

"Yes, that's the *Isola* right enough," he went on, as he focussed them, "and isn't she just spinning through it! Here, take a look. What a lovely craft she is! I should like to have young Billy's opinion of her."

"The young Billy" to whom he alluded was the Honourable William Anson Iddison, Lieutenant in the Navy, and presently second in command of His Majesty's Destroyer *Scorcher*. He was already, at twenty-two, the possessor of two medals, the Chinese and the Distinguished Service, and his most pious wish was for the promotion of his esteemed Commander to a position of dignity on board a cruiser. He loved the black, ugly, bull-nosed little *Scorcher*, and naturally wanted her for himself.

"Yes, there she goes," said Lady Maud when she had got the glasses right. "She is lovely, as you say. It seems incredible that anything so beautiful should be used for any evil purpose, so let us hope, for her sake as well, that we are wrong."

"With pleasure," he laughed rather grimly, putting out his chin a little, "but for all that I'd give something to be on board her this trip with Billy and two or three of his boys disguised as quarter-masters."

A good deal of light would have been thrown in places which Lady Maud and her lover were beginning to think so dark, if either of them could have listened to a parting conversation between Staunton, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud in the Council Chamber half-an-hour before the *Isola* sailed.

For the first time in his active life, Isolo Staunton had repented him of the evil that he had done, not for repentance sake, but because of that greater evil which, all unknowingly, he had brought upon the one human being for whom his heart held a tender human feeling. He had passed a night of sleepless torment, raging vainly against what promised to be the inevitable consequences of his own act, till at last his love for Mecedes had overcome even his iron purpose, and for her sake, he had decided to run the tremendous risk of a compromise with Fate.

"I quite see the force of your arguments, gentlemen," he said towards the close of the conversation, "and I am entirely satisfied that you have been thinking only of my interests; but I have counted the risk, and for my daughter's sake I am prepared, in fact, resolved to take it. If the operation which you will perform, Doctor Billaud, does not restore your patient's past memory, then some excuse must, and shall be found, to bring him back to life. If, on the other hand, it does, then I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that his departure from the upper to the under world is not only necessary, but inevitable."

"Very well, sir," replied the Frenchman, "since that is your decision it shall be done. Señor Valdez and I have warned you, and therefore our duty in that regard is performed."

Thus was it decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have one chance for his liberty and perhaps his life.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

TO PARENTS.

THE Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a situation in the offices of this firm at a salary of £100 a year to commence with to a boy, and a like situation of £100 a year to a girl.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering either the editorial department, the art department, or the counting-house, so that every opportunity will be given to the boy or girl who shows any particular tendency towards one of these classes of work.

In addition to these two handsome awards, a further hundred consolation gifts will be distributed amongst those who come next. The conditions under which these offers are made are very simple. In THE BOYS' LEADER, published on Tuesday, November 3rd, will appear the following set of questions:

1.—Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?

2.—What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?

3.—Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?

4.—Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?

5.—Which is your favourite book, and why?

6.—When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.

The boy and girl who most successfully answers all the questions set will be considered the winner.

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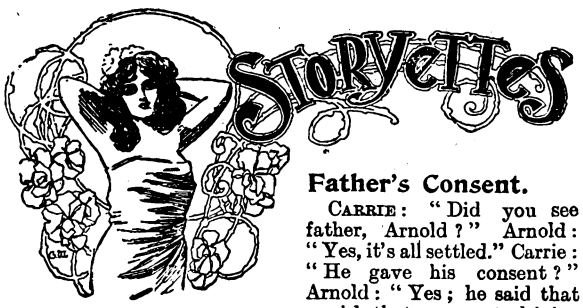

Father's Consent.

CARRIE: "Did you see father, Arnold?" Arnold: "Yes, it's all settled." Carrie: "He gave his consent?" Arnold: "Yes; he said that a girl that was out driving and yachting and bicycling as much as you didn't need much of a home, anyway. Not very nice, was it?"

When the Lights are Low.

SHE: "When is a comfortable position uncomfortable?" He: "When anyone enters the room suddenly."

She Was Tired of Waiting.

HE: "Ethel, what can it mean? Last night I dreamt that I proposed to you." She: "I should say that you are more sensible asleep than awake."

The Very Reason.

"WHY don't you think of marriage?" asked the gushing young thing of thirty odd summers. "I do," answered the cynic. "It's thinking of it that keeps me a bachelor."

He Proposed Once Too Often.

WIFE: "When you proposed to me, John, did you think I would accept you?" Husband: "Not the first time." "The second?" "I wasn't going to propose more than once."

More Bachelor's Advice.

"THERE are two kinds of girls a fellow should never flirt with." "Oh, really?" "The girls who are so young they don't know any better, and the girls who are so old they mean business."

That Settled It.

"No, sir," exclaimed the irate sire, "my daughter can never be yours." "Quite right, sir," replied the cool youth; "she couldn't possibly be my daughter, but she's going to be my wife."

Better Late Than Never.

"INTELLIGENCE has just reached me," began Mr. Blodger, as he sat down to the dinner table. "Thank Heaven, if it has at last," exclaimed Mrs. Blodger. The meal was partaken of in silence.

Then He Squirmed.

"IF you insist on breaking our engagement, Miss Fickle, I shall make your letters public." "You are welcome to do so, Mr. Scamper; there is nothing in them that I am ashamed of, except the address on the envelope."

A Distinction With a Difference.

ANGRY FATHER-IN-LAW: "Didn't you tell me when you married my daughter that you were worth £40,000?" Son-in-Law: "No, sir; I said that I could lay my hands on £40,000; but had I done so I should now be in gaol."

He Should Have Said "Less Beautiful."

RICH HEIRESS: "But, Captain Hawleigh, would you love me when I grow old and ugly?" The Captain (gallantly): "You may grow older, my dear Miss Crœsus, but you can never grow uglier." And he wondered why she rejected him.

A Reassuring Simile.

SHE was going away. "Oh, John!" she sobbed. "J-John, are y-you quite sure you'll m-miss me?" "Darling," replied her big husband, "I'll miss you as much as I do the morning train." Thus assured, she picked up her bag, and with a weet smile, started for the seaside

Sisterly Love Again.

HE: "She looks as proud as though the whole world is under her feet!" She: "Well, she's right! Did you ever see her feet?"

Made a Name for Herself.

ISORA: "Your name is so curious." Azile: "Yes; I'm named after my rich aunt, Eliza; but I reversed it, as it looks so much nicer."

Severely Reprimanded.

WALTER (aged five): "Papa, when I grow up may I get married?" Papa: "My son, I regret to see you anticipating trouble so early in life."

How Very Provoking.

"HER marriage was a great disappointment to her friends." "Indeed?" "Oh, yes. They all predicted it would turn out unhappily, and it didn't."

The Chief Inducement.

SHE: "I don't want to marry you. I don't even want to talk to you!" He (a widower), eagerly: "That's the very reason I want you to marry me!"

A Competent Critic.

HE: "That must be a very interesting book you are reading." She: "Oh, it's awfully exciting! The heroine changes her gown six times in the first chapter."

There Had Been Rumours Before.

MAMIE: "I hear you are going to be married again." Edith: "Again? Why, I've never been married at all yet." "No; but I can't recall the number of times you were 'going to be.'"

Good Indication.

IDA: "Why do you like Harry? He kisses you so awkwardly." May: "That's just why I like him. If he went about it in a graceful manner I would know he had long been practising."

A Grievous Libel.

CUSTOMER: "Why doesn't Miss Robinson deal at your shop now?" Grocer: "One of my assistants insulted her." Customer: "How?" Grocer: "She overheard him telling someone that she was our oldest customer."

He Was so Considerate.

TOM: "Why are you so melancholy, old man?" Jack: "Miss Jones rejected me last night." Tom: "Well, never mind, there are others." Jack: "Yes, of course, but somehow I can't help feeling sorry for the poor girl."

George Would Not Object.

SHE: "Albert, I have come to the conclusion that I love George better than I love you, and——" He: "What about the engagement ring I gave you to wear?" She: "Oh, that's all right. George says he won't object if I wear it."

There Was a Reason.

MRS. MAINCHANCE (sentimentally): "I declare, darling, you hold the umbrella over me just as carefully as you did in our courting days—more carefully, if anything." Mr. Mainchance (prosaically): "I didn't have to buy your millinery in those days, Myrtilla."

His Courage Failed.

SENIOR PARTNER: "My dear Muller, you had the courage to save my daughter from drowning. You deserve to be rewarded. I will give you my daughter in marriage." Muller (bookkeeper): "It is really very kind of you; but I am not so courageous as you seem to think."

Real Economy.

ANXIOUS HUSBAND (at dinner): "Really, dear, turkey again? I'm afraid we won't manage at this rate!" Wife: "Really, dear, it's *all* management. I made so much turkey-stuffing that I had to order two more birds so that not a crumb should be left. Now you see how economical I am, you goose!"

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The Man and the Foolish Little Girl.

A Correspondence That Brought an Alliance.

Once there was a Foolish Little Girl—that is, people (mostly her friends) called her that, for had she not been besought by three different men to be a wife, and had she not an equal number of times refused? And they were very "eligible," these men—they had much to offer in worldly goods, were pleasant to look upon, and they loved the Foolish Little Girl. But she shook her wayward head and elevated her dimpled chin and said "No!" three times very distinctly.

One day she did something to amuse herself. She saw an advertisement like this, in a newspaper: "Correspondence desired with bright, refined young woman. Object, to pass the time. Address A. B., &c.," and she answered.

They exchanged two letters each and then became confidential. Now, odd as it may seem, one will often reveal things to a practical stranger, particularly if it be under cover of mystery and such circumstances as surrounded these correspondents, that one would never confide to one's dear friend. Thus it happened that after the second letter each told the other a few things.

Said the Man to the Foolish Little Girl: "I am tired of everything—I hate Society—I haven't money enough to travel the world over as I would like—and I hate people in general and girls in particular, for it's all the fault of a girl that I'm in this discordant tone of mind. I want to get interested in something and I hit upon this scheme as being original and cheaper than a trip abroad. It's already succeeding. Tell me something about yourself and how you came to answer my advertisement."

The Little Girl wrote back among other things: "Perhaps my reasons are similar to your own—perhaps I haven't any reasons, but whether I have or not I'm being amused and that is something that hasn't happened since last summer when I knew—well, him—just him—no matter who he was or why I lost him. Nobody knows of it. No one in my family would sympathise if they did, but perhaps you can, for you have learnt your lesson too."

Their letters were frequent and long after this and were not so very silly, all things considered. One day something quite exciting happened. The Man touched upon a certain incident of his past summer holiday.

"The quarrel came so suddenly," he wrote, "so like the proverbial thunderbolt from a sunny sky, and she had grown so dear to me that I couldn't realise all at once that anything so ugly could come between us. In my surprise the words of explanation came haltingly. She misunderstood, and before I knew it she had said a few quick sentences and left me there, trying to comprehend what had happened.

Exactly at this point the Little Girl's big eyes began to open bigger than usual, and soon she let the paper fall from unheeding fingers and stared and stared at nothing while strange scraps of things pieced themselves together in her mind. Then she came to earth again, picked up the letter and read it through to the end, where for the first time his name stood forth fully instead of the old "A. B."

"Why didn't I guess it before?" said she to herself. "Who else could ever write such descriptions of that dear old place? Why nobody but us ever knew about that cove in the bay."

Then a sudden thought made her eyes open big again. "I wonder—I won-der—I w-o-n-d-e-r——" Then a violent headshake—"why, no! of course he doesn't know."

But he did. He knew after the very first confidential letter. For she was a very Foolish Little Girl, and she wrote her heart out in those letters.

Then another thing happened. One day the mamma of the Foolish Little Girl found a note. Note said, "Mamma, dear—when I return I shall be Mrs. Alden Brice. He's the one in the golf suit that you hated so last summer. He isn't very rich and I know what you all will say. But it has to be."

She was not so very foolish after all! **May Harney.**

"Penny Illustrated Paper" says: "In 'ANTIPON' the world is made richer by a marvellous discovery."

The "Sheffield Independent" says: 'ANTIPON' is a preparation which bids fair to revolutionise medical science."

"ANTIPON"
PERMANENTLY CURES
the most obstinate cases of
EXCESSIVE OBESITY.

The Marvellously Successful Permanent Cure for Corpulence.

Illustrated London News. Everyone seems to know instinctively when one has too much or too little flesh upon one's bones, and the time may come to many when the burden grows oppressive and causes alarm. To such sufferers "Antipon" should prove advantageous, because it not only speedily absorbs and throws out of the system all superabundant adipose matter but increases strength and vitality.

Methodist Recorder. It is satisfactory to know that the new cure "Antipon" is the practical result of a specialist's researches and discoveries, so that reliance can be placed upon its efficacy.

Penny Illustrated Paper. In "Antipon," the great new permanent cure for corpulence, the world is made richer by a marvellous discovery. Cures or so-called cures, which purged and sweated the patient into a state of decline, are of the past. "Antipon" is something of a diametrically opposite nature, for whilst it is gradually absorbing and ejecting the gross deposits of superfluous fat which clog and debilitate the system and impede the action of the vital organs, it increases muscular strength and helps to revitalise the nervous system.

Weldon's Ladies' Journal. Readers troubled with *embonpoint* will find in "Antipon" a reliable and permanent cure, exceedingly pleasant to take, and, being a powerful fat absorbent, it dissolves and eliminates from the body all superfluous adipose, both the internal fat and the subcutaneous. It also forms a strength-giving tonic, improves the appetite, assists digestion, and tones up the whole system, without the sufferer incurring any distressing restrictions as to diet.

The Lady's Pictorial. To reduce superabundant fat is of vital importance. The wonderful new fat absorbent known as "Antipon," performs this work promptly, safely and with permanent effect. It goes to the very root of the evil; destroys the superfluous fat that impedes the free action of the internal organs, also the subcutaneous adipose, abdominal and general, that gives such an unseemly appearance to the sufferer. "Antipon" causes no discomfort of any kind, and is a harmless liquid of pure vegetable ingredients, agreeably bitter and refreshing to the palate. The reductive action of "Antipon" begins at once, and within a day and a night of the first dose the scales will proclaim a decrease. When the figure has been denuded of all superfluous fat and the patient is satisfied that normal weight has been attained, the doses may be discontinued,

THE CURE IS COMPLETE AND PERMANENT.

"ANTIPON" may be had of Chemists, in bottles, price 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d., or in case of disappointment, by sending cash remittance to the "ANTIPON" Company, 13 Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.

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A WOMAN'S HATE.

The Story of a Lover's Disappearance and a Girl's Faith.

THE news spread like wildfire that Brian Wyndhurst had taken the cheque for one thousand pounds, drawn but unsigned, had forged the signature of the head of the firm, cashed the cheque and absconded. The excitement in the large office was tremendous; it came like a thunderbolt on all the clerks and employées; and when it was carried from the premises of Morgan and Sons to the ears of Marian Arnold, Brian's sweetheart, it seemed to stiffen every muscle and nerve in her body and turn her to stone.

For a full minute she stood in this apparently petrified condition, gazing at her aunt with eyes that saw nothing; then she sank in a limp mass on the couch from which she had hastily risen. When she had sufficiently recovered to ask questions, she demanded more particulars.

"The gentleman is a detective," responded Mrs. Arnold uneasily. "Do you think you can go through the ordeal, Marian? He will ask you all manner of things about Brian."

"I must go through it," returned Marian firmly. "In the interest of justice—and Brian! There is some dreadful mistake! He could not do such a thing!"

"Well, collect yourself, my dear!" exhorted Mrs. Arnold, still mentally troubled. "Brian always seemed a nice, steady young fellow, but they hint at betting and—but I'll show him in!" she added hurriedly, as she saw the colour coming back with a rush to Marian's cheeks and interpreted that circumstance as the raising of the storm cone.

Detective-Inspector Mostyn entered and took the proffered seat; he began his business tactfully, and it did not take him long to place Marian in possession of all known facts and all conjectures.

Brian Wyndhurst was a trusted clerk in the firm; he was the only son of the woman whom John Morgan had loved but failed to win. When Brian was left an orphan, with scarcely a penny in the world, John Morgan had taken him in hand. Brian had been educated and then placed in a large commerical office; it was tacitly understood that if he showed sufficient capacity, he would ultimately become a partner.

Every Friday it was necessary to draw £1,000 from the bank by means of an open cheque for the purpose of paying the clerks and factory hands who were in receipt of weekly wages. This was done early on Friday morning and a special cheque book was used for these wages cheques. It was part of Brian's duty to take charge of this cheque book in a safe; he would write the cheque and Mr. Morgan would sign it on Friday morning; occasionally, in order to be ready, the cheque would be drawn on Thursday evening, although not signed till the next morning.

Brian generally cashed the cheque, taking most of it in gold, some in silver, and a small proportion in notes; he was usually accompanied by another clerk and they drove in a cab from the doors of the bank to the factory, where most of the money was left, and then back to the office. Once or twice Brian had cashed the cheque alone, laughing when the grey-haired cashier shook his head disapprovingly at the probable danger incurred by Brian.

What had occurred on the present occasion? Brian had left the office as usual on Thursday evening, but he did not put in an appearance on Friday morning. It was nearly eleven o'clock when the firm received a telegram from him, to the effect that he was not well enough to come to the office. Thereupon Mr. Morgan had taken his duplicate key from the drawer in his private safe and had opened the one in Brian's charge where the cheque book was usually kept, in order to sign the wages cheque and have it cashed. To his amazement the cheque was missing! The counterfoil was duly filled up, but the all-important slip of paper was gone. Mystified, but not especially uneasy as the cheque did not bear the necessary signature, he drew another himself and went off in a cab with a clerk to the bank to cash it. On his arrival, he received the stunning intelligence that a cheque had already been cashed and was shown the one which he had missed!

It bore his signature; he knew it was a forgery, but it was so cleverly done that he could not detect any flaw himself till he had subjected it to a searching examination through a pocket microscope.

Explanations followed. A slightly-built young fellow had cashed it, alone; he brought a letter of introduction from the firm and had a cab at the door. He said that Mr. Wyndhurst was ill.

The letter produced was typewritten on the firm's paper and signed by John Morgan—another clever imitation. Inquiries were at once made and the police informed. Brian, it was found, had not returned home last night, but had wired to say that he would stay with a friend. His drawers at the office, as well as the safe, were examined, and the state of the contents suggested that Brian had intended to abscond. Further examination was being made in order to ascertain whether his books had been falsified and whether he had been guilty of other thefts, but everything was in order so far. The only clue was a paper, evidently written by Brian under the influence of some strong agitation; this paper was a mass of figures with odd letters, indicative of betting transactions, and it also contained the name of a woman, Clara Beale.

That was all. Could Miss Arnold say anything of Brian's movements on the previous evening? Had she—hem!—any reason to suppose that Mr. Wyndhurst had been betting or——

"He always condemned gambling in unmeasured terms!" declared Marian decisively.

The detective was on the point of observing that people sometimes strongly condemn a thing as a cloak, while they do that same thing all the time; but he remembered himself just in time.

"I have not seen Mr. Wyndhurst, or heard from him, since Wednesday evening," said Marian. "I expected him to-night and if he doesn't come, I shall conclude that some evil has befallen him! I fear it is so, for he is the soul of honour and would not be guilty of so wicked a crime, so great an act of ingratitude!"

"Precisely!" acquiesced the officer, just a little drily. He had heard of that sort of thing so often! Such confidence was creditable to human nature, but it wasn't business from his point of view! "Was he all right on Wednesday evening, Miss Arnold? Not worried at all, but just as happy and buoyant as usual?"

"He *did* appear somewhat worried," admitted Marian hesitatingly. "He said that he might have something to tell me soon, but"—she blushed—"I understood that remark in a way which you will not understand!"

"Exactly!" remarked the detective sympathetically, but

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looking much more alert. "Didn't explain what he was going to tell you soon, I suppose?"

"No! But surely you do not think him guilty? You are not looking for him in order to arrest him?"

Marian half rose from the couch in indignation, but dropped back again.

"We must find Mr. Wyndhurst, Miss Arnold,' was the evasive answer, "and then we shall get at the truth!"

The officer took his departure and Marian waited feverishly till the evening was far advanced, hoping against hope that Brian would appear; but he came not, and with a sharp pain at her heart she lay on her bed to pass the night in sleeplessness, and gradually forming the determination to join in the search herself on the morrow, if no tidings came of her missing lover. The morning journal brought her the intelligence that Brian Wyndhurst was suspected of the robbery and was being sought by the police with a view to his arrest.

Marian Arnold found herself face to face with a condition of things which demanded all her courage and which would have the effect of either crushing her and destroying her love for Brian Wyndhurst or transforming her from the simple, placid maiden into a woman of energy and determination. She was pretty, with attractive ways and a simple trustfulness calculated to charm a young man of such virility as Brian, just as his very manliness drew him to her as the one who would be capable of protecting her. She loved him, she had told herself, but she had never sounded the depths of her heart to learn how much she loved him. She was content to trust him, believing that he would do his best to make the path of life smooth for her, while she was filled with a mild determination to help him in his troubles and share his joys.

And in the course of a few hours, circumstances had effected a great change. This danger to Brian had removed the mist from her mental vision; she could clearly perceive those sterling qualities which had been but dimly visible to her; during the night of bitter anxiety and reflection she had probed the depths of her heart and had discovered the profundity of her love for Brian. The old placidity was gone; the Marian Arnold of that morning was a woman with a resolute countenance that denoted a set purpose.

Mrs. Arnold watched her niece with some anxiety; she was afraid that the girl would suddenly faint or go into a fit of hysterics; she was totally unprepared for what did occur, and it startled her a great deal more than a fainting fit would have done.

"Aunt," said Marian suddenly, breaking a long silence, "I am going out to-day to do what I can to find Brian!"

"But, my child, you cannot do anything!" expostulated Mrs. Arnold, when she had sufficiently recovered from her astonishment to be able to speak. "The detectives have the case in hand; they are more capable than you can be of——"

"I know," interrupted Marian quietly. "But there is one great difference between the detectives and myself—a difference which, I think, gives me an advantage. I am in love with Brian Wyndhurst, and love, although blind in some respects, is very sharp-sighted in others. I may find a clue which they have missed! They start with the assumption that Brian is guilty; I am confident that he is innocent. We shall view the facts from different standpoints. I am convinced that there is some plot against Brian!"

Mrs. Arnold remained silent; she did not feel so confident about Brian's innocence. He was a good fellow, but young men sometimes give way to temptation. However, she did not argue with Marian; twenty-four hours previously she would have spoken out boldly enough, but this Marian was not the niece of the past! So she held her tongue.

"I shall go to see Mrs. Mead, Brian's landlady; afterwards I shall call on Mr. Morgan!" declared Marian as she rose from the breakfast table. She had forced herself to eat in order to maintain her strength.

She carried her plans into execution. Mrs. Mead was somewhat perturbed by the visit at first, but she warmed to Marian when they were seated in her scrupulously clean, though humble parlour.

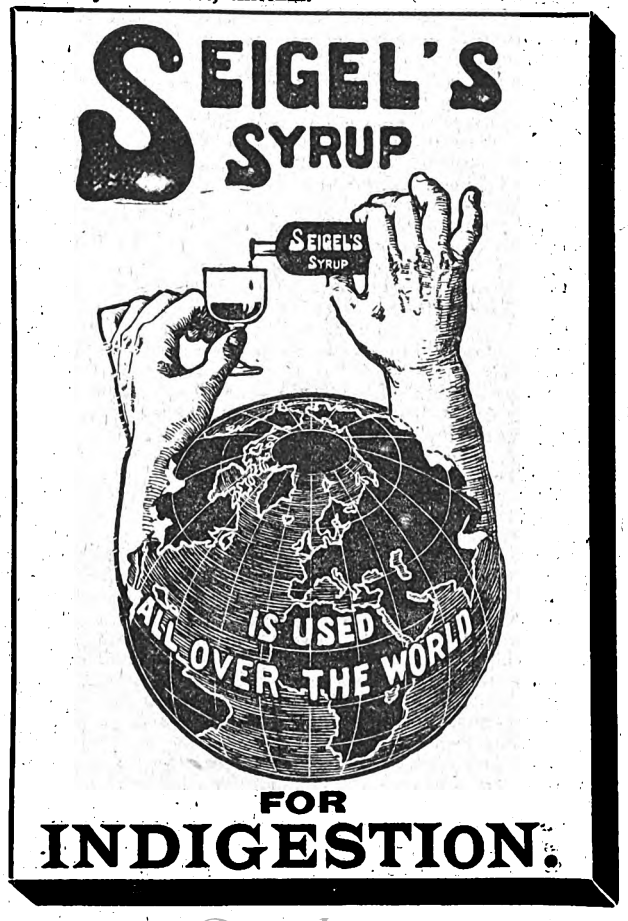
"So that is all you know?" queried Marian, fixing her keen

The Terrible Turk.

"He is a pitiless monster," writes one correspondent; and another, "Wherever he goes there is misery." Hard sayings, these, and all summed up in the word "unspeakable," applied to the Turk by Mr. Gladstone. It is matter for debate whether any nation is so bad as this. Of most people or things some good can be urged, but none of indigestion, which is responsible for more misery than a million Turks in arms could produce. It is the function of food to make rich, pure blood, and to sustain muscles, brain and nerves. When food fails to do this, the digestive organs are at fault, and only Mother Seigel's Syrup can set them right again. Seigel's Syrup is a gentle tonic, compounded of fruits, roots, and herbs, which assists nature to do its own work in its own way, regulating the system and stimulating the liver to healthy activity.

Marriage and Health.

Married men live longer than single men. So, at least, a study of the United States census returns would seem to indicate. But though marriage may be conducive to longevity, it certainly does not secure immunity from indigestion, biliousness, and the host of weakening and distressing ailments which have their origin in a disordered stomach and a torpid liver. Yet even that may be secured by the timely and regular use of Mother Seigel's Syrup, a natural tonic and digestant made of fruits, roots, and herbs. "For years I was a martyr to indigestion and biliousness, and was afraid to eat at all. Thanks to Seigel's Syrup I am now as well as I could wish to be." So says Mrs. Rose Warboys, of 100 Queen Street, Hitchin.



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eyes on Mrs. Mead, after the landlady had repeated the particulars already made known. "You can tell me nothing more, nothing? You know what has been said — that he betted and that the name of a woman, not my name, was found on a paper in his drawer?"

Marian, full of loving trustfulness in Brian, waited for an emphatic reply that would confirm her own views; but Mrs. Mead looked half frightened, and gazed confusedly at the carpet. "Poor girl!" she murmured; "I really ought to tell her, for if she has been deceived, she ought to know it!" Marian saw the landlady's confusion; it struck a chill to her heart, but she cast aside the doubt and pressed the question.

"Well, miss, it'll be best for me to tell you," she answered slowly. "Mr. Wyndhurst *did* have something to do with another lady, because she came here for him once, and I believe he met her elsewhere. I'll tell you what I know, but for goodness' sake you mustn't tell the police that you've got it from me! They would send me to prison for hiding the facts! But I did it to save him, for he was a nice young gentleman and perhaps it was a first false step and——"

"Tell me all!" demanded Marian, her cheeks paling. "You may help me to save him!"

The last remark was ambiguous, and Mrs. Mead interpreted it to mean that Marian Arnold wished to assist Brian to escape the consequences of his false step. Mrs. Mead was flurried and unable to reason clearly.

"I can't tell you much about what happened before the evening of Mr. Wyndhurst's disappearance, Miss Arnold. A young lady came to see him once, but she would not give her name; it was evening and she wore a thick veil. All I can say is that she seemed very upright—perky in her manner, too. I believe Mr. Wyndhurst met her elsewhere and had been on intimate terms with her. Mr. Wyndhurst has been worried lately, I am sure of that! Well, the night before last he didn't come home and a telegram came from him, as I have told the police. But I didn't tell them that I went out after the telegram came and when I got home, rather late, I found that someone had been in! Oh, I was sure of that; you see, I am very particular how I arrange my things and I hate to see chairs and mats and other things crooked. Now, the mat inside the front door was crooked! Of course, I never left it like that!"

"What does that indicate?" asked Marian judicially.

"Someone had been in, someone who didn't wish me to know it, and so had been extra particular about wiping his feet! He, or she, had shifted the mat in wiping his feet so much! I didn't pay any attention at first, thinking it was Mr. Wyndhurst come home, after all. So I went to his room and found it locked. It is never locked unless he is in bed. I left him alone till the morning, but as he didn't come out and didn't answer my knocks, I got a duplicate key which I keep in a drawer and opened the door. He wasn't there and the bed hadn't been slept in!"

"Well?" inquired Marian, with a trace of eagerness and anxiety.

Mr. Wyndhurst had been in his room and had changed his suit. He had taken one suit from the drawer and had put the other, the one he wore when he left in the morning, back in the drawer again. And in changing he dropped something on the floor without noticing it. I'll show you."

She went away and returned a minute later with a small stamp-photograph of a young woman. It was at the time when these little novelties were in vogue and many persons stuck them on letters to friends. Marian Arnold examined the picture critically and a pang of jealousy shot through her; she shut out the feeling in an instant, feeling ashamed of her momentary defection. The woman was strikingly beautiful, and even this little imperfect picture corroborated Mrs. Mead's statement that she was very upright. Mechanically she turned it over; on the back was written "24 B. W." Those were Brian's initials, but it was not his handwriting, and what did the figures mean? Were they part of some cipher? The idea of a cipher occurred to her because Brian was fond of codes and ciphers, and they had amused themselves in their own correspondence with that kind of thing.

Mrs. Mead regarded all this as evidence of Brian's culpability, although she was loth to believe in it. Marian was puzzled by this last discovery, but she was more than ever of opinion that there was a plot against Brian. She soon quitted Mrs. Mead's parlour and hurried to the office of Morgan and Sons, where she saw the head of the firm.

Mr. John Morgan received her sympathetically; he had seen her before, and thought that she was likely to make Brian a sensible, loving wife; but this interview increased his admiration. She surprised him by her resolute air and keen insight. His feelings were the same as those of Mrs. Mead; he desired with all his strength to believe in Brian's innocence, but appearances were against the young man. He said so.

"It is wrong, Mr. Morgan! I am certain there is some plot and we shall prove it!" she cried vehemently. "At least, *I* will prove it, if others cannot. Love can succeed where mere official duty fails!"

"Really, Miss Arnold, you make me feel quite glad!" exclaimed the elderly man, taking her hand and pressing it warmly. "I entertain the greatest affection for Brian, and this affair—has—upset me!"

There were tears in his eyes when he ceased speaking, and he had to cough violently in order to recover his self-possession.

"Tell me the latest information," requested Marian. "Were the originals of the telegrams written by him?"

"It is his style, but not quite like his handwriting," replied Mr. Morgan. "It looks as if he were much agitated. The letter introducing the messenger to the bank was typewritten; the messenger himself had the appearance that seemed a mixture of femininity and masculinity, and he was dressed——"

Here Marian interrupted him, giving a description of the second suit, according to Mrs. Mead's words, and before Mr. Morgan could do more than exclaim "That's it!" she produced the stamp-photograph. "I should like the bank cashier to say if the messenger's features resemble those," she cried in agitation.

Then she told him all she had discovered. Mr. Morgan was amazed; but he pointed out sorrowfully that the police would take it all as further evidence of guilt.

"Never mind!" cried Marian warmly. "Let us get to the bottom of it, and we shall see. Have you got that typewritten letter?"

"The police have it, but I have a press copy and am studying it."

In response to her request he showed the copy.

"There is no doubt that it was done on one of my machines," he told her. You will see that the bottom of the "n" is broken towards the end of the letter. The clerk who generally uses the machine discovered the break yesterday morning."

"You have a clerk named Jackson," said Marian quietly. He can use the typewriter, but is not good at it and is not a correspondence clerk. He only uses one sort of machine. Was that letter written on that particular machine?"

Morgan reflected. Yes; he remembered the facts mentioned by Marian. It was the same machine.

"And he wrote that letter!" whispered Marian, leaning

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towards Mr. Morgan, as if afraid that even a whisper might be heard. "Brian has told me of one peculiarity of Jackson's typing and letter-writing; he always begins the first word of the letter under the "r" of 'Dear,' whereas most people begin farther in, so that the 'Dear Sir' stand quite clear. This letter is written in that way."

Mr. Morgan jumped excitedly from his chair. Touching the bell, he ordered the letter-book to be brought to him; an examination of the copies failed to reveal a single letter arranged in that way.

"That clerk must be watched and this portrait shown to the bank cashier and the police," said Mr. Morgan decisively. "Miss Arnold, we may hope yet."

"Yes," returned Marian slowly, "unless—unless they have murdered him."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Morgan solemnly.

Two days elapsed, but the detectives, although they said they had an important clue, had arrived at no result. Marian herself had done some amateur detective work, but without success.

It was on the evening of the fourth day since Brian's disappearance that two people sat facing each other at a table in a fashionable restaurant; they were in a quiet corner and the place was almost empty, so they could talk freely in low tones. They were Jackson, Mr. Morgan's ledger clerk, and a woman who bore a striking resemblance to the stamp-photograph.

"I don't like this hanging about, Alice!" said Jackson moodily. "You doubled from Charing Cross to Calais with a Paris ticket; then went to Boulogne and came back in another guise. The police have traced you in that suit to Calais, but as you changed into feminine attire they lost you there. But I think that visit to Wyndhurst's lodgings and the change of suits was unnecessary."

"It made the case looker blacker against Brian, and that's what I wanted! I hate him for having refused me for that chit of a girl, and I have a dash of Spanish blood in my veins. When we have debts to pay, we pay them!"

There was such a fiendish glitter in her eyes that the weak-minded Jackson felt uncomfortable. He was in love with the beautiful demon; he couldn't help himself; and she had promised to marry him if he assisted her to have revenge on Brian.

"I have had revenge on him and on her at the same time with a goodly sum of money into the bargain!" she laughed. "They both suffer, and I glory in it! I have disgraced him! Oh; it is a splendid revenge!"

"It's too risky!" declared Jackson. "You were nearly caught by the landlady and you left the door locked. And I tell you, I'm confoundedly uncomfortable. It has just leaked out that you dropped a stamp-photograph on the floor!"

The woman said something angrily under her breath, and her manner was less easy.

"It's time we cleared out! You promised to marry me and that we should go to Mexico, where you had property. When are you going to carry out that promise? And where is my share of the £1,000? I ran a lot of risk!"

In her inmost consciousness the woman despised him, but he was a useful tool, and she had fooled him with a promise which she never intended to keep. She half regretted that she had returned to England, but she wanted to do further harm to Marian Arnold.

"All in good time!" she returned coolly. "I want to get Miss Arnold into the clutches of those who hold her lover, and then we will be off."

"Look here!" cried Jackson, paling. "I don't like this sort of thing. I hadn't any idea that you wanted to kill Wyndhurst, and I can't help to settle her as well! I can't!"

"I don't want you to!" said the woman scornfully. "Meet me at Dover two nights hence. You can travel by the nine o'clock from Charing Cross; I shall go sooner!"

After a few more remarks they left the restaurant. Alice Barfield was maturing a plot for the destruction of Marian, which she hoped to accomplish on the following evening.

But the best-laid plans go wrong at times, partly because the plotters have too much confidence in themselves. Alice Barfield planned to send someone to Marian on the next night with a mysterious message from Brian that would tempt Marian to venture into a trap; but on the next morning there arrived from Paris at the office of Morgan and Sons a note in Brian's handwriting to Mr. Morgan. It was to tell him that it was useless to search for the runaway, as he was beyond the arm of the law, and that to seek him would be to bring much greater disgrace on all concerned. That letter, which Alice had forced (as she thought) from the unwilling and desperate Brian under threat of a horrible death, was a terrible blow to John Morgan. It seemed to confirm his worst suspicions; in a hopeless sort of way he sent for Marian Arnold, and held the letter to her without a word.

Marian read it eagerly; she studied it excitedly; then, to Morgan's consternation, she waved it aloft with a triumphant laugh.

"He is not in Paris and he has not absconded!" she cried. "I can see that this letter was forced from him in order to throw us off the track; but an idea seized Brian and he finally consented, pretending to be unwilling all the time. He guessed that I might see the letter, and if I did that I should be able to read the cipher."

"Cipher!" echoed the bewildered John Morgan. "I see no hidden message or cryptogram. You're dreaming, my dear."

"Read every fourth letter in those words," said Marian, handing him the writing. "Every fourth letter written there goes to form a hidden message, and that message explains the figures and letters on the back of the stamp-photograph! He is kept a prisoner at 24 Bath Walk! Where is that?"

"Phew! About the worst street in the Metropolis, or in that part of it."

"We must rescue him at once!" said Marian. "They may kill him!"

The police counselled waiting till dark, and so it happened that while Alice was arranging to entice Marian into the same den, the girl was waiting near Bath Walk while a number of detectives raided the house and rescued Brian Wyndhurst, exhausted by exposure, ill-treatment, and anxiety, from the hands of the rascals who had been only too ready to do as Alice Barfield wished for a few pounds.

Alice, on learning from her female emissary, that Marian was out, had been seized by some misgiving; but instead of fleeing she had foolishly hastened to Bath Walk, where she was arrested just as Brian was released. She had the mortification, and fitting punishment, of seeing the meeting of the lovers.

Brian was taken to Mr. Morgan's home, where he received every attention.

The remainder of the plot was soon made public property. Brian had accepted an invitation and urgent request from Jackson to accompany him to a conversazione at a workmen's institute; but that was a ruse to get him into a lonely place.

He was drugged and conveyed to Bath Walk, and his keys were taken from him. He was stripped, and, on regaining consciousness, had to put on some loathsome clothing. Jackson took the office key and the key of the safe, while the woman took the key of his lodgings. It was Jackson who forged the signatures.

Jackson, on being arrested, volunteered all the information which the police wanted, but he gained little thereby. He was sentenced to two years' penal servitude. Alice Barfield suffered a heavier sentence, but she walked from the dock defiantly, unrelenting.

The bulk of the £1,000 was never recovered, but Mr. Morgan was not much troubled about it. As for Brian and Marian, they had suffered, but it had intensified their love, and, after a while, they even felt a little sorry for the accomplices who were wearing away some of the best years of their life in prison.

G. Merriam.

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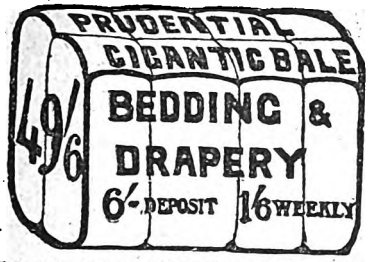

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Should Love Affairs be Kept Secret?

"SHOULD a girl tell her friends her love affairs?" inquires "GERTY." "I am just dying to confide in somebody my troubles and joys over my own affairs, but do not know whether it would not be unkind to my lover to make him a topic of conversation among other girls."

* * * * *

You are very wise and discreet, "GERTY." Certainly love affairs should not be the subject of "tittle-tattle." It is very unkind to a man to make him so pointed an object of interest to a lot of girls he does not know. If, however, you have one friend whom you can trust, I think you would be doing yourself much good by seeking her advice or consolation. Such feelings gain nothing by being "bottled up."

The Girl About Town.

"THE girl I am fond of," writes "GUS," "is a business girl, who attends an evening class three times a week. This means that she has to journey across town every night at a late hour. I am very nervous of her making these trips alone, yet could scarcely offer to see her home every night, as that would attract too much attention. Besides, I live in lodgings at the other end of the town. How would you advise me to act?"

* * * * *

I should change my lodgings, "GUS," and go to the neighbourhood in which she lives, if that is possible. If she is willing, there would then be nothing pointed about your seeing her home, as in any case you would be going that way. Neither need you always go to the door of her home, and thereby cause her embarrassment. Certainly a girl does need some kind of escort in crossing a big city late at night.

Should a Girl Tell Her Past?

"THE man who is now my *fiancé*," writes "ANNIE," "thinks that he is the only man who has ever kissed me. I have not denied this, but, as a matter of fact, I have had more than one previous love affair. Now to tell him this would, I fear, disturb his affection for me. Ought I, do you think, to tell him all about things, or should I leave it till later on?"

* * * * *

I think it is better to be candid now. It would be far better for him to know at the beginning all about your past affairs than to suddenly find out that you have been concealing things from him. It may be a blow to break the news to him, but if you do it carefully, he ought to be made to see that it is not unnatural that you should have attracted others. Besides he will afterwards admire you the more for being open with him, and what man is there whose vanity is not gratified by the thought that he has carried off in triumph a girl whom others have failed to win?

Asking a Girl Home.

"I AM very friendly with a certain girl," writes "CHARLIE," "but do not wish to propose to her until my people know her and like her. However, I do not quite know how this is to be managed, as I understand it is not etiquette for a man to invite a girl home without some chaperone."

* * * * *

"CHARLIE" is very sensible in his ideas. Certainly he had better postpone proposing until he has the approval of his family. As to inviting the girl to his home, "CHARLIE" should certainly include in the invitation one of her relations, her mother, sister, or brother, so as to place the affair on a formal social basis.

Friendship—Not Love.

"I AM very 'gone' on a certain man," writes "HELEN," "but every time we have discussed love and marriage, he has told me that on no account could he allow himself to go further with a girl than friendship. He pretends that he disapproves of marriage and says he will remain a bachelor. What am I to do to overcome such a feeling on his part?"

* * * * *

If you are really in love with him you have certainly done a good deal in winning the friendship of a man who poses as a woman-hater. In time, perhaps, you will persuade him to alter his views. But on no account try to draw him by petty devices, as such men are rarely attracted that way. Enjoy his friendship, and hope that in time something riper will result.

Not Jealous Enough.

"I AM worried, perhaps for a very absurd reason," writes "J. K. T." "My sweetheart is not a bit jealous. Whenever I talk of other girls I know, or have met, she just takes an interest in them, but never seems to be afraid of my carrying matters too far. Now do you think such a girl can be really fond of me? Is not jealousy a proper part of love?"

* * * * *

You are to be congratulated on having so very sensible a sweetheart. Evidently she has such perfect trust in you that the idea of your being unfaithful has never crossed her mind. No, jealousy is not a proper part of love. It is a very unpleasant and foolish passion, which does far more harm than good. However, don't try too hard to excite such feelings in your sweetheart. She might be deluded into jealousy, and such girls rarely forgive tricks.

Angling for Brothers.

"MOLLY" writes: "For some time I and my parents have lived in a small country village, where we have only very rarely been asked to visit our neighbours. It is six months since we last visited a certain family where there are five girls. The other day, a brother of mine (unmarried) returned from abroad. The day after his arrival we received an invitation to visit the family in question. How do you think I ought to view such proceedings?"

* * * * *

Evidently that family of girls had a business eye on your brother. It is, however, exceedingly rude and clumsy of them to show it quite so pointedly. To neglect you for six months, and then only ask you as a sort of cover for your brother, shows that they cannot be very desirable people to cultivate. You should decline the invitation, and save your brother from young ladies whose keenness to meet him is so badly disguised. At any rate, leave it to him to say whether or not he wishes to make their acquaintance.

Cynthia.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win.)

A SITUATION WORTH £100 A YEAR

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win.)

Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home."
Published by the Proprietors of "Pearson's Weekly," &c.

The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

100 CONSOLATION GIFTS WILL ALSO BE AWARDED.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.
Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.
This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.
The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.
Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.
At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf

---

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt (President of the United States), Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton, the late Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.

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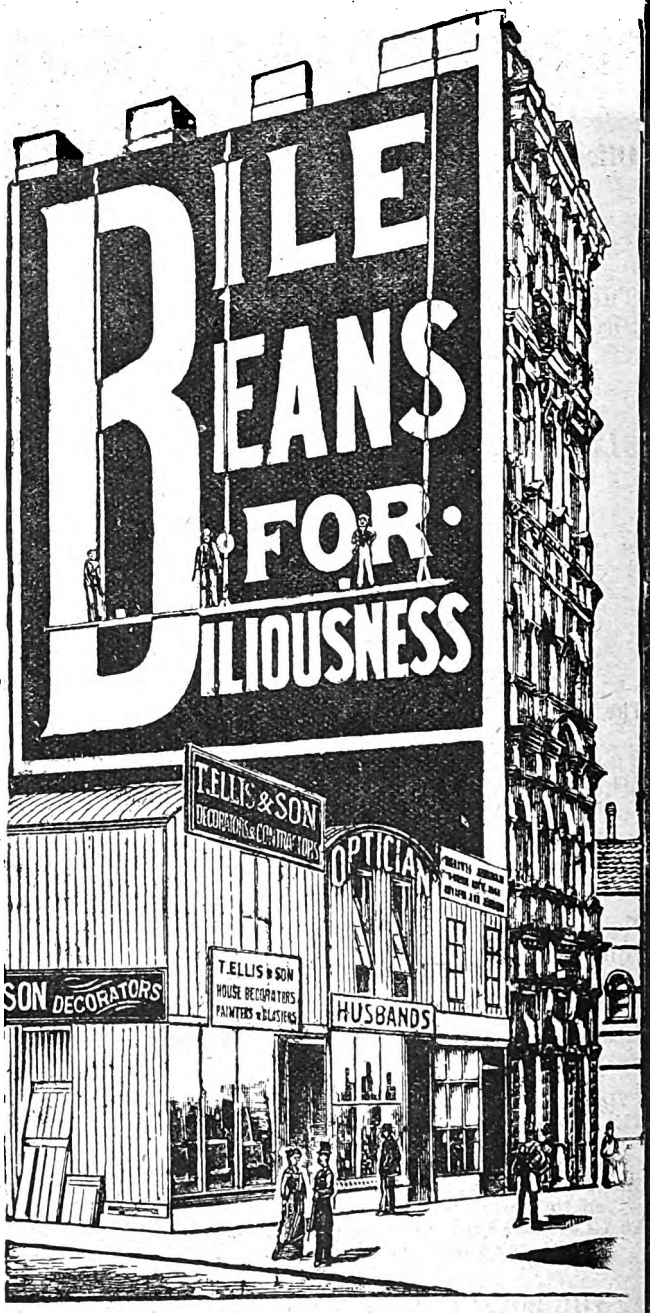
THE GREAT "AD"

OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPECIFIC.

THE accompanying sketch depicts a huge advertisement of the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company in Australia. The largest letter—the now world-famous "B"—stands forty feet in height, and compared with it the men of average height on the scaffolding appear to be mere pigmies. Bile Beans' most telling advertisement, however, is to be found inside the houses of the people, where the great army who have been benefited by them sing their praises and recommend them to others who suffer as they once did. The fame of Bile Beans has so far spread, and the manufacture of them so greatly increased, that the making and purveying of Bile Beans for Biliousness is now one of the largest medicinal enterprises in the world. This gigantic sign is a wonder of the advertising world. Bile Beans are a wonder of the medicinal world.



AUSTRALIA'S 40-FOOT BIG "B."

HOW BILE BEANS Cure INDIGESTION.

Many people fondly believe that if they can only get a change of air they will cease to suffer from indigestion, liver complaint, biliousness, or some similar ailment which may be troubling them. In this way vast sums of money are wasted every year in stays at the seaside or in the country. "I often went away for a change of air," says Mrs. Brown, of Park View, Leven, "but derived very little good fr m it, and in a few days I would have indigestion just as bad again. After any food I had most violent pains, accompanied with headache, sickness, and feelings of weakness. In the end I grew so debilitated that I could not do my housework. Sometimes I felt quite hungry, but I actually dare not eat because of the pain it occasioned me afterwards. Various doctors were consulted, and I took their prescriptions, but the relief I obtained was very meagre and only temporary.

"At last I decided to give Bile Beans a trial. Soon after beginning with them I felt I was improving, so I persevered. The relief I gained was marvellous, and after a short course I found myself quite restored to health. I can now eat any kind of food with relish, and I am never more pleased than when I am recommending to other sufferers the medicine which cured me."

THE MEDICINE FOR THE MILLION.

BILE BEANS for Biliousness are the finest family medicine, and promptly and permanently cure Headache, Constipation, Colds, Liver Chill, Influenza, Piles, Liver Troubles, Bad Breath, Indigestion, Flatulence, Loss o Appetite, Dizziness, Buzzing in the Head, Sleeplessness, Debility, Anæmia, and all Female Ailments. Of all Medicine Vendors, 1/1½ and 2/9 per box (LARGE BOX CONTAINS THREE TIMES QUANTITY SMALL SIZE).

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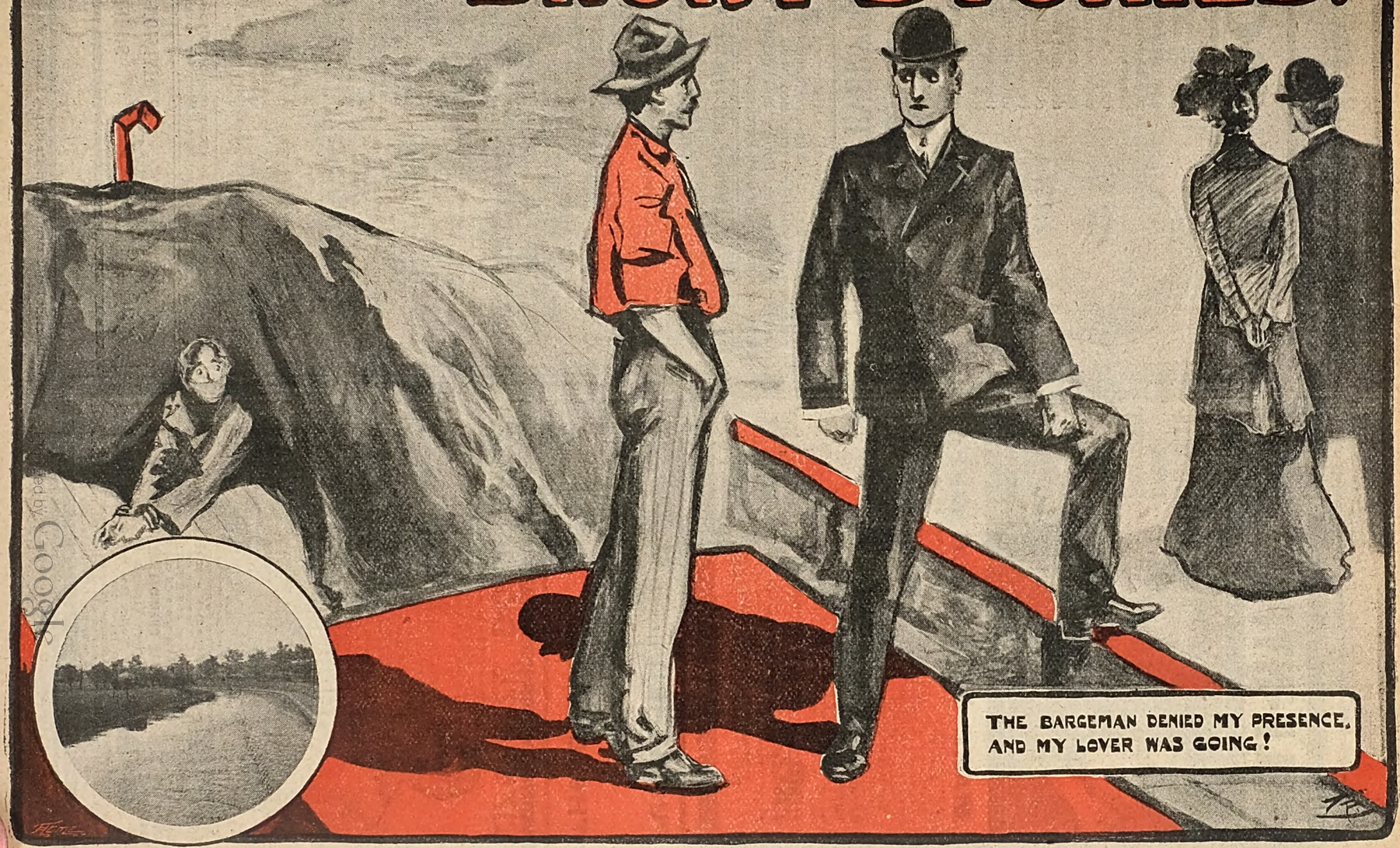

This little photograph shows the part of the canal where

No. 776. Week ending November 14, 1903.

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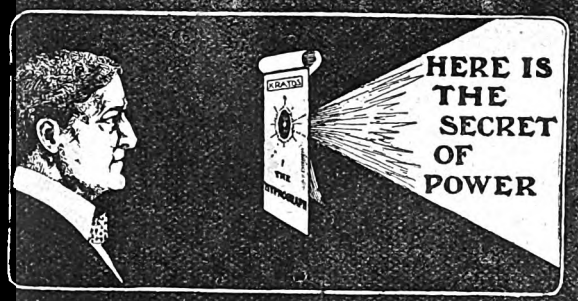
SELF-HYPNOTISM



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The Hypnograph is strictly scientific. It is to mental work what the compass is to navigation. It cannot fail to help you. Until you have used it you cannot realize what a wonderful and beneficial thing it is.

FREE. At present **The Hypnograph** is not for sale, but is offered free in order to create an interest in our practical books on mental subjects. If you are sufficiently interested to want **The Hypnograph** write for the free Illustrated Booklet "**The Power Within.**" enclosing 1d. Stamp for return postage.

RESEARCH PUBLISHING CO. (Dept. 437), Temple Chambers, Temple Avenue, London, E.C.

PUBLISHED FOR THE DEAF.

A special description of the causes, prevention, and home treatment of deafness is contained in the **REVIEW OF EAR, NOSE and THROAT DISEASES.** Anyone whose hearing is failing should send for a free copy of this Medical Journal. Address all communications to The Editor, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

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585,209

During the year 1902 I had accounts with **five hundred and eighty-five thousand, two hundred and nine customers.** I do not suppose that a single one of this enormous number did business **merely to oblige me,** they sent their orders in full confidence that they would be well served and on the understanding that unless thoroughly pleased with the goods there would be **no obligation whatever to purchase.** Seven days are always allowed for approval, and if you are not entirely satisfied send the package back.

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An Agency for my Firm is a very remunerative way of using spare time to advantage. Write for particulars.

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SHORT STORIES.

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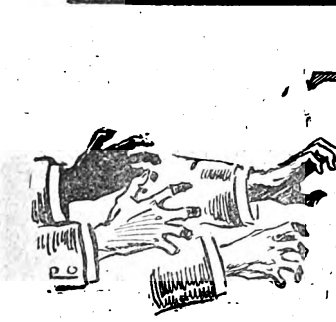
Fascinating New Series. Start To-day.



The Pursuit of Sara

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate*. He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the racecourse, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who tried to get Sara to give up the papers to him.

He took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to her, keeping a tight grip on her arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document there stared at her a hideous and distorted likeness of herself!

With a cry she grasped the paper tight, and read, her cheeks aflame, the description of her face and figure that succeeded. It offered a reward of £100 to the person who arrested her! She was in a dire plight!

She just managed to run away from him. She reached her hotel to find an adjacent factory in flames.

Against her window a ladder was placed, and up came Templeton and Rigby Starr! In the latter's hand was a knife!

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

And then, with blind fury, Sara threw herself against the figure clambering into the room, and strove to force him back into the abyss below.

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WHAT HAPPENED BY THE CANAL.

LINKING my arm about his shoulders, I pressed him back with the strength that comes to all of us, even the weakest, at crises in our lives. Gripping the window frame—an inch or two above him—he strove to hoist himself, by sheer power of muscle, into the room. Leaning my whole weight forward, with a sudden jerk, I all but over-balanced him; involuntarily he let go of the frame, and, clutching at me for support, caught me round the neck.

The clasp almost throttled me; instinctively I staggered back, fighting for air.

This movement on my part gave him his chance. Like a flash he released me, aiming a blow at my head that all but knocked me off my feet. Blinded with pain and rage, I flew back to the window, slamming it down before he could withdraw his hand, so that he hung suspended by the wrist.

The cry of agony that broke from him was the signal for an onslaught on the door. Sidney Ilford, realising his partner was in danger, was fumbling nervously with the lock. In a second I crossed the room, jamming myself behind the door, so that when it opened I should be concealed from view.

The next minute the door flew back on its hinges, Ilford, with eyes and ears alone for Rigby rushed to his assistance. Darting from my hiding-place, I rushed from the room down the corridor to the landing, where, by good luck, I found the lift ready and waiting.

"To the hall!" I gasped. "I'm going out," and I settled my hat, somewhat askew from my exertions, straight on my head. When I reached the street, the suddenness of my escape seemed to daze me. It was but a minute since I was upstairs fighting a last forlorn and desperate fight for love and liberty. Now the struggle was over and I was free with the notes and document in my possession.

My mind, working quickly, mapped out a plan of campaign. Hurrying past Campbell Street, still blocked with the crowd of onlookers at the fire, I made my way down Granby Street to a hairdresser's on the right hand side of the name of Jackson, where I remembered having seen the legend "wig maker" in the window.

I had made up my mind not to be driven from Leicester, at any rate until I had seen Maggie and learnt the news she had to tell. In order to carry out my purpose, however, it was obvious that Templeton and Co. must be thrown off the scent. Hitherto I had been the quarry, they the dogs. Now it was time I should play another *rôle*. I would take a leaf out of their book, and so effectually disguise myself that they would not cast a second look in my direction.

After some difficulty I secured a wig that answered my requirements. Of smooth iron grey hair, it completely altered my appearance. From the hairdresser's I hurried to a chemist's, where I purchased a box of rouge, an eyebrow pencil, and a pocket mirror, while from a milliner's next door I procured a dowdy-looking "sailor" in black straw and a thin black veil. Laden with parcels I hailed a four-wheeled cab, and told him to drive down the London Road towards Victoria Park.

I waited till we were clear of the more crowded streets, and then quickly, though with apprehension, proceeded to fix on my wig. Straining my hair back from my forehead, I contrived to coil it into a neat, hard bump. It made my head rather an odd shape, but that was a secondary consideration. The grey wig, parted in smooth bands on my forehead, securely fastened, I turned my attention to the box of rouge. My natural complexion is pale, my skin dead white. By the time I had rubbed on plenty of red colour, deepened my eyebrows from pale brown to black, I do not think my dearest friend would have recognised me. I am sure Noel would have passed me by. In my black coat and skirt, my neat sailor hat and veil, I looked a middle-aged woman of healthy, if plain, appearance.

My toilette finished, I packed my hat into a parcel, and, stopping the cab, alighted on the outskirts of Victoria Park. The cabman, whatever he thought, made no comment on the alteration in my looks, but contented himself with demanding just double his legal fare.

I paid what he asked, then, turning into the park, quietly deposited my hat behind a clump of trees. Some ten minutes later, seated on the top of a tramcar, I passed Harrington Shackel tearing along the road at a terrific rate. He scanned the tram as it passed him, but his eyes passed me by indifferently; he did not know me!

Having dispatched a long and urgent wire to Maggie warning her against the renewed activities of Templeton and Co., and appointing the "Old Gateway" as our meeting-place for to-morrow morning at 12.30, I judged it time to get something to eat.

It was now close upon half-past four, the fire had died down, the crowd of sightseers dispersing thronged the streets.

A certain little restaurant at the corner of Campbell Street, "Bottini's," struck me as a pleasant refuge from the turmoil.

I entered and took a seat at the far end of the apartment facing the door.

I was half through an appetising meal of lamb cutlets and green peas, when my attention was arrested by the occupants of an adjoining table. I had paid but little attention to my surroundings hithero, thankful for a short respite from the danger and excitement that of late had been my daily portion. I had eaten my dinner oblivious of what was happening round me.

The sound of a sharp metallic laugh roused me. Turning my head, I saw, at the table next but one to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr!

Forgetting my disguise, I was within an ace of starting to my feet and making a wild dash for the door. I only just saved myself from such an act of folly, and, trembling with the strain, I leant back half dead with fear.

"A wild cat!" cried Rigby, who had suffered most through my escapades. "I should like to throttle her."

"So you said before," interrupted Shackell, "you don't seem able to carry out your wishes."

"You've nothing to boast of," retorted the other, "she fooled you pretty well."

"For Heaven's sake don't quarrel," interrupted Templeton. "Time's precious, while you sit here and argue, the little cat may be making good her escape."

"No chance of that," said Rigby, "we're watching all the stations and the hotels. She can't give us the slip this time. Her red head's not easy to overlook."

"Leicester's a large place," said the senior partner. "A sharp-witted woman like her could contrive to lie low for some time."

"What do you think we ought to do, then?"

"We shall have to get at her through the people at Northampton. I've wired to an agent there, and told him to shadow the Dunkley girl till further orders. Meanwhile," he glanced at the clock, "we've other matters to discuss. Where's Ilford?" and he glanced sharply at Shackell.

"He's posted at the hotel. He persists in thinking Miss Gillespie will come back there to ask for letters."

"Maybe he's right. At any rate let him stay there for an hour or two. In all other regards," he lowered his voice and looked round cautiously, "things are very satisfactory. It could have been wished that the affair had been finished quicker, but——"

"Is the cash right? That's the question," said Starr.

The senior partner nodded.

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"Not a doubt," he said, "and now," he rose as he spoke, "I think we'd better be going. Tell Ilford to meet me outside the Palace Music Hall at eight o'clock to report. Starr can take his place, and Shackell"—the senior partner smiled—"you know what you have to do?" he queried softly.

Harrington nodded, and the glint in his eyes sent a shiver through my very heart.

I had made shift to continue eating my dinner while they talked, holding an illustrated paper as a screen before my face. As Templeton turned to go, however, I forced myself to lay the paper down. Now was the time to test the efficacy of my disguise. If they recognised me, it was better they should do so here in a public restaurant where, at any rate, I should be safe from personal violence, than in a more remote spot.

Slowly I raised my eyes and looked at them all three in turn. They glanced at me, but took no notice and passed through the door.

As for me, I could hardly believe in my safety—and their stupidity. They had been within a few feet of me, had looked at and criticised me, and—blessings on my wig and my beautiful red cheeks, had not known that I was Sara!

My spirits rose at the thought of my cleverness. I grew bolder, and decided I would go to the Palace at eight o'clock and endeavour to overhear what took place between Templeton and Sidney Ilford. I was so elated with my small success that I under-estimated the resources of my enemy. Templeton was far too old and too experienced a general to be outmatched by me.

I waited in Bottini's till a quarter to eight, watching the stream of customers that in little groups of two and three came there to dine. Horsey-looking men with pretty women, clergymen with badly-dressed wives, one or two actresses from the local theatre with their local admirers, and a sprinkling of commercial travellers.

The streets, full of life and motion, were at their brightest when I left the little restaurant. The crowds outside the popular music hall reminded me of London, and brought a pang of home sickness. The hall itself, tastefully decorated, and bright with paint and gilding, was crammed to overflowing at the commencement of the show, with an appreciative and hilarious audience. I caught sight of Templeton's tall figure at the box office, and after a discreet interval I took a ticket in the same part of the house as he selected—the stalls. It happened by good fortune that my seat was in the very row immediately behind his. There was a vacant chair beside him, and once or twice he glanced round the theatre as though looking for the person for whom he had reserved it.

The performance had not long commenced before the guest arrived. It was Sidney Ilford—as I had expected. Under cover of a "serio-comic" with full orchestral accompaniment, Ilford rapidly detailed his movements.

Leaning forward, my eyes fixed on the stage, my face set in a smile of expectant delight, I contrived to overhear the conversation without rousing suspicion.

"She's not been back," said Sidney. "But about half an hour ago a boy came along with a telegram. I told him I was expecting a wire and glanced at the envelope to see the name on it. Imagine my delight when I realised it was for our dear Sara. Ray is the name she's chosen this time, as I happened to discover when she came to the hotel. I watched the boy deposit the wire in the office, and came off here, leaving Rigby on the watch outside."

"What's the use of that?" said the senior partner. "You should have offered to take the telegram to her, said she was downstairs at the door, or something of that sort. Whatever is the good of leaving the thing in the office?"

"I had to," was the answer. "She's given explicit instructions that letters and wires are to be delivered to her personally. I heard her myself."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"You must go at once to the hotel and explain that you're a friend of the family, that she's stopping with your wife, and that you've called for her bag and any letters there may be. They'll believe your story like a rocket, especially if you offer to settle the bill. It's no use for me to try the game on, staying in the same hotel they wouldn't credit it, and Rigby they would recognise as well. I brought him down to the office when he fell through Sara's window. You're the only person they'll believe."

"Meantime the girl may go back and claim it?"

"Impossible, Rigby's posted on the steps of the hotel. She can't pass without his seeing her."

Turning my head I saw at a table near to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr.

"I suppose the wire's from Northampton?" said Templeton.

"Perhaps, unless——" Ilford's head drew close to the other's, and his voice dropped to a whisper.

In my anxiety to catch what he was saying, I forgot the need of caution and turned my face from the stage towards him.

In an instant Templeton observed me.

"Have you dropped anything, madam?" he said coolly. "You appear to be looking in this direction."

"My programme," I stammered. "I think——"

"Your programme is in your hand," he said. Then, in a loud voice to Ilford:

"We will resume our conversation later on. Our talk distracts this lady's attention from the stage."

Several people heard the rebuff and stared at me in the delighted fashion people adopt when a third party is rebuked.

I sank back in the seat, nervously clutching the unhappy programme. My eyes upon the stage I took in nothing of the performance. Figures came and went, sang and danced, and to me the whole show was a blank. My mind was fixed on one thing, and one thing only. How should I circumvent Templeton, how stop him claiming my wire?

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The number of a fresh turn went up. Templeton, glancing at his programme, announced that it was "Herbert Campbell."

"We may as well wait and hear him," he said.

Ilford nodded and laughed uproariously, as the great Herbert, in the garb of a policeman, walked, or rather waddled, on to the stage.

The two conspirators were safe for five minutes at least. If I left the theatre first, I should have a clear start. Once let me get out of the building, away from the blaze of light, the blare of sound, and some inspiration might come to me. But how could I leave without attracting their attention? I had already roused Templeton's suspicion, a move on my part would increase it. And yet, a middle-aged spinster—to all appearance I looked the part—could surely leave a music-hall without exciting comment. I might be shocked at the performance—alas! I had gazed with riveted attention at a short-skirted danseuse. What could I do?

Suddenly I started to my feet.

"I feel faint," I gasped, clutching hold of my neighbour, a dark, handsome-looking girl. "Please let me pass. I——"

"Lean on me," she answered readily. "Here, let the lady by, will you?" as one or two protested, "she's ill, poor thing."

"Shouldn't come to a hall, at her time of life," cried a shrill-voiced woman.

Careless of remark I clung to my pioneer, and passed down the row of seats in safety. Reaching the door I glanced back, and, to my horror, saw Templeton and Rigby preparing to leave.

"Thank you," I gasped, dropping the arm of the dark-haired girl. "It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged." and leaving her abruptly—and in open astonishment—I darted down the steps and across the road.

From where I stood I could see the entrance to the Palace plainly. I had not long to wait before Templeton appeared. In piteous indecision I watched the portly figure descend the steps, each minute gave me less time to act, brought him nearer to his goal—the wire that was lying at the hotel.

An urchin from the gutter, a pale-faced, keen-eyed Arab of the pavement nudged my arm.

"Mother's in gaol," he said in a hoarse voice, "and father's dead. I've no shoes"—he glanced at his bare feet—"and I'm hungry. Mother's in gaol."

He did not ask for money; only repeated his plaint, his eyes large and sombre fixed on mine. A sudden thought flashed through my mind.

"You see that gentleman?" Stooping, I caught hold of the boy's arm, and pointed to the senior partner.

"Which?" said the boy, with an artful leer.

"That one," I repeated, slipping a shilling in the grubby hand. "That tall, stout man with the high hat and grey whiskers. Do you think"—I clutched the urchin tight—"do you think you could—upset him?"

"I might," said the boy stolidly, "for half a crown."

"Here's three shillings. He's a bad man, a wicked man

The New Walk, Leicester, where Sara encountered Templeton, who penetrated her disguise.

He wants to put little boys like you in prison. He wants to put me in prison too. If you can upset him, throw him down so that he is quite a long time getting up, I shall be able to run away. Will you do it?"

"I'll butt him in the stomach," he replied cheerfully. "He'll go down—wollop," and the little wretch danced mirthfully.

"Mind you've promised," I cried, as he darted from me—a frail craft on which to set one's hopes.

He grimaced in reply, and grasping a packet of newspapers under his arm, raced to the fray. Speeding across the road, head down, voiced upraised crying his wares, he charged full tilt against the senior partner, and, bless his little dirty face, sent him spinning in the mud.

Miss Sara Gillespie as she was before she assumed her disguise.

I waited for no more, but ran at top speed, a pace unbefitting a middle-aged spinster—down Granby Street, not pausing till I came within sight of the Hotel.

I walked boldly and unchallenged past Rigby Starr, up the stairs right to the office. There, just inside the window, I could see my telegram. The sight gave me confidence and courage.

"Good evening," I said boldly to the manageress. "You had a young lady, a Miss Ray, stopping here? She is my niece"—I eased nearer to the door that fenced off the office from publicity. "She's a good girl," I said softly, "but, but—just a little flighty. Her mother, who lives in Northampton, met her in Granby Street to-day and took her home. She sent me on to explain to you and fetch her bag and pay her bill. You see, she had differences at home. A young man? More than one, I fear." I shook my head and looked unutterable things. "My goodness me, if there isn't a telegram for her." I stretched out my hand, and, yielding automatically to the demand, the manageress handed me the wire.

"Is Miss Ray not returning?" she asked.

"Dear me, no, her mother won't let her away again in a hurry. What did you say the bill was? Thank you, that will settle it, I think, and I'll occupy her room to-night. Name?" I paused. "Dunkley," I said. "Miss Dunkley from Northampton. One moment *please*. If anybody should inquire for my niece—a gentleman, you understand—don't let him know she's left, he'll go off post-haste to Northampton and worry my poor sister to death. Tell him Miss Ray's here, and that she's gone to bed. You understand? Good night," and clasping my telegram I rushed—my excitement was too great for steady walking—up one staircase—just as Templeton and Ilford came up the other.

I listened to the senior partner's well-phrased tale, and gloated over his discomfiture, when at the conclusion of his speech he was informed that "Miss Ray was upstairs in her room and had received her telegram."

"There's a mistake somewhere," the manageress continued. "I've had a lady here just now, Miss Dunkley, who assured me that Miss Ray had been with her mother since dinner. Perhaps you'd better see the lady?" She rang a bell and sent a chambermaid to summon me.

"Go up to No. 63 and say they're wanted."

"Kindly say that Mr. Masterman is here," said the senior partner, and the indignation that I felt at the heartless lie seemed to choke me. Swiftly I hastened up the stairs. Another flight and yet another. And then across the dark corridor into my room, where having locked the door, I cast myself upon the bed.

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In answer to the maid's knock I sleepily asked "Who's there?" and in reply to her statement that Mr. Masterman awaited me, I bade her tell that gentleman "that I am not acquainted with anybody of that name."

I buried my head in the bed-clothes as her footsteps died away, and choked with hysterical laughter at the thought of the senior partner's face when she delivered her message.

"Checkmate!" I cried. "Checkmate!" Then, groping for the matches, I lit the gas and greedily opened the wire.

"I shall be with you to-morrow. Maggie Dunkley will not tell me where you are or I should come to-day. She fears I am an impostor. She sends this for me. Dearest, my heart's fond love, Noel."

From Noel, from my sweetheart! Dear Heaven, if I had failed in my attempt, if the telegram had fallen into Templeton's hands! And he will be with me to-morrow, all our troubles over, our sorrow past. The vile conspiracy that has separated us will be ended, done with at last.

The boy sped across the road, and sent Templeton spinning into the mud!

In a passion of tears, glad tears that spring from an overcharged but grateful heart, I kneel beside the open window turning my face upward to the sky. To-morrow the stars will shine upon us two together! The moon that casts its silver cloak over the blackened ruins of the factory will shine upon my heart and I—my dearest heart, my love, my Noel!

The wig that had done me such good service I plucked off and threw contemptuously aside. I let down my hair, and ran my fingers through its length. He loved it and admired it, therefore in my sight it was fair. To-morrow I should feel his arms about me, his dear lips upon my own. To-morrow——

Sunday dawned clear and bright. The bells chiming for early service woke me from pleasant dreams. It seemed to me an omen of good hope that the sun shone so pleasantly, that the air was warm and soft. Not until I was dressed did I remember with a shiver of compunction, that I should be compelled to put on that hideous wig. I came here last night as Miss Dunkley, middle-aged and grey-haired. I must depart in the same guise. Besides it would be more than probable that I should encounter one of the firm on guard outside the hotel. If I appeared red-haired and pale-cheeked, I should be discovered and my meeting with Noel prevented.

I was so excited at the prospect of re-union with him, that I forgot the conversation I had overheard in Bottini's restaurant. I did not remember that Templeton had spoken of having communicated with their agent in Northampton charging him to shadow Maggie Dunkley, wheresoever she might go.

Careless and light of heart I left the hotel, and all-impatient for the moment when my friend should tell me of Noel, hastened to the meeting place a good hour before the appointed time, and pacing to and fro in the shadow of the old gate, pictured the happy meeting that was in store for me.

Maggie, trim and neat in her Sunday frock and feathered hat, was punctual to the moment. Far too anxious to be prudent, I flew to her side, and heedless of hostile eyes, embraced her fervently.

She drew back astonished, as might be expected, from the clasp of the strange grey-haired woman.

"You don't know me, dear," I said, laughing. "Of course not, how should you recognise me? I'm Sara—Sara Gillespie. Look, and unpinning the sailor-hat I tore off my false grey locks, showing my own red hair as testimony.

I thought even at the moment that I caught an exclamation from the other side of the arch, but put it down in my heedlessness to the surprise that anyone might feel at the sight of a lady divesting herself of her head-dress.

"Dear goodness, you have given me a turn," cried Maggie, gazing at me as though doubtful even now of my *bonâ fides*.

"Where's Noel?" I cried eagerly. "Tell me, Maggie, what have you done with him?"

"I'm not sure, till I've asked you certain questions, if the young man who came *is* Noel," she answered. "Do you describe him, carefully, and I'll see if what you say agrees with the description I put down."

"Tall, broad-shouldered, clean-limbed. Dark brown hair, with a slight wave; clean-shaven, square white teeth, brown skin, and a lovely smile.'

Maggie grinned at my enthusiasm.

"I think it's all right," she said cautiously. "But to make sure I'd better repeat what he said. He told me that your full name was Sara Christabel Gillespie. Is that true?"

"Quite. You needn't worry, Maggie, it's the right man at last."

"You're sure? Remember you made a mistake before."

"Well, you shall be with me when I meet him, so if he is an impostor no harm can come."

"Very well, Jim thinks you'd better let him come as well. He'll bring Mr. Masterman along, and I'll go with you. What do you think of meeting him near the canal? It's pretty there, and nice and quiet. There are such lots of people in the parks on Sunday. Jim's sister-in-law has a cottage close to the waterside; we could go there and have tea."

"The canal or anywhere else so long as Noel is there," I answered. "Tell me, Maggie, why didn't he come with you this morning?"

"He wanted to," she answered, "but I was afraid. Jim said I must be sure that he's the right man before I let you see him. He's in Northampton now, waiting with Jim. He doesn't know I've come to Leicester," she added laughing. "I'm to send a telegram when I leave you, and when they get it Jim and he will set out at once. There's a train will bring them in about half-past three."

"Oh, Maggie," I cried half in despair, "you shouldn't have kept him from me."

"I like that," she answered angrily, "a nice state of things there would have been if I had brought the wrong one to you."

I realised the truth of the words, but, all the same, I felt a foolish sort of resentment that Noel had been kept from me. At length Maggie proposed that we should go to the house by the canal to wait there for Jim Goodman and my sweetheart.

"You'd better fasten on your wig," she added, "you'll be spotted at once without it."

I complied with the request, and together we set out for

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Mrs. Goodman's house, calling at the post office on our way. The house proved to be quite half a mile from the canal, and one of a row of cottages off the Abbey Park Road. The place was small, the children numerous and noisy. It seemed impossible for me to spend the time waiting for Noel in such uncongenial fashion.

"I shall go for a walk," I announced. "I'm too restless to stop indoors. I'll be back here at three sharp, Maggie."

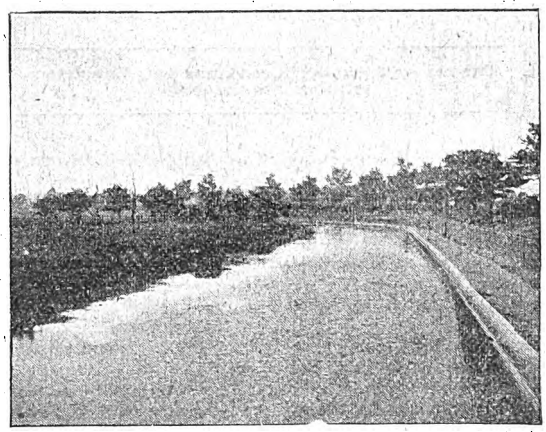
"Don't be late," she answered. "I'd better show you the spot where we arranged to meet. Jim thought you'd rather your young man shouldn't see you first of all at his sister's. It is not far, not more than ten minutes' walk."

She put on her hat and accompanied me with several small children across a stretch of meadow land to where the green-sward sloped to the water's edge. The towing path on the other side of the canal lay bare and brown in the bright sunshine. The scene was very beautiful, the day very pleasant.

"You won't mistake the spot?" asked Maggie. And then, "Don't you think you'd better wait with me at Gracie's? Suppose anything goes wrong?"

"Impossible," I answered. "You and Jim have been far too careful in your arrangements; I shall be back at the cottage at three."

I watched her figure cross the field, skirting a belt of trees and a pleasant hedgerow. Then, too restless and excited to remain still, I crossed the bridge a little higher up and tramped along the tow path till I reached St. Margaret's works. Leaving the water behind me, I tramped through the narrow streets till I gained the centre of the town. Leicester on Sunday morning after church is a sight worth seeing. All the work girls and operatives in their Sunday bravery throng the parks, the squares, and the principal streets. One hardly sees an ill-dressed girl; they keep indoors on Sunday!



The Canal, where Sara and Noel came so close together, and and yet were powerless to communicate with each other.

The seats in the Municipal Square were gay with flowers, feathers, and silks; dainty toilettes, costly gowns met one at every turn. I found a vacant place on one of the seats, and found distraction for my thoughts in watching the scene around me.

Suddenly from a group of bright colours, a blue frock and picture hat detailed itself.

"Are you better to-day?" said a pleasant voice; "you *were* bad last night, poor thing!"

Glancing up I recognised the girl, who, thinking I was faint, had escorted me from the music hall.

"Much better, thank you," I returned.

"I was quite anxious about you," she went on, "especially after the funny way you left me. You looked quite scared; I couldn't understand why you ran off like that. This gentleman," she motioned to a portly-looking person standing with his back towards us, "this gentleman was as concerned as me."

As she spoke the individual referred to turned, raised his hat, and advanced to meet me. Then, if ever, I had need of all my courage, my resources. The man who stood with outstretched hand before me was none other than the senior partner, Templeton himself!

The impulse of flight seized me once again, my eyes refused to meet his searching glance, my voice, sunk to a husky whisper, was beyond control. I gripped the seat hard, and waited till the ground steadied beneath my feet.

"It is very kind of you to feel concern on my behalf," I said and my voice was thin and quavering. "Few people care to trouble about an old woman like myself. I ought not to have ventured in a music hall in my frail state of health."

"Did you enjoy the entertainment, Miss——" He paused interrogatively, and in the accent of his voice, the twitching of the upper lip that showed the yellow pointed teeth, I realised he had penetrated my disguise. But—and in that lay my chance of escape—it was evident the dark-haired girl was not one of his employées. He had introduced himself to her notice on the common ground of their concern for me. It was obvious that in the event of a scene she would be more inclined to take my part than his. She had friends with her, a party of girls and young men. While I remained with them I was safe from any attack.

I disregarded Templeton's request for my name and answered placidly that "a part of the performance had seemed interesting."

Then turning to the girl in blue I laid my hand on her arm.

"I wonder if you'll take pity on a lonely old woman and let her spend an hour with you? I like young girls, especially when they're pretty and nice as you. It would be a real kindness if you'd bear with me a while?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the young lady with a little giggle, and linking her arm in mine, she led the way across the square and in the direction of "The New Walk"—a broad path shaded by leafy trees.

Her friends, following our lead, walked close behind; Templeton beside us. Up and down the Avenue we paced, the senior partner watchful and alert, purring soft speeches to the girl in blue, who, flattered at his attentions, kept giggling and throwing glances at her friends. In the middle of the walk, we suddenly encountered a couple of the "blue girl's" admirers, they seized on her, evidently regarding Templeton and myself as intruders of a most undesirable type.

The senior partner seized the opportunity to draw close to me. Impatience got the better of caution, for once his acumen failed.

"Thief!" he said. "Thief! I'll have you in gaol before the morning."

In a second I flashed past him to the girl in blue.

"My dear," I said, "your friend," I pointed to the senior partner, "is, I fear, insane. He has just accused me of theft. I never saw the man before last night. It has upset me terribly. I must ask you to remonstrate with him. I'm sure," I turned to the young men, "you would not see an old woman abused before your eyes? He spoke of taking me to prison."

"He's no friend of mine," said the girl quickly.

"Then how dare he walk with you?" cried one of the admirers, facing up to Templeton.

"If you don't mind, my dear," I whispered, "I will go away. I cannot bear a scene. My heart's not strong, but really your friend's too outrageous."

Leaving the senior partner the centre of an excited group, I slipped down a side turning, and hurried into a church conveniently near.

Here at any rate I was safe, in sanctuary no one could touch me!

The clock had chimed the hour of three before I felt able to leave the building. I was weak and trembling, full of forebodings and bitterly repentant that I had not stayed with Maggie at the cottage near the canal.

I took a tram from the Clock Tower to Abbey Park and arrived at the street where Mrs. Goodman's house was situated

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twenty minutes later. One of the children met me at the top of the road. She ran towards me, her face alight with expectation.

"You're not to go home," she said. "I was to tell you that Maggie was waiting for you by the water, and that you must not go near the house because somebody was watching."

She ran off, having delivered her message, without giving me time to question her further.

I was half inclined to disregard the injunction; I had promised Maggie to call for her, and it seemed unaccountable she should have changed the plan. Still, it would be risky to disregard so plain a warning. Possibly one of the firm was at this moment lurking round the corner.

And yet I was undecided, and when at last I turned my back on the road, and walked alone to the meeting place, I did so with a heavy heart.

There was no sign of anyone at the rendezvous. Steeped in the calm of a Sunday afternoon the landscape was void of man or woman. In the distance a barge lazily drifted towards me, drawn by a patient looking horse that plodded on without a driver. A distant clock chiming half-past three, I ran up the slope eagerly searching the horizon. No one in sight, only the barge lazily drifting nearer.

Should I return to Mrs. Goodman's cottage? The idea was not feasible. I might fall into the hands of the enemy, besides, in my absence, Maggie and Noel might arrive.

Was it possible the message given by the child was a false one? She might have been bribed to deliver it. I was sure Noel would be waiting for me at the cottage.

Noel—I started round in the direction of the house only to pause in piteous indecision.

Perhaps I should meet him on the road? He would not know me in this hideous disguise. And yet I dared not deprive myself of the poor shelter it afforded me. Surrounded as I was with plots, hemmed in by foes, more cunning, more powerful far than I, it would be madness to abandon that which had once saved me.

As time went on, and still there was no sign of those I waited for, my mind grew apprehensive of a fresh plot. Perhaps Maggie herself had been deceived. It was possible that the man she saw was, after all, an impostor. She had been induced to make this appointment with me, in order to facilitate the scheme of my capture. And I—fool that I was—had played into my enemy's hands by refusing to remain at the cottage. For the sake of sentiment, because I wanted to spend a few hours alone, to dream of my lover and the approaching meeting with him, for the sake of idle folly, I had, it seemed, destroyed all possibility of re-union.

Where were they? I ran to and fro, scouring the distance with tear-dimmed eyes. Dear Heaven, surely I was not to suffer this great disappointment? Surely this time all would be well. My lips parched with anxiety, murmured his name, my heart, tired with the passionate throbs of fear that so perpetually convulsed it, thrilled with a fresh pang.

Suddenly the figure of a girl running towards me came into view. Close behind her were two men. The height and build were strange to me. They were gaining on the girl, who kept looking eagerly ahead. From the trees where I kept watch I could observe them plainly, but I was hid from view. As the girl came nearer I recognised her face and figure.

It was Maggie! Maggie pursued, I felt it, by the agents of Templeton and Co. My fears were realised. We had fallen the victims to a fresh conspiracy. In a little while they would catch sight of me, reach my side, and then, all efforts unavailing, the papers for which I'd sacrificed so much would be wrested from me, Noel's fortune taken from my hands.

I glanced round hopelessly. As yet I had not been perceived. There was a chance, the barest chance, I might escape them. The barge by this time had drifted to within a few feet of where I stood. I had but to make a rapid dart from the shelter of the trees—but a short distance from the water—and, jumping from the beach, scramble on board and trust to my wits to find a safe hiding place.

Swiftly I put the project into operation, I reached the water's edge, halloed to the boy who sleepily held the rudder, then, wading into the water, climbed cat-like up the rope trailing at its side. An awning stretched half down the deck made a sort of cabin. In a second I dived under the tarpaulin, and made for some sacks of flour behind which I crouched.

Something from the far end of the vessel moved towards me. I paid but little attention to the noise, my energies were concentrated on the figures running to the shore.

Of a sudden, from the darkness behind me, an arm shot out and gripped me by the throat. The next moment, bound and gagged, I lay behind the sacks—helpless and immovable.

My eyes left uncovered, through a rent in the tarpaulin, discerned the figures of Maggie, Jim Goodman, and, yes, my sweetheart, Noel.

With an effort that seemed to break my very heart strings I strove to free my hands, writhing upon the floor, I tried to fix my teeth in the handkerchief that closed my mouth.

Fool! Fool! I had walked open-eyed into the trap. I had of my own will parted myself from Noel and safety.

My lover's voice sounded across the water.

"Have you seen a lady pass this way?"

The sleepy boy murmured a negative.

Impatient at his stupidity, Noel seized the rope hanging at the side and, followed by Jim, scrambled, as I had done, on board.

From my side something moved. My eyes fixed on the light beyond the awning, saw the figure of Sidney Ilford gradually outlined.

In response to further questioning he replied that he had seen and heard nobody.

"I've been dozing for a bit," he said pleasantly. "There's not a soul about this afternoon."

"Could anyone have got on board without your knowing it?"

"Hardly, I think, still"—he smiled—"you can search the barge if you like."

Noel, feeling at a loss, stammered something about trouble.

"Not a bit," said Ilford. "Look by all means."

They searched every corner of the barge, except the corner where I lay concealed behind the sacks of flour.

"I'm very much obliged to you," said Noel. Then, turning to Maggie, "she must have gone back to your place, I suppose."

Maggie agreed. They seemed about to leave the vessel.

Then, but not till then, did the agony of my position come to me. I was here within sight, within sound of my lover, and I could not appeal to him! A red light danced before my eyes, many waters sounded in my ears.

"Noel, Noel!" I tried to shout, but my cries of agony were muffled into a sound so faint as to escape his ears.

I was bound hand and foot, gagged—and he, my lover, did not know it.

They would kill me, perhaps worse, they would take the notes, and the paper——

And then the cold hand of despair clutched my heart.

I was in the power of Templeton and Co. at last!

At length, shifted by my frantic struggles, the ropes that bound me hand and foot, loosened a little of their pressure. Slowly and with infinite pain, I rolled over and over—my bonds were still too tight for me to crawl—towards the opening at the end of the tarpaulin.

Gradually I reached the journey's end. My head thrust under the edge of the tarpaulin, I glanced up pathetically to where my lover stood.

Surely he will see me! He would not leave the woman that he loved, the woman who had risked her life for his to so cruel a fate.

My eyes, fixed on his, wildly, imploringly, sought an answering sign of recognition.

Another moment would decide my fate.

Would he see me, or——

Noel was going to leave the barge!

(Another instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

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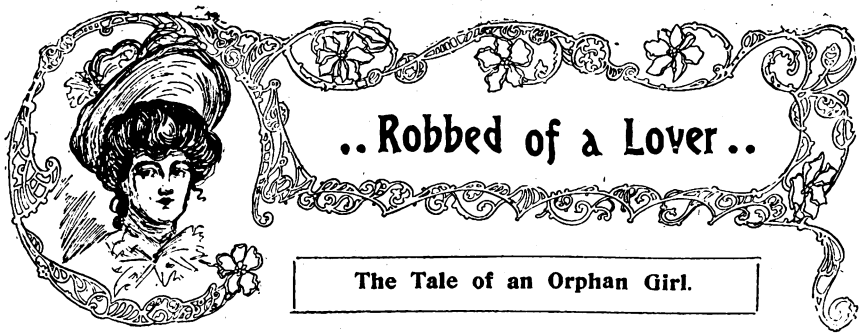

..Robbed of a Lover..

The Tale of an Orphan Girl.

My father and mother died in India while I was a mere child, and I was left to the not-too-tender mercies of my father's maiden sister. She was the first of a large family, he was the last, so she was many years older than he. Of the intermediate brothers and sisters I knew nothing, and I have never seen or heard of any relatives on my mother's side.

Aunt Sophia was an austere woman with her own ideas of how a child should be brought up. I was kept practically a prisoner in the big house, standing in its own grounds; I seldom went beyond the boundary of those grounds. My education was undertaken partly by my aunt and partly by an equally austere, not to say sour, and elderly lady, who was dependent on my aunt's bounty, Heaven help her! Both were well educated, but utterly unfitted for imparting knowledge to a child. My spirit was well-nigh crushed under their rigid discipline, and I grew up timid, ignorant of the world, and, consequently, badly-equipped for what was to follow.

My aunt—strange creature!—finding that I did not share her views on certain religious matters, despite her assiduous teaching, turned against me when I was eighteen. I will not attempt to pass any condemnation upon her; I will merely say that she informed me that she had done all she could for me, but as I did not choose to follow her precepts any longer, and as I was now old enough to look after myself, we had better part! At first I did not know whether to be frightened or pleased at this unexpected offer of liberty, but after hurried reflection, I decided to leave her. I think she was surprised; she had probably counted on my being so afraid of the temptations of the world as to beg her to keep me; then, when she saw that I had made up my mind to go, she grew more stony than ever and insisted that I should find an abiding-place within twenty-four hours.

I had a guaranteed annuity of one pound per week, so I felt confident that I could manage to exist without Aunt Sophia. I went boldly to the rector's wife and told her of my dilemma; she took me in hand and finally arranged that I should live with Lady Thornhill.

"She will be so glad to have you, my dear!" said the clergyman's wife sympathetically. "She resides in another part of the country, my own native place, but she is staying with the Crouches here. She is a widow of forty, but as young at heart as any woman of twenty-three, and she likes to have young people round her. She tells me that she is looking for a companion, and that she will be delighted to have you. You will be treated as one of the family."

I hardly know what happened during the next few days; it seemed all hurry-skurry, and I awoke out of this waking dream to find myself installed in Thornhill Grange. How different it was from the old life! In the one place, solitude, severity, where a bright laugh would have seemed a sacrilege; in the new home, all was brightness and gaiety, happy voices and merry laughter!

The next event of my life was when I met Clifford Hazeldene at one of those enjoyable little parties which Lady Thornhill gave so frequently. "I hold that it is part of my mission in life to do my best to make other people happy, my dear!" said the amiable lady, a glorious smile illuminating that attractive and lovable countenance, "and, as I have plenty of money, I give these parties, which *do* make the guests happy for a time!" And I had not been at the Grange more than three weeks when I met him.

I have often wondered why I made such an impression on him! I have looked at myself critically in the mirror, but the reflection does not give a sufficient answer, I think. Neither then, when I was eighteen, nor now, when I am turned twenty-two.

It is difficult to describe one's self, so I will repeat Lady Thornhill's description of me, when she caught me surveying myself.

"A tall girl, with well-moulded figure, just blossoming into womanhood. Naturally graceful, but lacking the finish of graceful movement owing to insufficient training. Just a little awkward in society—also owing to defective training—but that very awkwardness is attractive. A wealth of silky, golden-brown hair, clear, soft eyes, betokening a capacity for great affection, a good complexion, cherry lips, such as ought to make a young man wish that it was Christmas and that a bunch of mistletoe were overhead, and——"

But I stopped her, flushing furiously, and I remember having felt vexed with myself that, at the last words, my thoughts should have flown to Clifford Hazeldene!

That such a man should attract me is not in the least surprising; I marvel that any woman could resist falling under the spell of Clifford Hazeldene! And, for that very reason, I ought perhaps to judge *her* leniently! He was my hero, my ideal! Tall, strong of limb and face, handsome; his eyes were the embodiment of frankness. He was a man who would shrink from nothing, if it were his duty. What more can I say of him? My hand trembles so violently that the writing is scarcely legible! My love!

Lady Thornhill, as hostess, introduced us. An indefinable thrill went through me as I felt the clasp of his strong hand and noted how gently it closed over mine. My eyes fell before his gaze, and I was almost too confused to act in the usual formal manner. I thought of the great Nasmyth hammer about which I had read, how it could do such great things and yet could descend so gently as to crack a nut without touching the kernel, and it seemed to me that Clifford Hazeldene was like that. He would be a strong protector and yet be so tender to the woman he loved!

Somehow it seemed to me that he sought me out during the evening, and I wondered that he could leave the more brilliant Society young ladies in order to converse with poor little me! I liked it; I was delighted, so delighted that I fear I answered foolishly sometimes.

My aunt had never taught me dancing, a defect which Lady Thornhill set to work to remedy without delay. I was an apt pupil, and, by dint of much practice, I acquired a fair amount of skill. Most men with whom I danced that evening must have been annoyed with my awkwardness, but Clifford was quite different, and I got on ever so much better.

We were seated in a corner, during an interval, and Clifford spoke.

"Do you know, Miss Deane, I am enjoying myself immensely this evening!" he remarked, and he glanced at me in a manner which I did not quite comprehend, although I was conscious of a slight burning of my usually pale cheeks.

"I think that Lady Thornhill's parties are very pleasant!" I responded simply. "She is always very pleased to know that her guests have had a good time."

"Y-e-e-s!" he said slowly, looking at me intently. "But I meant that I had enjoyed our brief conversation. You

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know a great deal more than most young ladies, whose talk is rather empty. I——"

"Oh, I do not know how you can say that!" I broke in quite honestly. "They have been out more than I have, and they must have learnt more than I."

"There is knowledge and knowledge," he observed enigmatically, "and I prefer your kind. You are more natural; they have assumed the veneer of Society polish. It is quite enjoyable to have a chat with you!"

If I had been more of a woman of the world, I should have seen more in his words than I did. I remembered that we had chatted on two or three subjects which some people call "deep" or "learned," and I could scarcely conceive that others had not studied in the same way. I glanced at him, for I was looking down at that moment, and the expression which I saw on his handsome face made me tremble.

At that very instant our conversation was interrupted. Mr. Morris came up with Miss Irene Hartford, and I was introduced to that other person who, with Clifford, was to play such an important part in my life story.

"I have brought your partner safely to you, Hazeldene, and I have come to claim mine!" said Morris genially.

I remembered that I was engaged to him for the next dance, and I understood that Miss Irene Hartford was Clifford's partner for that same dance. I experienced a sensation of envy, almost resentment, at the thought.

The next instant I was being introduced by Clifford Hazeldene to Miss Hartford. I thought that she was a lovely girl, almost queenly in her appearance. What chance had I against such an one? And yet—he had not followed her like a shadow, as he might have been expected to do! Any man might have been excused for falling in love with her at first sight!

Miss Hartford was charming and talked vivaciously, but the strains of the music sent us hurrying to our places.

I saw Clifford again that evening, and the few moments spent with him were full of ineffable delight. When I found myself in my room, after the departure of the guests, I asked myself what was the strange feeling at my heart, and the answer was a thrill that caused me to sink into a chair and clasp my hands to my heart to still its wild throbbing. I loved Clifford Hazeldene! I tried to tell myself that I was mistaken, that I did not know what love meant; but my heart cried out against such an answer. I knew that I was in love. Oh, the joy of it! Only those who have loved can realise the full significance of Tennyson's words, that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all! I have gone through the sorrow of it since then; that sorrow would never have come to me but for my having loved; yet I would not alter it if I could, for then I should never have experienced that joy of loving!

He sought me out after that evening; he called to see Lady Thornhill and myself, and if he found me alone he was not displeased. We saw him at social gatherings, and he was always at my side as much as he could be.

I, too, looked for him and the day that passed without my seeing him was not a really happy one. I saw Lady Thornhill gazing at me curiously when she thought I was not observing her, but I understood that she viewed the course of events with approval. I scarcely dared believe that Clifford was in love with me—poor me! Yet there was no other explanation, and I was so happy!

So happy! Stay! Was it really so? There were times when a feeling of dread made me uneasy, and the cause of that sensation was Miss Hartford. She fell into the habit of calling to see dear Lady Thornhill; she was always very charming and affable, but I fancied that there was a strange glitter in her cold, grey eyes when she spoke to me. I felt as I imagine a bird must feel when fascinated by the gaze of a serpent! Instinctively I began to suspect some desing on my happiness.

Lady Thornhill was fascinated by the beautiful Miss Hartford; she pressed invitations on her. This was not to my liking, but there was no help for it. It spoilt my pleasant chats with Clifford, for she was so often there, and he was obliged to devote part of his time to her.

As often happens in such circumstances, the climax came quickly. I heard Miss Hartford's name coupled with that of Clifford Hazeldene; it was hinted that their frequent visits to the Grange were not without object. People had long thought that something might happen in that direction, so ran the gossip, and an interesting announcement might be expected at any time!

That rumour stabbed me to the heart, and it made me rebellious; why was I forgotten? Did nobody see anything in *me?*

I was cool in my bearing towards Clifford that evening, for it had occurred to me that I might, after all, have been mistaken. He seemed puzzled, and asked me to walk through the garden with him. I was about to refuse, but the look on his face changed the refusal into acceptance. He conducted me to a small bower, where we seated ourselves.

"What is the matter, Ivy?" he asked softly. "Why are you treating me so coldly?"

I tried to look boldly at him, but—— Poor, foolish me! I could not withstand that ardent gaze, and my eyes dropped in confusion, although I stammered, in a despairing attempt to resist. "I do not see why I should treat you with any extra warmth, Mr. Hazeldene!"

"Now, Ivy, you do not mean that! I know you do not, because your face contradicts your tongue! And you must call me Clifford!"

He took my unresisting hands in his; he bent nearer; but I would not lift my face—nay, my head sank lower.

"You cannot have been blind to the object of my visits, Ivy! See, I call you by that name. And I want you to give me the right to do so; I have acted the usurper in doing so hitherto, but now I ask for the right."

There was a depth of passion in his low tones which made my head sink a little lower, a little nearer to his breast. I knew what he meant, but I could not reply.

"I want you to tell me that you will be——" he began, but the sentence was interrupted by the sound of another voice.

"What a delightful place this is!" It was Irene Hartford's voice, and it seemed to transform the heat of summer into the frost of winter. "I hope I am not intruding, but Lady Thornhill wished to see Miss Deane, and I volunteered to find her. Oh, dear!" she sighed, as she dropped into the seat from which I had hastily risen. "I feel quite fatigued, and I must really stay here for a minute or two. Isn't it charming, Mr. Hazeldene?"

Clifford was bound to reply, and I ran off alone. As I ran along I recovered from my confusion, and I thought I saw things more clearly. That was some ruse of Irene Hartford's part. How long had she been there? How much had she overheard?

A swift expression of surprise passed over Lady Thornhill's face when I told her that I had come in obedience to her request, conveyed by Miss Hartford, but she said smoothly: "It was nothing important, but now that you are here, I wish you would do——" And then she mentioned some trifling thing which I have forgotten.

So Irene Hartford had robbed me of the full enjoyment of the sweetest moment in a woman's life! Clifford would repeat the proposal at the next opportunity, but it would not be the same.

They came in a few minutes later; Clifford was white,

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and I guessed that he was very angry at the interruption, while Irene Hartford was calm and equable. She spoke with unruffled serenity, but I detected a gleam of triumph in those grey eyes, and I felt revengeful.

Clifford surprised us by saying that he could not stay to take tea. He took leave of us; his leave-taking was very formal with me, but I understood why, or thought I did, and was content to wait for our next meeting. Then Clifford Hazeldene went—and he went for good!

I waited in vain for him on the following day, and the morning of the second day brought me intelligence which dazed me. Clifford had left Mayton and gone to London. I waited for some sign from him, waited with a sickening fear gnawing at my heart, but not a word reached me.

Irene Hartford called again on the third day; she was as queenly as ever. She came, as I learnt later, with the set purpose of dealing me the final stab.

"I dare say you were surprised, dear Lady Thornhill, that Mr. Hazeldene went to London so quickly?" she asked sweetly. "Well, I have a little secret to tell you. Our engagement is to be announced shortly, and our marriage will take place as quickly as the necessary arrangements will permit. It is to accelerate those arrangements that he went off."

Why should I dwell on those terrible moments? I shudder even when I think of them! I remember that I preserved a calm demeanour by a tremendous effort, in order to rob Irene of as much of her triumph as I could, but—oh!—the agony of it! After she was gone I became ill, and it was two months later when I was able to get about a little and was strong enough to be taken abroad by dear Lady Thornhill. I had brain fever, they tell me. Clifford and Irene were married in that blank interval. I resolved to make my home in the quiet Swiss village whither Lady Thornhill conducted me, and I am still here. Lady Thornhill, who knows all, comes to live here for some months in the year, and life passes without much excitement. I can do much good here, and in relieving the troubles of others I contrive to partly forget my own.

I had been here two years when I ventured on a journey to Zurich to spend a fortnight with Lady Thornhill at the Hotel du Lac. It was nearly a week after my arrival; it was a warm afternoon, and Lady Thornhill preferred to enjoy a siesta, while I took a walk in the direction of Worishoeen. I was thinking deeply as I walked along with a quick step, unmindful of the scenery, and I blundered against a man. I began to apologise hurriedly in English, forgetting where I was, but the words froze on my lips. It was Clifford Hazeldene!

"Ivy!" he exclaimed hoarsely. How ill and weary he looked! "Ivy, you here?"

I was on the point of asking him frigidly by what right he used my Christian name, but the unutterable weariness of his countenance stopped the words. The pang that went through me told me plainly what I had tried to persuade myself was false; it told me that I loved him as madly as ever. How strange is love! In that one moment I understood that all the hard thoughts concerning his perfidy had been unjust; as I stood facing him, I knew that he was loyal and true. I recognised that appearances were dead against him, but I no longer believed in them.

"Ivy!" he said again, more calmly this time. "Yes, I am glad that we have met. Come with me, just there, where we can talk unobserved, and I will tell you all."

Involuntarily I walked with him to a secluded spot, away from the road, where we stood facing one another. His weary face betrayed his agony, but he did not waver as he spoke.

"It is a miserable story, and it proves how—— No! I will pass no comment on the woman who bears my name, I will set forth facts.

"After you left us in the bower, sent away by a subterfuge, Irene laid down her plan with fiend—with deliberation, I mean," he said abruptly, adhering to his resolve and checking his involuntary slip. "She told me that I should never marry you, for she would prevent it. I rose to my feet to put an end to the interview, but she sprang to her feet and barred the exit.

"With a deliberate coolness which you cannot conceive, Ivy, she stated her plan.

"'I've made up my mind that you shall marry me,' she said, 'and I will force you to do so. You pretended to love me once, and I have a letter from you. I shall use that letter if you do not agree to my proposition. That letter will not do much of itself, but it will support other statements which I shall make, and cause them to look genuine!'

"After that outburst, Ivy, she told me that if I were once more seen with you, she would spread a horrible report that would blacken your fair name and mine as well; then she threatened to do it if I did not marry her as well as give you up. She gave me some details of her terrible plot, and I shuddered as I recognised how easily the lies would be believed, because they were so plausible. The world is naturally inclined to judge harshly, Ivy! I tried to find a way out, but I saw none.

"I left the Grange. Irene gave me no time. I was forced to announce our engagement, to save your good name and my own. I wondered that Irene should push it so far as to insist on my marrying her, but I found out. It was to prevent any possibility of union between us, and it was because, in her own peculiar way, she loved me. I was fascinated by her at one time, and I wrote an innocent letter to her, but the madness wore off as soon as that letter was posted.

"We were married and I left her. But she would have me near her; she is the more jealous of me because she has been unable to make me love her in spite of all her attempts. She worships me, I know, but my love is not for her.

"That is all, Ivy! It may cause you to think less harshly of me, and I repeat that I did it to save you, although you may think me a weak fool!"

What reply could I make? Some words, I know not what they were, surged to my lips, but Clifford clutched my arm and I followed his gaze. Irene was standing before us, a mocking smile on her lips, a wicked gleam in the grey eyes.

"So the old play is being acted?" she sneered. "So this is why Miss Deane lives in Switzerland, and why my husband wishes to live away from his own estate. I am sorry to spoil the play. It is a comedy, but it may turn to a tragedy! I think I now have very good proof of a statement I made some time ago, and I may as well make the world fully acquainted with the facts."

With those words she turned on her heel and walked away. I had expected her to make an attack on me bodily, for her usual calmness had vanished by the time she had finished, and her face was distorted.

Clifford and I separated, after he had assured me that he would do everything to prevent the execution of the threat and to shield me.

I heard indirectly that Irene was taken suddenly with influenza, followed by pneumonia, and that her husband attended her assiduously; perhaps that saved me. At any rate, I heard no more, although it was months before I dared to feel safe.

And so another period of more than two years passed. I am happier in the knowledge of Clifford's loyalty, but my heart was heavy for him.

And now, this morning, I receive a telegram signed "Thornhill," and it tells me that Irene has met with a fatal accident in the Alps. She was picked up dead.

I grieve for her untimely end, and yet—I cannot repress the feeling of happiness that comes over me despite my efforts to check it, for I know that at some future time Clifford will come to find me. Am I wicked? Will someone guide me aright?

Geo. Day.

SHE: "And what would you be now if it weren't for my money?" HE: "A bachelor."

HE: "Her hair is like sunshine:" SHE: "Ye-es; it's brighter some days than others."

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A Race for a Rose.

Explaining What the Winner Won.

For pleasant anticipation, meagre realisation, flirtation, and perspiration, nothing can excel a midsummer picnic.

The picnic, like the circus, usually succeeds in breaking our last year's vows never again to attend it, cajoles us into a faint belief that we are to be entertained, and sends us home with a foolish irritating sense that we ought to have known better.

The last picnic I was allured into was so dreadfully genteel that, for once, I looked forward from the start to a dreary eight hours of refined and wearisome tranquility. It was conducted in the most perfect manner possible.

Two large open brakes, under matronly supervision, and under the protection of several male exquisites, bowled away to the grounds, carrying many pretty girls, in the most stylish picnic dresses imaginable. There was no unbecoming hilarity on the way out; and during the period before dinner, no tree-climbing, hat-decorating, or other excitement after we arrived.

The dinner arrangements were entirely too systematic. I thought, as I watched the caterer opening his neatly-arranged bundles and baskets, of the picnic dinners I had assisted at in my less dignified days.

I remembered one in particular, where we had enough cake to make a good-sized regiment ill, enough salad eggs to ballast a yacht with, and enough potatoes to satisfy a dozen Irishmen; and I remember quite vividly that on this particular picnic we had nothing but empty dishes to carry home. Such is the marvellous vigour and capacity of a juvenile appetite!

I anticipated that the beautiful monotony of the occasion would prevail throughout the day, but I was agreeably disappointed.

As the luncheon hour approached the gentlemen began to arrive, some in carriages, a few on horses, and finally a party of gentlemen on splendid bicycles. The latter caused no little excitement by their appearance thus, and they occasioned considerable disgusted envy among those who had chosen less athletic means of transportation.

The bicyclists were heroes, and they were sublimely conscious of it. They strutted back and forth importantly, or exhibited their skill to an admiring and amused feminine audience, or else lounged in studied attitudes wherever they could command the exclusive attention of some credulous girl.

Among them were two gentlemen who made me the object of much attention, not because of any intrinsic merit of my own, but because I was honoured with the friendship of the coldest and most exclusive heiress in "our set." The fact that Rosalind Brewster had selected me for an intimate friend and companion was quite as unaccountable to me as to anyone else; but the gentlemen referred to wisely refrained from speculating upon the nature of our friendship, and accepted me as the only means of reaching Rosalind's interest

It was evident to me that they were both deeply fascinated by her personal and financial charms, and that their peculiar relations with each other must inevitably bring about a "little unpleasantness."

Mr. Curtis was a gentleman born—that is, he was born in a family which had for some years been established in the best of Society; he had been abroad, had dissipated a fortune or two, and was rather lionised by a fast set of young gentlemen.

His guest, Mr. Henry Sedley, was a young Scotsman who had entertained Curtis some months in the North, and who had been South just long enough to appreciate the attractiveness of Southern girls.

Neither gentleman had made Miss Brewster the object of marked attention, partly out of respect for her, and partly because she would not permit it. The strange girl had a heart, and a good one, too, but she had thrown such a wall of suspicious reserve about it, that it was not generally believed in.

Both gentlemen had laughingly accused me of robbing Miss Brewster of all the warmth of sentiment she possessed, and Mr. Curtis boldly announced his belief that she was incapable of any depth of feeling.

Remembering these remarks, and prompted somewhat by a curiosity to ascertain where her choice lay between these two most persistent admirers, I rallied her myself upon her frigidity, and had the gratification at this memorable picnic of seeing her welcome both with unusual cordiality.

They were both charming men. Mr. Curtis was more dignified and had a readier tongue, but the Scottish gentleman made up in good nature whatever he lacked in wit, and in fine physique whatever he lacked in dignity. I had no choice between them, and I sometimes think she had none; but the event which seemed to decide her was so trifling, considering that it shaped the course of two human lives, and her choice was so persistent and true, that I, at other times, think it was made before she entirely realised it.

After dinner we four adjourned to a snug little summer-house on the shady side of the hill, and here indulged in the lightest gossip and Society common talk. Miss Brewster, being in a talkative mood, received the stock jokes and stories of Messrs. Curtis and Sedley, which, on ordinary occasions, were poured into my phonographic ear to be ground out to her afterwards; and I, being in the dispiriting position of a social necessity—a mere convenience as it were—without even the compensation of second-handed attention, very naturally pined. I yawned surreptitiously behind my hand several times, became bolder and blinked openly, and finally dropped comfortably off into an afternoon nap.

In this interesting state I remained possibly an hour—probably ten minutes—and, upon awakening, found that my spiritual absence from the party had excited no attention whatever.

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In fact, my existence was so supremely disregarded, that Mr. Curtis, in the temporary absence of his friend, was boldly offering his hand and heart to Rosalind. I was tempted to be honourable—to reveal to these young people that I still lived; but the thought of interfering with the first proposal Rosalind had ever received restrained me, and I let well enough alone.

He said earnestly:

"I realise that you have never thought of the matter, and you have probably never thought of me. I have no desire to intrude upon you in *any* sense, but you should know, at least, when and where you have inspired love. You should know that you are loved, even if you are untouched by any feeling yourself. Do not think that I spoke with any hope of winning you, Miss Brewster, for I have always believed you heartless."

"You are unkind, Mr. Curtis," she said reproachfully.

"I presume I am," he exclaimed, in a despairing sort of way. "I do not mean to be, however; I do not mean to give any such return for your gracious treatment of me; but your unfavourable reply has made me forget myself."

"I gave you no answer," she said gently. "You surprised me into silence. I have never suspected that you—that you or any other gentleman cared for me."

She blushed painfully and hung her head like a shy Society "bud," rather than like a well-trained *habituée* of three seasons.

While matters were thus—his indecision proceeding from necessity, and hers from choice—there came an interruption in the shape of a delegation from the main body of picnickers.

As I knew that attention would quickly be directed to me, I very promptly closed my eyes, and assumed the serene and amiable expression of one who dreams with an easy conscience.

Rosalind, who did not wish to be found guilty of a *tête-a-tête* with Mr. Curtis, came hastily over to where I was slumbering, and, without much difficulty called me back to life and propriety. I calmly yawned in her face, while the delegation informed us that Mr. Curtis was wanted to take part in an open bicycle race in the glen below.

The young gentleman declined on the ground that he was he only racing-man in the party, and that his presence in the contest would not only interfere with its being a closely contested one, but would discourage many from entering. This statement was, however, taken exception to by his friend, Sedley, and he was obliged then to accept the situation and the implied challenge.

We found upon returning to the grounds, that Mr. Curtis had acted more wisely in declining than we had given him credit for. As soon as it became know that he would participate, the contestants rapidly evaporated, until the list contained only his name and that of his friend Sedley. Their friendly rivalry on the "wheel" had never assumed the proportions of a race, and as opinion seemed to be quite evenly divided as to their capabilities for speed, the interest excited soon became greater than if a promiscuous scramble for first place had been in prospect.

A course was chosen so as to give us a good view of the start, it led up the road for about a half mile to a broad turning place, and had for a homestretch the smooth piece of turf directly in front of the grounds.

Neither Sedley nor Curtis made any preparation other than a careful examination of his machine, but the starters, timers, and judges were organised in the most elaborate style imaginable. To cap the climax of general interest and Rosalind's nervousness, I suggested that she might stand on a provision basket at the finish, and, as the winner passed her, hand him the rose she wore on her bosom.

This idea was taken up with the greatest of enthusiasm, and, in spite of her protestations, she was obliged to accept the position.

She accordingly took the place assigned her, and although she stood upon a very inappropriate pedestal, her statuesque grace and dignity commanded the admiration of those who ordinarily granted her only respect.

Realising that she must feel exceedingly nervous, I stood by her side and enrolled the services of a young student to assist in keeping up her courage.

As Messrs. Sedley and Curtis slowly passed by her on their way to the starting place, they politely doffed their caps, and I could plainly see in the latter's pale and excited face, and in the determined expression upon the young Scotsman's countenance that the race would be bitterly contested.

The young student informed us that it would be a "close thing, as Curtis had a fine record and Sedley was in beautiful condition." He also informed us that both men had expressed their determination to win at any cost, and that several of the party had quietly staked considerable money on the result. These remarks did not contribute at all to Rosalind's peace of mind, as they added to the sense of responsibility she already felt weighed down with. When everything was in readiness, two gentlemen held the bicycles in position, while a third, after giving a few instructions, said, promptly:

"Are you ready? Go!"

They went at first with the only impulse received from the starters, but quickening wonderfully at every push on the pedals, until they sped swiftly up the road almost hub to hub.

The student eyed them critically through an exquisite eyeglass until they passed from sight, and then turning to us, said:

"There is no nonsense in these mile sprints. Now, on a five or ten mile course, a man can save himself and win; but on a dash like this, you know, a man must put in from the start for all he is worth."

"Is there any danger?" Rosalind asked, nervously unfastening the flower on her bosom.

He shook his head in an ominous manner, saying.

"Racing doesn't kill men, but it uses them up terribly. I wouldn't be surprised to see them both completely winded."

After a brief period of time, Rosalind's anxiety was quickened by a movement among those who were further up the road, indicating the approach of the two cyclists. In a few seconds more they appeared round a bend in the road, and headed directly for us. The Scotsman was bending dangerously far over the handles, but was riding in a line as straight as an arrow's flight, while Mr. Curtis, although he sat erect, and appeared from his square shoulders and rigid arms to be exerting himself magnificently, was swaying violently from side to side, and was evidently losing ground. Suddenly, as they neared us, his pace slackened, and then he was seen to tumble headlong upon the turf.

Sedley came swiftly on, his face and eyes beaming with excitement and triumph, and dexterously caught the coveted flower from Rosalind's extended hand. As soon as he had passed, he wheeled around and was among the first to reach his unfortunate friend. The latter lay quite still for a few moments, much to our alarm; but as we approached, Mr. Sedley raised him gently from the ground, and in response to his inquiry, "Are you hurt, old man?" received a reply in the

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negative, so gruff and coarse that we felt no further apprehension.

The young Scotsman apparently did not notice this rudeness, for he gracefully placed the rose in his friend's hand, saying:

"I am content to have won the race. The rose is yours by virtue of your pluck and fair play."

Curtis drew away from Sedley and, flinging down the flower, said, angrily:

"If you content yourself with a victory so ill-gotten, you are welcome to the spoils."

"You don't mean to accuse me of unfairness?" Sedley asked gravely.

Curtis hesitated for a moment, and then, looking at his friend sullenly, said:

"Well, what else can I do?"

Sedley returned his glance with one of reproach, but said, coolly:

"I regret that you take such a view of it; you are certainly mistaken."

Rosalind picked up the slighted flower, and, fastening it upon Mr. Sedley's coat, said spiritedly:

"You have won this fairly, and by your magnanimous conduct, you have won it doubly."

There was a murmur of approbation audible, and Mr. Curtis, feeling that he was without sympathy, picked up his bike and walked angrily away.

As Sedley wheeled his bicycle slowly back to the grounds, Rosalind walked at his side, the student and I following.

The latter, who had been blazing with indignation from the crown of his little straw hat down to his patent-leather boots, exclaimed, rather loudly:

"The coward! He fell because he couldn't win!"

"It is not as bad as that," I said.

"You are no judge," he said, with characteristic effrontery. "I saw him put on the brake the moment he knew that the race was lost. He pulled up, and then took his time about falling. I tell you the fellow is a coward!"

My eloquent escort then launched out into an extensive dissertation upon the ethics of racing; and, encouraged by my silence, he talked himself into a mild form of bronchitis.

Under the cover of his conversation, I listened to that of Rosalind and her Orlando. She said:

"You evidently did not place a very high estimate upon my rose, since you were so willing to part with it."

"I see that you are unwilling, after all, to credit me with the sacrifice I made," he answered. "I should think that my hard struggle for its possession ought to convince you that I valued it highly; but it is just as well that you should not understand either my eagerness to win, or my motives afterwards in presenting *him* with the flower."

He was treading upon dangerous ground, and Miss Brewster, realising it, changed the subject skilfully.

"Will you do me a great favour?" she asked.

"With pleasure!" he replied unhesitatingly.

"It is that you forgive Mr. Curtis. I am glad that you have committed yourself in advance, for I am thus assured that he will be pardoned."

"You are taking advantage of my willingness to oblige you," he said gravely.

"I know that I am," she acknowledged, "and it is unfair in me to do so; but I feel that Mr. Curtis did not mean what he said—that he was betrayed by his chagrin and his temper to harsh words which he will afterwards deeply regret."

"You plead his cause eloquently," Sedley observed. "Such warm friendship is worth losing the race for."

She blushed slightly and said in a lower tone:

"I am perhaps going too far in my attempts to make peace. I am presuming upon your friendship."

"You are acting from the kindest motives, I know," he said, warmly; "but you are asking me to sacrifice my pride to his ill-temper, as severe a humiliation as you could impose upon me. As a proof of what I would do for you, I pardon him. I accept the inglorious position you wish me to take, but I cannot further accept of his hospitality. I shall leave for home at the earliest opportunity, satisfied that I should never have come."

He had laid aside his bicycle, and as they strolled on, Rosalind took his arm. He was a tall, solidly-built fellow, and she a slender, delicate girl, hence there was something in this silent expression of dependence which touched him. He said:

"I know that it is ungenerous of me to talk thus to you; but when a man acts as he has to-day—openly insults his guest—and the lady I most respect exonerates him, and even asks me to bow to his insolence, I feel somewhat disagreeable."

As my escort stopped while they went on, I heard no more; but I noted as I watched them that his manner seemed to grow less aggressive and hers more interested. They passed on slowly out of sight, while I, like a good girl, allowed them the freedom they were both hungering for, and at the same time impressed my young student with the idea that I was a "fearfully clever girl, you know," by listening with mummy-like attention to his collegial yarns.

I felt that the revelations of the day should greatly influence Rosalind in choosing between the two men, and reflected with no little satisfaction that if she did not succeed in patching up a peace between them, she would soon have to avow publicly a preference for one or the other.

"It's too bad that this business should end so unpleasantly," said my friend, relapsing into a live topic, "Curtis has ruined his own reputation and spoilt the visit of his guest. Sedley will go as soon as he can pack, and I don't blame him."

"He won't go," I said confidently. "I am willing to bet a pair of gloves that he will remain a month or more."

"I take you—that is to say, the bet," he responded with spirit.

* * * * * *

The Rose was won, but not before the wager was. As I write there lies near me on the table a pair of long Bernhardt gloves of spotless white. I have been tempted to use them more than once, but at the giver's suggestion I am reserving them for Mr. Sedley's wedding, at which I am to be honoured with the office of first bridesmaid.

Madeleine Maurey.

WIDOW (tearfully): "Yes, my daughters are now my only resources." Friend: "Take my advice, and husband your resources well."

JACK: "I proposed to Nellie Sweetlyps last night, and——" Ned: "I know just when it happened. I saw you holding her hand when you did it." Jack: "You're mistaken; I wasn't holding her hand. She was feeling my pulse to see if my heart was really beating as fast as I said it was."

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

II.—THE MISTAKE OF MILLICENT HOWARD.

MILLICENT HOWARD was looking radiantly beautiful. Everyone agreed in that, and all, except one or two men biassed in favour of *fiancées*, acknowledged she was the loveliest girl at the ball.

Beautiful by nature, beautifully dressed, and a fairylike dancer, she was naturally engaged for every dance as soon as she appeared, and George Poole, her devoted admirer since childhood, was unable to obtain more than two valses to his name. How it happened that Graham Parker, who came after him was able to get the three for which he boldly asked, is a mystery only to be explained by a girl at a dance.

"Now," she said gaily, as Graham came up to claim his first dance, "this is number ten on the programme, so you may rest assured that I have already assented nine times to the statements that the room is hot, the floor perfection, the band charming, and, in general, the ball a great success, so those subjects are taboo."

"Well," he said as he placed her hand on his arm and they slowly began to valse, "may I say that the one thing more perfect than the floor, more charming than the band, and *the* success of the ball, is Miss Millicent Howard? Or are you tired of hearing that also?"

Millicent blushed brightly, but she turned off the compliment with a laugh. It was perhaps a little laboured, but she did not notice it, she was too perfectly happy at that moment to pick holes in anything, least of all in anything he should say to her.

They paused to rest a moment near where George was pulling his moustache in some natural jealousy at the undisguised happiness shining in Millicent's eyes.

Suddenly the electric light went out, and the brilliant scene was plunged in darkness. A hush, a stifled scream, and then girlish laughter and excited talk.

Then, piercing the darkness, a cry of "Fire!"

Instantly the room was a seething mass of human creatures fighting for their lives.

Someone cried out:

"For Heaven's sake go quietly, and all will be well!"

But in vain, the terrifying darkness and the smell of smoke, which grew more and more perceptible, seemed to have maddened everyone, and they fought almost like wild beasts to reach the doorway.

At the first alarm George had rushed to Millicent's side, and finding Graham had evidently been torn from her side in the rush, and hearing her cry piteously:

"Oh, please, where are you? I can't see anything, and I am squeezed up in this corner and can't move," he called out, "Miss Howard—Millicent—I am here and will take care of you. Trust yourself to me."

And soon she was clinging convulsively to his arm, trembling and almost fainting.

Love and peril taught George, quiet, unassuming George, the very last person Nature had meant for a hero, what to do.

"Millicent," he said sternly, "you must not faint, you would be trampled to death at once. Pull yourself together *directly*, and do what I tell you."

The authoritative tone roused her for the time at any rate, she fought bravely with the feeling of faintness and suffocation, and put it from her.

George found that behind him was a heavy velvet settee firmly fixed against the wall, so with some difficulty he scrambled on to that, and, bending over her, said:

"Now, put your arms round my neck, and I will draw you up out of the crush on to this place, where you will be out of immediate danger."

Obediently she locked her arms round his neck, while he clasped his round her slender waist, and, with a mighty effort, which seemed almost to crack the sinews of his back, he drew her out of the struggling mass of men and women.

The touch of her bare arms, the sweet warm weight of her lissom body in his arms filled him with a rush of joy no danger could quench, and holding her closely to him he murmured in her ear:

"This is a heaven worth going through much to obtain. Oh, Millicent, Millicent, if you knew how I love you! Let me die at this moment if you can never have love for me."

But Millicent hung in his arms a dead weight, he hardly knew whether she had heard his wild words or not, only fancied the clasp of her arms grew slightly closer, and, as his heart throbbed madly at the thought, he bent over her drooping head and caught the words—

"I love——" But then there was silence and he knew she had fainted, this time in real earnest.

For the first time George felt the desire to save his own life also. Hitherto his only thought had been of her, now he felt that life held possibilities of a joy he had hardly dreamt of, and it would be very bitter to lose it.

The firemen had arrived; the cries of the strong, the groans of the weaker, who were trodden under foot or crushed against walls, were growing less, some people had succeeded in getting out, and the work of rescue was being carried on as systematically as possible. Suddenly the flames burst out in the roof, and a lurid light was cast upon the ghastly scene.

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George's one thought at that moment was—"Thank God she can't see that!"

Worse than the wrecked room, the dead or unconscious bodies of those who had been laughing and talking so gaily only an hour before, were the faces of the living, tortured out of all human resemblance in the agony of that wild fight for the life that they felt was beyond the narrow doorway.

Strong men working at the outside were knocking a hole in the wall of the building farthest from the door, but the flames were gaining apace, and the smoke was stifling.

Looking round desperately to find a means of escape for Millicent and himself from a terrible death, George saw the moment the wall fell where the men were working not far from him. Seizing her in his arms, he made his way as quickly as he could to the opening, staggering under his burden.

As he drew near, another portion of the wall, loosened by the fire, fell, and, bending over his precious burden to protect her, he yet managed to thrust her into the arms of the first smoke-begrimed form that emerged from the opening ere he fell, struck senseless by the falling bricks.

Graham Parker, his dress-suit torn, his hands bleeding from their labours, his face blackened, and his hair singed, carried the poor girl tenderly out of the burning building.

The fresh air outside seemed to revive her, and opening her lovely blue eyes, she smiled up at him with a look of ineffable content, and, he could almost have sworn, with undisguised love.

"You have saved my life," she murmured, and then, as she awoke to the fact that they were out in the lamp-lit road, and she was in his arms, "Oh, put me down, please, I can stand quite well."

But when she came to try she found she could not stand without assistance, so, with his arm supporting her, he led her to where her frantic father was anxiously scanning the faces of the victims as they were brought out, with a sickening fear of finding hers among them.

"Millicent—and alive!" he cried joyously. "Thank God! And you, too, young man," he added, peering into Graham's face. "I don't know if you are anyone I know, but please stay with her a minute while I get John to bring the carriage round to this side street," and he was gone in a moment.

For some minutes they stood in silence, Millicent making several ineffectual attempts to say something. At last it came out hurriedly as she saw her father with his head out of the brougham window calling directions to the coachman.

"Graham," in a sweet, hesitating voice, "I heard what you said in that awful place," with a shuddering glance behind her, "and I want to tell you that I do love you, and that I have always loved you ever since I have known you, and now you have saved my life I could not let you go away without telling you what only my silly faintness prevented me from saying at the time."

Bewildered with what he heard, Graham could only press her slight form to him, and found no words in which to reply.

The carriage was there, Millicent's father wrung his hand vehemently, thanking him earnestly for what he had done, and cutting short his protestations that he had done nothing. Then Graham helped the blushing, trembling girl into the carriage, and she drove off waving a white hand from the window, while he went back to continue his work of rescue with his heart throbbing, and his brain in a whirl from the problem that was thus set him to solve.

"Millicent loves me? What ought I to do? It is clear that poor old George saved her life and proposed to her in the dark, and it is equally clear that she thinks it is I who have done both. It is the most awful fix a man was ever in. If I let things go on and say nothing, I am playing an awfully mean trick on George, who is my friend, and altogether sailing under false colours, and if I tell her she is mistaken I refuse her love, and put her to the shame of having confessed a love that was never solicited. Good heavens, what ought I to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

LAST week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" concluded by leaving Miss Gillespie in a very perilous position, and this week readers will have the satisfaction of learning how she successfully escaped from her immediate danger, only, alas! to be led into another trap. Our "Sara" covers have been creating quite a stir, not only in those towns wherein the actual episodes occur but over the whole country.

NUMEROUS correspondents from everywhere in the British Isles have written to me concerning Miss Gillespie, and not a few of them ask the question, "Does a future episode happen in this town?"

Now I am sorry to say that I do not feel able to take you so far into my confidence as to tell you exactly where Sara gets driven to. Of course, many of you will perhaps be sorry to find that Sara did not penetrate into your immediate regions, but no doubt such of you will be consoled when you find that you are either personally acquainted with the places she does visit, and that any rate you have friends or relations there. I may state, however, that the scene of Sara's next thrilling escapade is the city of Birmingham.

FROM Liverpool I have received the following from "W. R. M." "We have formed a literary club here, and we think very highly of "SHORT STORIES." We take it in turns to read aloud to assembled club-ites a story from your bright little paper."

I am very pleased to learn that the members of this club have such a high opinion of SHORT STORIES, and I consider it a capital idea for one to read out the stories aloud. Now the long winter evenings are coming on, the club should flourish greatly, especially as I have some extra-special good matter in store for readers. Other clubs might do worse than follow the example of this Liverpool one, and I should like to hear if any do so.

ON the opposite page is another Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

As in the case of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," the first of the series, which commenced last week, I am offering a prize of *one guinea* to the reader who sends in the most satisfactory solution to the problem.

The question which requires answering is this: "Should Graham Parker inform the girl of the true state of affairs, or not?"

Arguments, clearly stated, should not exceed one hundred words.

Replies must not reach these offices later than Friday, November 20th, and envelopes should have "Love Problem" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner.

ON pages 620 and 621, you will find two drawings depicting athletic young women. These are the first of a series, "The Girls of Great Britain," and I am sure you will find each picture interesting, and true to life.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Don Ramiero guesses the position of affairs, and decides to hasten the removal of the man who might possibly do his master so much harm.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a plea of ingenious trickery, on the Spaniard's part, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated on board the yacht that he had fallen overboard, and was drowned.

When Mercedes heard the news—the glibly spoken lie—she fell fainting to the deck, breathing words of delirious love.

Then Isolo Staunton understands that his daughter has given her heart to the man he has doomed to a living death!

He is furious at Valdez for hastening the action.

Mercedes lies at Death's door, attended to with the greatest possible care by the yacht's physician, Dr. Billaud.

In consequence of the alleged accident, the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé*, Captain Percy Iddison, have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton decides to go and break the news to Ellerton's father personally.

He orders Billaud to perform an operation on Ellerton, to see if it be possible to restore his memory. Should that prove to be impossible, his life should be spared, and he would be restored to Mercedes.

Thus it was decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have just one chance for his liberty.

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TENTH CHAPTER.

Ellerton Recalls the Past.

WHILE the *Isola* was clearing the Firth of Forth both the Captain and the First Officer remained, according to custom, on the navigating bridge.

Captain René Durtal was a Corsican. A little over medium height, the breadth of his square shoulders and the size of his muscular limbs made him look rather under it if anything. Black-haired and bearded, with piercing steel-blue eyes, and strong features, he was a man much admired for his undoubted manliness and strength; but if his hair had been clipped close and his beard and moustache shaved off—as they once had been in the prison of Ile Nou, in New Caledonia, his admirers would have been not a little shocked at the result. The bluff, hearty, handsome sailor would not have been recognisable in the brutal assassin whose mis-shapen skull and animal features would thus have been revealed. His age was a few years under fifty.

His second in command was a tall Englishman of about thirty-four. He wore a heavy moustache and neatly-trimmed torpedo-beard which effectually concealed the tell-tale weakness of his mouth and chin, and even made him good-looking beyond the average of men.

His name on the books of the *Isola* was Herbert Darfield. Before he joined her it had been Arthur Culworth, which was the name of a second-officer on one of the crack Atlantic liners who had been arrested for fraud and conspiracy in connection with the disappearance of certain mails and specie at New York. He had been released on heavy bail found by his present skipper, whom he had never seen before, and as he vanished within an hour the bail was duly estreated.

Every responsible officer on board the *Isola* was a criminal of some sort, convicted or otherwise, bound to his employer by the fetters of his own crimes and the fear of their consequences, as well as by the golden links of self-interest. As a matter of fact they were Staunton's purchased slaves, but he had made them rich beyond the reach of temptation, and so no man was better or more faithfully served than he.

"When we are well out of sight of the land, Mr. Darfield," said the Captain, "you can let her have full speed ahead. You will, of course, keep as far away from everything you sight as possible, but, if you must pass something, don't forget to slow down as usual."

He said this in excellent English, but with a decided accent, which the lady guests on board the yacht were wont to find "very interesting." His lieutenant touched his cap—discipline under Staunton was almost as strict as under an Admiral of the Fleet—and said:

"Very good, sir. And when we are well outside I presume that we shall steer as straight a course as possible for the Anchorage?"

"Certainly, my friend," replied the skipper, for, outside the demands of discipline, they were excellent friends. "The Señor's instructions are that we shall arrive there with as little delay as possible. As you know, we have a very important consignment on board, and, moreover, we have to get the poor Señorita into the blue waters of the Mediterranean as fast as we shall dare to make the *Isola* travel."

"Now I will go to lunch," he went on, as he saw the land fading swiftly away into blue mist on either hand. "You have the course; north-east two hundred miles, then due north to the circle."

He touched his cap in polite response to his lieutenant's salute, and went down the ladder to join Don Ramiero and the doctor in the smoking-room for the inevitable cocktail.

Darfield began his watch by walking several times back and forth on the bridge, thinking over the singular events which had happened during the brief cruise.

Presently, looking aft as he turned at one end, he saw the tall figure of a woman dressed in nurse's costume coming towards the bridge. He, of course, knew that two nurses had been engaged at Edinburgh for Miss Staunton, but he had been on shore when they came on board. Since then they had been below with their charge, and so he had not seen them.

He took another turn, and when he got back she was nearly under the bridge. He looked down instinctively, and saw a pale, almost white face, with firm, regular features made beautiful by a pair of deep grey eyes, which shone softly under long black lashes. The broad, low forehead was fringed with bright chestnut ringlets, curling out from under the little, close bonnet.

As the eyes met his they seemed to dilate and darken as though they were gazing upon some fearful object suddenly encountered. The woman's form seemed to shrink smaller and shorter. Her head went back and her hands rose to her temples. Her lips parted slowly. A gasping sigh came from between them, and he heard the faintly-spoken, almost inarticulate words:

"Arthur! Good Heavens, what does this mean?"

The helmsman in the close-shut wheel-house looked out through the plate-glass wall and saw the First Officer go grey under his tan, reel back from the rail, and then clutch it again. His lips moved quickly and jerkily, and his eyes were staring wide-open at something on the promenade deck, which the helmsman could not see.

What the white trembling lips were saying was:

"Janet! My lost, good angel! Janet, my wife! Dead and alive again! So old Yuill lied after all, as I thought he did, the scoundrel! Janet here on the *Isola*—this vessel of crime! My God—what's going to happen now?"

The woman only heard the first few words. When he called her "wife" her eyes were blinded by a swift rush of tears; her breast heaved and shook with a sob that wouldn't be choked back. The air seemed to grow dark, and, driven by a sudden dread of fainting, Janet Culworth turned and went back with unsteady steps towards the companion-way.

So it was that the husband and wife whom the shadow of crime had divided, as they both believed for ever, met again—for better or worse.

For the next three days and nights the *Isola* sped eastward and northward, and finally due north at a speed that would have astonished even those who had seen her do her twenty-two knots along the Solent, for she was flinging the ocean leagues behind her now at thirty-five. Yet, tremendous as the speed was, so perfectly were her engines balanced in her hull, that she swirled along as easily over the smooth summer sea as though she had been travelling twelve or fifteen.

In physical health Mercedes had improved even more rapidly than Doctor Billaud had dared to hope, and already her mind was reawakening under the gentle and skilful treatment of her nurses. Indeed, he already began to see a prospect of giving her back to her father when he met the yacht, as had been arranged, at Monaco, completely restored, saving only, perhaps, that one possibility which he still feared and yet hoped against.

But for that "other patient" to whom he had so callously alluded during the memorable conversation in the Council Chamber, there was now but little more hope, if any, than for the felon condemned to the scaffold waiting his doom in the last of his earthly habitations, for the mission on which the *Isola* was now bound was the execution of the pitiless sentence passed upon him by the Lord of the Underworld, and every smooth pulsation of her engines was bearing him nearer to its mysterious portal. There was just one chance for him, and one only.

Wilfrid Ellerton had never been allowed to completely recover from the stupor into which he had been thrown by

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the drug which had been poured on the cloth over his head. He had had periods of half-awakening, during which he wondered vaguely where he was and what had happened. Now and then, too, visions of glorious bliss and exquisite loveliness, to which he could give neither definite form nor exact name, flitted through the mists which had somehow clouded all his mental horizon; but as to how or why the mists had come he had neither memory nor knowledge.

Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud sat late over their coffee and cigars in the Council Chamber after dinner on the evening of the third day out from Leith. The subject of their conversation was just then coming slowly to his senses in a small, windowless cabin beneath the main deck, and almost immediately under the floor of the sanctum.

"And so, my dear Señor Valdez, you are still of opinion, even after all the arguments that I have adduced, that the course you propose to pursue is a wise one?" said the doctor, allowing the ash from his cigar to fall into a little silver tray.

"My dear doctor," replied Valdez, rather coldly, "it is not here a question of right or wrong, or wisdom or foolishness, it is a matter of obedience or disobedience to the commands of one who, as you know, has the power to punish—and who never forgives.

"You have performed the operation in accordance with the Señor's last orders when he left us. It was, as you know, his settled purpose to discover whether that piece of bone was pressing on the brain or not. You found that it was, and you have raised it. If you find that the operation has not restored to him the memory of certain occurrences which the Señor desires to be utterly forgotten, then it is our duty to arrange circumstances, if I may put it so, that they will fit in with his rescue as the sole survivor of the company of a fishing smack which had picked him up, and we had the misfortune to run down in the darkness. You are, of course, aware of the Señor's very pressing reasons for accomplishing this rescue if possible.

"Certainly," replied the other, "it is perhaps the one chance of escaping the commission of what some people would call a crime and possibly of restoring his daughter's complete reason and insuring her happiness. Laudable objects, I admit, but the risk is tremendous. It is always the unexpected that happens, and even an escape from the Underworld might, by some miracle, be made possible. No, no, with all due deference to the Señor, if that memory has come back to him, it is not safe for him to be alive *anywhere*. Much better to have left things as they were and put him below without any further trouble."

"You will pardon me, Doctor, if I remind you that that is not a question for us to decide. The Señor has already decided, and it only remains for us to carry out his orders," rejoined Valdez coldly. "Ah, there," he went on with sudden animation, as three gentle knocks sounded under the floor of the room, "your patient is ready for examination, I presume."

As he spoke he began to pull the loose carpet away from one of the corners. When a space of a couple of square yards had been bared he tapped three times on it with the toe of his boot. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. There was a slight sound as of the working of well-balanced machinery, and in a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton, seated in an armchair, appeared through the gap which was exactly filled by the rising platform on which the chair rested. His head was bandaged, and his face was that of a man who had narrowly escaped death after a long illness, but there was intelligence in the opening eyes with which he looked wonderingly round the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero politely, and in sympathetic tones. "We, that is the Doctor and myself, are delighted to see you so far on the way to recovery after the serious injury occasioned by your fall. May I ask if you feel that your head is quite clear now?"

"Perfectly," replied Wilfrid in a weak but quite distinct voice; "the only thing I'm not quite clear about is that fall you speak about. Still, that doesn't matter now. So I've been *ill* some time, have I? Yet I seem to be still on board the yacht. The rest are still here, I suppose. If so I should very much like to see Mr. Staunton as soon as possible. I have something very important to say to him which I meant to say that evening when I had the accident."

"I am afraid," said Don Ramiero kindly, "that it will hardly be possible for you to see Mr. Staunton to-night. He is unwell. In fact he had to go to bed immediately after dinner. But in the morning, no doubt. And now as to your own health. Excuse a rather curious question, which I really ask on Mr. Staunton's behalf, for reasons which he will make plain to you later on, but do you find that your memory of past, somewhat long-past events, is any different from what it was before your accident?"

Wilfrid Ellerton answered the momentous question, on the reply to which, had he but known it, so much of life and happiness depended, with a low laugh, which made Doctor Billaud turn his head and give Valdez a quick, warning glance.

"Why, yes," he said. "That is rather a curious question, but the answer to it, I think, you'll find more curious yet. My memory is in that way most singularly better. Why, there are some things that I remember with perfect distinctness now which, for some reason or other, I had forgotten for years, and, what is more funny still, I remember now that I *had* forgotten them."

"That, my dear sir," said the Doctor in his soft, even voice, "is really most remarkable. You will, I am sure, pardon me if I seem to intrude upon your confidence, but my professional interest in the matter is so keen that I hope you will be able to accept it as an excuse."

"Certainly, Doctor," replied Ellerton good-naturedly. "I don't know of any reason why I shouldn't answer any question you like to ask about that sort of thing. What would you like to know?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ellerton," said Billaud in his suavest tone, "that is very kind of you. Well, in the first place, I should like to know in which period of your life occurred those forgotten events which you say you have just remembered; and at the same time, perhaps you would not object to giving me, just as a matter of professional interest, you know, some idea as to the nature of those events."

Ellerton looked down at the floor for a few moments and then his eyes wandered round the walls of the Council Chamber, dwelling here and there on the pictures hanging on the walls. One of them pictured a boy and a girl in a small boat on the sea.

It was the merest trifle, but it was enough to set the mechanism of his restored memory in motion. In a moment he was back amidst the long-forgotten horrors of the whaleboat, adrift on the wide Pacific. He began, and, like a man telling the story of a dream from which he has just awakened, so he told that story to his two eager and desperately interested listeners in such graphically lucid detail that it was little less than a reality to them while he was speaking.

He finished by saying in the most matter-of-fact tone:

"There, gentlemen, that is the thing that I had forgotten. Not the sort of thing a fellow would be likely to forget, is it?"

"And you feel quite certain, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero, after a little pause during which he and the Doctor had exchanged glances of sinister significance, "that this most interesting and thrilling experience was a real event in your earlier life, and that you actually do remember it as such?"

"Of course I do," he replied, with fatal candour, "why, the whole thing's as clear to me as though it had happened only yesterday; as, in fact, for some reason or other, it really seems to have done. I could tell you the names of the men in the boat with me, the ship we were wrecked in. Everything, in fact. I shall have quite a thrilling yarn to tell Mer—er—Miss Staunton and the other ladies after breakfast to-morrow."

"I have not the slightest doubt but that it will be as deeply interesting to them as it has been to Señor Valdez and myself. Really, Mr. Ellerton, I have to thank you for what I may call one of the most striking experiences of my pro-

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fessional career!" exclaimed Doctor Billaud with very real interest. "And now I must prescribe for you. A glass of wine with just a couple of drops of sedative in it, and then to bed again, please. A sound night's sleep and you will be quite ready to tell your marvellous story to the ladies in the morning."

"Thanks very much, Doctor," he said. "I do feel a bit fagged. By the way, I've forgotten to ask you what you have been doing to my head, and—and how the dickens I managed to get into this room?"

"All in good time, my dear sir," replied Billaud gently as he watched him drink the wine; "we must not trouble the head with too many details just yet; but I also shall have an interesting story to tell you later on."

While he was speaking Ellerton's head had drooped forward on to his chest, and the next minute he was fast asleep. Valdez tapped on the floor and the platform descended. Presently it came back empty.

"Well, Señor Valdez," said Billaud, "I think that is quite conclusive. Shall we descend?"

"We will," replied Don Ramiero; "he has pronounced his own doom."

Then, standing on the platform, they disappeared into the depths of the *Isola's* hold.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Physician and Nurse.

UNDER the floor of the Council Chamber there was another room of exactly the same size, but very different in its appointments. Its walls, ceiling and floor were of half-inch steel, painted a neutral grey. It was lighted by eight electric bulbs, two on each wall, and it was absoultely devoid of furniture with the present exception of the arm-chair in which the form of Wilfrid Ellerton was lying, huddled and limp, just as a lifeless body might have lain.

Its other occupants when Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud descended on the platform were René Durtal and his First Officer, Herbert Darfield.

"And now, my dear Doctor," said Don Ramiero, as they stepped on to the floor of the room, "I must trouble you to make sure that your patient is quite unconscious, and then we will leave you free to visit your more important charge, who is, doubtless, by this time in need of your care."

The Frenchman turned quickly away to make his examination, and so they did not see the scowl on his brow, or the ugly twist of his ape-like lips which told of an anger amounting almost to fury, to which he dare not give expression. The suggestion was really an order, and he knew that he had to obey it without question. He would have given half, nay, all that he possessed to have remained in the room and seen what was about to be done with the unfortunate young fellow whom he had just drugged into insensibility; but that was forbidden, and he knew that if he made any difficulty about going, there would be no hesitation in removing him by force.

Valdez pulled aside the loose carpet and gave a signal. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. In a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton appeared through the gap, his head bandaged.

He was aware of the existence of that Underworld over which his master ruled with undisputed sway, but that was all. What it was in reality, or by what mysterious means it was reached from the world above the waters he no more knew than the firemen who fed the *Isola's* furnaces, and this was not the least of the causes of his secret, but ever-growing, hatred and jealousy of Don Ramiero.

Why should this Spaniard know secrets and possess powers with which he, the man of science who held the power of life and death in his hands, was not to be trusted? Well, he might learn for himself some day, and then—but for the present it was necessary to obey.

"Absolutely unconscious, my dear Señor Valdez," he said

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with gently smiling lips as he came back from the side of the chair; "he will remain as he is for fully two hours, which, I trust, will be long enough for your purpose. At the end of that time you will be good enough to give him hot brandy-and-water of moderate strength, first in teaspoonfuls, and then, when he can swallow it, as a draught. Within a quarter of an hour or so, he will be in full possession of his faculties, and in a week or so at the outside his physical health will be completely restored. And now I will act upon your suggestion and go."

"I am much obliged to you, Doctor," replied Don Ramiero smilingly. "I will come back with you, and let you out as you might have some difficulty with the doors."

The Frenchman had hard work to keep his lips smiling, for this was another very sore point with him. He had not even been trusted with the secret of the doors of the Council Chamber, and to such a fiercely jealous nature as his this silent lack of trust was infinitely worse than open insult would have been.

The rising platform carried them back, and as he was opening the doors, Don Ramiero said gently but with unmistakable meaning in his voice:

"That is the first time, I believe, my dear Doctor, that you have been in the lower chamber. Under the circumstances it was necessary that you should visit it. At the same time I think it well to inform you that the Señor does not wish it to be known that such a chamber exists. He has his own reasons for this, and I need hardly suggest to you that they are probably very weighty ones."

"My friend," replied the other, smiling and looking him frankly in the eyes, "whatever they are, it is not for me to question or even to inquire into them. Let me assure you that I remember nothing of what I have seen during the last half hour."

"That is exactly the reply that I should have expected from such discretion as yours, my dear Doctor Billaud," murmured Don Ramiero.

"Our friend is altogether too polite, and he is getting rather too much power into his hands," he said to himself as he closed the doors. "He must be watched. If he is not careful it may possibly be necessary to arrange for another of these regrettable accidents. No one is so necessary to the Señor as to be indespensible, my friend."

Meanwhile the Frenchman was saying in his soul as he went back to his own rooms:

"Why should that Spaniard be trusted with secrets which I may not know? If I am good enough for Staunton to trust with the reason, nay, the very life, of his daughter, am I not good enough also to know the secrets which Valdez knows? Does not this tyrant of ours know that the surest way to turn faithful servants into traitors is to distrust them while they are worthy of trust? Yet I will know some day, cost what it may, for knowledge is power, and power is the only thing worth having in this worst of all possible worlds."

No wonder Billaud's curiosity was deep and burning with regard to the happenings about to take place in the chamber below the Sanctum, for certainly nothing stranger had ever taken place either on the ocean or beneath it since men first went down to the sea in ships.

As soon as Don Ramiero had closed the double doors he went to the telephone and rang up the bridge where the Second Officer was in charge. The bell tinkled in answer, and he said:

"Have you picked up the buoy yet, Mr. Martin?"

"We have just got it with the searchlight, sir; we shall be fast within five minutes. Shall I ring you up again as soon as we are?"

"If you please, when you are quite ready. There is no immediate hurry," said Don Ramiero, hanging up the transmitter.

Almost at the same moment Doctor Billaud knocked softly at the door of the spacious state-room in which Mercedes was lying, already in the first stage of convalescence. It was opened by the head nurse, the woman who had recognised the First Officer of the *Isola* as the man who had given her his name, and then disgraced it.

"Good evening, Miss Yuill," he said softly as he entered. "Ah, I see that our dear patient is sleeping very nicely. It is the best of signs. Yes, yes, we shall have her well, I hope by the time that we have exchanged these northern latitudes for the blue waters of the Mediterranean."

"Northern latitudes?" she echoed. "What do you mean, Doctor? I thought we were going straight from Leith to Monaco?"

"At the last moment our sailing orders were altered," he replied in a whisper, for he was now by the bedside and was feeling his patient's pulse with an almost imperceptible touch of his finger. "Have you not noticed how the temperature has fallen during the last twenty-four hours or so?"

"No," she murmured, remembering what had happened during her last walk on deck. "You see, we have been very busy, Miss Leven and I, and I am not a very good sailor; so what time I have had to spare I have spent lying down or else in the saloon."

"Quite so," he replied, with a keen look at her fair face and honest eyes; "but, my dear Miss Yuill, this will not do at all. With the work that you have to do, and will have to do for some days and nights to come, it is absolutely necessary that you should have fresh air and exercise. Yes, as Miss Staunton's physician, I must really insist upon it. You will, I am sure, oblige me by asking Miss Leven to relieve you at once, and then by taking a good half-hour's promenade on deck. I need hardly remind a lady of your experience that the perfect health of the nurse is often essential to the recovery of the patient."

His tone and manner meant even more than his words, and she felt that there was only one reply to them, and so, with a few murmured words of thanks for his consideration, she left the room.

"That is a woman of character," he said to himself when she had gone; "and if I can still read the human soul through the windows out of which it looks upon the world, she has seen sorrow very close to her, misery, perhaps. Yes, she has suffered, and therefore she should be able to help me. I shall be better here for the present. If she notices anything out of the way during her stroll most possibly she will consult me, and then we may be able to come to something like an understanding. A handsome woman, too, almost beautiful, indeed, and highly skilled—a perfect wife for a physician. Well, well, what nonsense I am talking! And your dear Elsie still serving her life-sentence in the Isle of Pines. Tut, tut, let us attend to business!"

At this moment there was a tap on the door and Miss Annie Leven, the second nurse, entered. She was an absolute contrast to Janet Yuill—dark-haired, rosy-cheeked, hazel-eyed, *petite* in figure and overflowing with health—a typical Scotch lassie.

Meanwhile Janet had reached the promenade deck. The wind was northerly, and she at once thought of the Doctor's words as she felt the keen nip of it on her face. The moon was down, but the sky was clear and gemmed with star-clusters as it only is in high northern latitudes.

After the first wandering glance and a moment's thought there was no doubt left in her mind as to the real meaning of that triangular patch of white far up in the midnight sky with the long, wavering lines hanging down from it. It was the summit of Mount Hekla, clothed with its glittering mantle of ice and snow, hung in mid-air under the star-shine more than five thousand feet above the smooth sea on whose surface the *Isola* was now lazily floating.

Yes, the yacht had stopped, and that was the snow-clad peak of Hekla, the great volcano of Iceland. It could not be anything else. She knew that it was the only mountain of such a height that could be seen from the surface of the North Sea.

What was the *Isola* doing here off the coast of Iceland,

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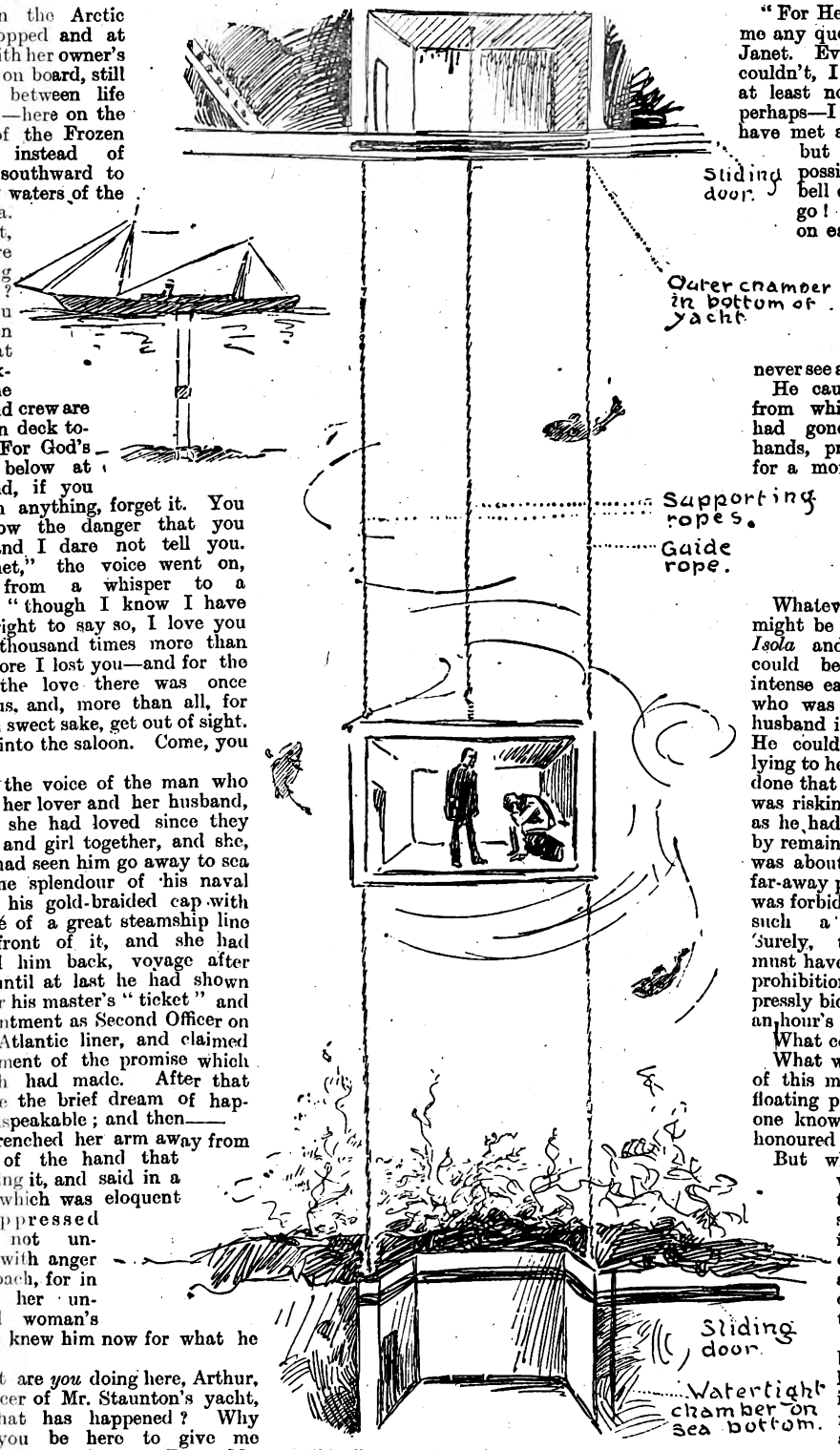
almost on the Arctic Circle, stopped and at anchor, with her owner's daughter on board, still wavering between life and death—here on the confines of the Frozen Ocean, instead of speeding southward to the sunny waters of the Inland Sea.

"Janet, what are you doing here? Have you not been told that no one except the officers and crew are allowed on deck to-night? For God's sake go below at once; and, if you have seen anything, forget it. You don't know the danger that you are in—and I dare not tell you. But, Janet," the voice went on, sinking from a whisper to a murmur, "though I know I have lost the right to say so, I love you more—a thousand times more than I did before I lost you—and for the sake of the love there was once between us, and, more than all, for your own sweet sake, get out of sight. Go back into the saloon. Come, you must!"

It was the voice of the man who had been her lover and her husband, the man she had loved since they were boy and girl together, and she, the girl, had seen him go away to sea in all the splendour of his naval suit and his gold-braided cap with the badge of a great steamship line on the front of it, and she had welcomed him back, voyage after voyage, until at last he had shown her father his master's "ticket" and his appointment as Second Officer on a crack Atlantic liner, and claimed the fulfilment of the promise which they both had made. After that had come the brief dream of happiness unspeakable; and then——

She wrenched her arm away from the grip of the hand that was holding it, and said in a whisper, which was eloquent with suppressed emotion not unmingled with anger and reproach, for in spite of her unquenched woman's love, she knew him now for what he was.

"What are *you* doing here, Arthur, First Officer of Mr. Staunton's yacht, after what has happened? Why should you be here to give me orders and warnings? Does Mr. Staunton know——"



This diagram shows how Ellerton was transported to the World beneath the Seas.

"For Heaven's sake, don't ask me any questions like that now, Janet. Even if I had time, I couldn't, I dare not, answer you, at least not here. Some day, perhaps—I hope so now that we have met against so strangely—but not now; it is impossible. Ah, there is the bell on the bridge. I must go! If there is anything on earth that is still dear to you, for its sake get out of sight before the watch comes on deck. If you were found here just now you might never see another sunrise."

He caught her left hand—from which the wedding ring had gone—between his two hands, pressed it passionately for a moment, and then, with a last look of eager appeal into her eyes, he released her and walked rapidly forward to the bridge ladder.

Whatever this terrible mystery might be which overhung the *Isola* and her doings, there could be no mistaking the intense earnestness of the man who was still, after all, her husband in the eye of the law. He could have no object in lying to her, and unless he had done that it was plain that she was risking her liberty, perhaps, as he had hinted, her very life, by remaining on deck. What was about to be done in this far-away part of the sea that she was forbidden to witness under such a terrible penalty? Surely, too, Doctor Billaud must have known of the strange prohibition, and yet he had expressly bidden her to take half-an-hour's walk on deck.

What could it all mean?

What was the real character of this millionaire's yacht, this floating palace which, as everyone knows, Royalty itself had honoured by its presence?

But while these questions were chasing each other through her brain, she saw silent, shadowy figures begin to creep quickly about the deck, and heard whispered orders pass from mouth to mouth.

She was no coward, but after what her husband had told her, it would have been mere folly to remain, and expose herself to insult and perhaps violence.

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She walked quickly to the saloon door on the other side of the deck to that on which the figures were moving, and slipped in just as a low whistle sounded from the bridge and the pad, pad of naked feet on the deck became louder.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

To a City Beneath the Sea.

When Darfield reached the bridge the rays of a small searchlight were shining on a little black buoy that was bobbing about on the water some fifty feet ahead of the *Isola*. There was nothing to distinguish it from the marks set by fishermen to indicate the position of their nets or lobster-pots—nothing to give the remotest hint that it was the clue to the greatest mystery of the twentieth century, a mystery which had been worrying the statesmen and financiers of Europe and America for nearly ten years past.

"You can lower away when you are ready, Mr. Martin," he said, after an anxious glance along the deck, as the Second saluted and left the bridge.

"Very well, sir. Everything is ready," was the reply.

A minute later a boat swung out on either side of the spar-deck and dropped almost noiselessly into the water. One of them pulled forward and took the end of a chain-cable which was being lowered out of one of the hawse-holes.

The yacht forged slowly up to the buoy, and when it was just under her sloping stem a man dressed in a diving-suit slipped over the side of the boat with the end of the chain in his hand and sank out of sight as the cranks of the air pump in the boat began to revolve.

Inside five minutes he came back up the rope-ladder which hung over the side and held out his hand. The end of an insulated wire, which communicated with the bridge, was passed to him, and he disappeared again.

He was a little longer below this time, and before he returned to the surface an electric bell tinkled in the chart-room in which Darfield was waiting with the telephone-receiver at his ear. The instrument began to buzz softly, and he said:

"Is that you, Herarra?"

"Yes, sir. We did not expect you so soon."

"No, this is a special trip. We have an important consignment for you. Is the chamber ready?"

"All ready, sir. Are we to expect the Señor?"

"No, he is in England. Señor Valdez and the Captain will bring the consignment to you as soon as we are ready. Stand by till I ring you up again."

"Very good, sir."

Then he went to another telephone and said to Don Ramiero, who was waiting in the Sanctum:

"Communication has been made, sir, and Herarra has the chamber ready."

"Very well. Tell him that the cable will be down in a minute or so. We are almost ready."

He hung up the receiver, went on to the platform, and descended into the lower chamber. Meanwhile the after-boat had picked up another mooring, and connected a cable with it.

"We are all fast, Captain," he said, with a glance at Ellerton's unconscious figure. "Mr. McAndrew can lower the cable as soon as he likes, and we had better get our patient below."

"Quite so, Señor," replied Darfield, going to the forward end wall and pressing a flat white button under one of the electric lights. One of the steel plates forming the wall fell back on a hinge. Beyond it was a sloping passage with a ribbed rubber floor leading down into the depths of the yacht amidships. At the lower end was an opening four feet high by three wide. Don Ramiero looked at the Captain and then at Ellerton. He understood, and between them they picked up the chair and carried Ellerton down the passage into the chamber at the end.

This was a little apartment, about the size of an ordinary passenger lift, but there were no seats in it, and so there was plenty of room for Ellerton's chair. When they had put it down Don Ramiero turned a switch, and a bulb in the roof began to glow. The Captain took a telephone transmitter from the wall, pressed a button, and said:

"Are you there, Mr. McAndrew? Yes. All ready? Very well. Run out the guiding-cable and the telephone wire, and when you hear that they have made fast below let me know. Thank you."

They waited for two or three minutes, during which they heard a sound as of a rope running swiftly over well-oiled bearings, over the fore part of the lift—for such this little chamber really was, though it was the strangest contrivance of its kind in the world. Then it stopped, and presently the bell rang.

"Yes," said the Captain, taking down the transmitter, "what's that? They've made fast? Good. Then I will close up and you may lower when I ring. Thank you. Good-bye for the present."

He turned a lever in the wall beside the opening by which they had entered, and a slab of steel slid noiselessly down, exactly fitting a rubber-padded slot which ran round three sides on the inside, and made the chamber both air and water-tight. At the same time Don Ramiero turned a little tap in the opposite wall and a cool stream of fresh air, stored under pressure in a reservoir in the roof, began to flow into the chamber.

The Captain touched the bell again, the lift sank about ten feet, and stopped; a heavy steel plate slid forward and covered the space it had left, then a portion of the yacht's double skin, a little to the starboard side of the keel, and just large enough for the diving-bell—for that is what the lift had now become—fell outward on a hinge and the water rushed in and surrounded the little chamber. The falling motion began again, and Ellerton had begun the first brief stage of his momentous journey to the Underworld.

The diving-chamber sank slowly, and in about five minutes it came quietly to rest on the bottom of the North Sea some sixty fathoms beneath the surface. The guiding-cable, down which it had slid from the yacht, led into another chamber which was structurally similar to the one which it had just left. It sank down, a heavy steel plate slid over it, a pair of rubber-lined jaws gripped the cable and stopped all inflow of water; another plate slid away from beneath, the water about the chamber fell away, and then it sank another twenty feet and came to rest.

"We have arrived," said the Captain, with a smiling look at Ellerton, "and before long this gentleman will, I suppose, awake in a new world. Ah, well, it is not to everybody that such wonderful experiences are given in these unromantic days. It is to be hoped that he will appreciate them at their proper value."

"It is at least somewhat doubtful," replied Don Ramiero drily, "the wonders will, of course, be there, Mr. Ellerton's appreciation of them under the peculiar circumstances is quite another matter."

At this moment the telephone bell rang three times. It was the signal that all was ready for the gates of the Underworld to be opened. Captain Durtal pulled the lever and the door-plate rose. A flood of soft light and a rush of cool, fresh air came in together, and an unmistakably Spanish tenor voice said:

"Welcome, Señors, to the Land beneath the Sea. Ah, and so this, I presume, is the consignment of which you told me over the telephone?"

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"Yes, Señor Herarra," replied Don Ramiero, in his most formal tones, "This gentleman," he continued, moving towards the chair, "is, as you see, seriously unwell. The Señor has come to the conclusion that a change of air will benefit him, and so he has instructed me to bring him into this retreat of ours and commend him to your most scrupulous care. Will you now be good enough to send a couple of your men to carry him to more comfortable quarters?"

"The Señor's wishes are the laws of the Underworld—which is his." replied Leon Herarra, a big, black-bearded, blue-eyed Andalusian, who, for a few years past, had been very badly wanted by the police of half the Governments of Europe, for the very sufficient reason that he possessed such an incomparable genius for coining and bank-note counterfeiting that the said Governments would have thought half a million sterling quite a reasonable price for his permanent retirement from business.

They had now begun to think that he had done so of his own free will and on a very handsome fortune. The fact was that he had accepted the very responsible position of Isolo Staunton's Viceroy in his Kingdom under the Seas.

"Excuse me a moment, Señors," he continued, stepping back into the passage. Then he called out in strongly-accented but perfectly plain English:

"Sigur, Elfreth, come here and bring two others. There is a precious burden to be borne. It is the Master's will."

There was a shuffling as of sandalled feet in the gallery, accompanied by a hoarse muttering of male voices, and the next moment four figures clad in grey woollen jumpers and short trousers appeared at the door.

If any of the late guests on board the *Isola* could, by any miracle of second sight, have been enabled to view the scene in the diving-chamber they would have been able to tell a story which the most credulous readers of newspaper sensations would have had some difficulty in believing. The four men who, in obedience to a few sharp orders from Herrara, took up the chair in which Ellerton sat, supported by a broad strap which the Captain had passed underneath his armpits and round the back, were in truth, not at all unlike those imaginary inhabitants of that other Underworld which the tellers of fairy-tales have pictured.

Although stunted in stature, and somewhat bent in shape, their shoulders were broad and their bare arms sinewy and muscular like their legs which were bare from the knee downwards. Their height was only an inch or so over five feet; but their heads were large enough for men of six feet. Their hair, cropped almost close to their skulls, was of a greyish white, and the skin of their faces, arms, and legs was almost of the same hue, and absolutely bloodless. Their eyes were covered with shades, as though to protect them from the glow of the electric lamps, which was, in fact, the case.

Such were the gnomes who, in the silence and semi-darkness of this world beneath the ocean, toiled like the slaves of some Eastern Genie, to increase the inexhaustible treasure whose possession made Isolo Staunton and his partner, Derrick Kesteven, the richest, and therefore, in the material sense at least, the most powerful men in the world.

Don Ramiero and the Captain followed Herarra and the bearers along the passage, which was some four hundred yards in length. The end was closed by a steel door similar to those in the water-tight compartments of warships. Herarra motioned to the bearers to stop, and putting his finger on a button at the side of the door, sent a signal in "longs and shorts," which, though inaudible in the tunnel, informed his second in command that the door was to be opened in the name of the Lord of the Underworld.

"I see that the precautions are as strict as ever, M. Herarra, said the captain in French, "and yet surely your domain should be safe enough even with open doors."

"Nothing is reasonably safe, Monsieur, until all possible precautions have been taken," replied the Spaniard in the same language. "We have these fellows pretty well in hand, but for all that, it would not do to let them know too much. Besides, you know, if by any means, through treason perhaps, the secret of our communication with the

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other world got known, this one gallery would be the extent of the invader's discovery. A knock on that door, or anything but the correct signal on the bell—and the door would remain fast and the gallery would be instantly flooded. No, no, we take no risks down here."

"And quite right, too!" laughed Captain Durtal, as the door slid slowly back in its grooves and they passed through into the ante-chamber of the Underworld.

The door closed again the moment they had entered, and as the bearers set their burden down at a sign from Herarra, he turned to Don Ramiero and asked:

"What are your wishes, Señor, as to the disposal of this gentleman, who, I presume, has had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of the Señor? Is it intended to terminate an existence which may have become superfluous or inconvenient?"

"No," replied Don Ramiero quickly, "it is not exactly that, although, with regard to the world which this gentleman has just left, it is so.

"His continued existence there has, unhappily, become an impossibility. For private reasons of his own, into which, as you are aware, it would be out of the question for us to inquire, the Señor has, as I may say, commuted sentence of death into one of perpetual banishment. I have your written instructions in my pocket, and if you will be good enough to let us have the use of one of your apartments for half-an-hour or so, I will give them to you and explain matters more fully."

"By all means and with the most cordial welcome, Señor," replied Herarra, with his most genial smile, for he was not a little pleased at being intrusted with what he rightly deemed to be a most important charge.

He gave a brief order to the bearers and as they resumed their burden, he went on:

"It is fortunate that I have just completed an extension of my dwelling-place. It was for that I asked for my last consignment of furniture. I have decorated it in Oriental style, and I venture to think you will find it comfortable. Will you be good enough to follow me."

They followed him and the bearers across the smoothly-levelled floor of a vast cavern from the invisible roof of which hung three great electric arc-lamps. Dim, almost ghost-like figures, clad as the bearers were, flitted hither and thither, all with bent heads and shaded eyes, most of them carrying burdens which, though small, appeared to be fairly heavy.

They passed through a roughly-hewn archway, one of several which led on all sides out of the vast ante-chamber, almost directly opposite the door by which they had entered, and came to a door which Herrara opened with a little key attached to his watch-chain.

When the bearers had gone through in obedience to a sign from him, he stood aside and said, with a motion of his left hand towards the door:

"Señors, do me the honour of entering."

Herarra closed the door behind them as they entered, and turned a couple of switches on a wooden panel just beside it. The dim glow of a single bulb overhead was instantly drowned in a flood of light which revealed to the visitors a scene in which the splendour of the East was admirably blended with the solid comfort of the West. The entrance-hall, as it might well be called, of the Viceroy's residence, was roofed with tent-like hangings of pale blue silk which, in the shimmer of the electric lights, looked strangely like the twilight sky of the Overworld, and its walls were hung with gorgeously-coloured carpets, the choicest products of Indian, Persian and Turkish looms. The floor of polished black stone was covered with skins of the white polar bear.

Their host turned to the right when they had gone about ten paces, and drew aside a curtain of heavy crimson silk, saying:

"This is the apartment, Señor Valdez, in which I propose to receive our guest. I trust that it may impress him favourably."

"Upon my word, Señor," exclaimed Don Ramiero, as his host switched on the lights and he looked about the magnificently-appointed chamber, "I must congratulate you on the excellence of your taste and the industry of your servants. Yildiz Kiosk itself has nothing to show like this. Our young friend should be fairly comfortable here."

"I hope so, Señor," replied Herarra, as he motioned to the bearers to put the chair in the middle of the room. "You may rest assured that no effort will be wanting on my part to reconcile him to his exchange of worlds—always supposing that I am instructed to do so."

"You are," said Don Ramiero, taking an envelope from the inside pocket of his coat. "Here are the orders of the Señor; you can consult them at your leisure. He will sleep for about an hour yet. During that time we can have a little necessary conversation, and you can send any cargo that you have available down to the lift. We must not keep the yacht waiting more than an hour, for we have an important appointment to keep a long way from here."

All the conversation with Herarra was conducted in Spanish, but his orders to the bearers were given in English, the only language, save their own ancient Norse, that the slaves of the Underworld were permitted to use.

Ellerton was lifted out of the chair and laid in a silken-hung recess in which a favourite of Haroun al Raschid himself might have been well content to repose.

Then Herarra, excusing himself for a moment, took the bearers to the door and sent them out, locking it behind them.

When he came back he was followed by three girls dressed in Oriental costume. They were exquisitely and yet strangely beautiful. Their features were small and almost perfectly regular. Their faces were bloodless, yet their skin was as clear as polished ivory, and their arms gleamed whitely through the gauze of their long, flowing sleeves. Their eyelids, golden-fringed, drooped over great sky-blue eyes, shielding them from the glow of the lights, and their pale yellow hair fell over their shoulders in shimmering ripples which almost touched the floor behind them as they walked.

Each of them carried a large silver salver. On one stood a couple of bottles of champagne, on the other some glasses and little bottles of liqueurs, and on the third silver trays filled with cigars and cigarettes.

"You see, Señors," said Herarra with a smile which showed two rows of brilliantly white teeth under his black moustache, "that we are well served in other ways than mere labour. I regret that my wife is not at present well enough to do the honours of her home, but she has sent three of her handmaids to wait upon us. A glass of wine and a cigar will make a pleasant conversation all the pleasanter. I presume that you do not wish our guest to be awakened——"

"No, no," replied Don Ramiero quickly. "It might be dangerous to disturb him before the time I mentioned, and you will see that it is the Señor's desire that he should awake amidst his new surroundings as from a dream, and with no links to connect him with the past."

"I fully understand you, Señor. His second existence shall be as distinct from his first as though he had been spirited away to another planet," answered Herarra as he proceeded to open one of the bottles of champagne.

———

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

Situations worth £100 a year for a Boy and £100 a year for a Girl are offered as Prizes in a Competition now started in

THE BOYS' LEADER.

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THE THREE LOVE LETTERS.

Telling How a Girl Answered Them.

"Who is she?"

"Old John Sargent's daughter; he died when she was a child, you know, and left his entire fortune to her."

"Why isn't she married?"

"They say she has buried her heart in Charlie Cutter's grave. You remember poor Charlie was thrown from his horse some five years ago and broke his neck and her heart at one blow. She is a fine girl, though, isn't she? No use trying to get her, Billy. Settle down and calm yourself. My sister says she never had a spark of sentiment about her anyway, but now she seems to have lost all interest in anything. Oh, no, not a mean streak in her nature. She is very generous with her money, but gives as though she did not care a straw what she was giving to—unnatural, very."

"By Jove, I think the girl has a heart within her, and if I were going to be in town this winter, I would try and reach it! She walks like a queen. What is she doing here?"

"Going to the cemetery. She has a key to the side entrance and they say she comes here at all hours of the day or night, but there is never a flower on Charlie's grave. She makes no outward show."

"Does she live alone?"

"No; houseful of servants, and a cousin or something as a companion; she used to do slumming, but I heard she got mixed up in a row one night and was hustled off to the police-station before the policeman found out who she was, but the whole force apologised, and she was sent home, so they say, in the Black Maria. Anyway she gets someone else to slum nowadays, and she pays the bills."

"Is she a blue-stocking?"

"Oh, steady, Will, she is nothing but what a man would want his wife, mother, or sister to be—with a couple of millions thrown in.

"She goes on the Continent, so Sallie says, every time she hears of anyone who wants a start in art or science, and pretends it is a favour to her that the poor student accepts a couple of years' receipted bills.

"She runs a free children's school and dances beautifully.

"She takes a box by the season at the Gaiety, and turns it over to the young folks like the dear that she is; but, by Jove, she would give you the same kind of a nod, if she met you, as she would her cook, and there would be no more heart or soul in her greeting than in a dish of uncooked mushrooms.

"I hate to have a woman so independent and so polite that one can't catch hold of a straw for a good foundation for criticism. I wish you were going to be here, Billy. If one could move her, you could. But she is beautiful and no mistake. Here comes Ned in his trap—alone, too—good luck, we'll ride home! Hi! Ned! Room for two? Thanks."

That day Dorothy Sargent entered the silent City of the

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by Mr. I. Snowman. This charming domestic scene is a fitting contrast to the pair of war subjects already given, and is reproduced in even better style, and on finer and heavier plate paper. The gravure measures 29 by 18½ in., and is printed on fine plate paper 40 by 30 in., free from advertising matter.

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Dead with more than sadness in her sweet face, and as she reached the grave that held all that was mortal of the one man she had ever loved, she pressed her face against the marble cross, and in her anguish cried aloud, "Help me, dearest!"

Suddenly, as though the load were lifted from her heart, and her prayer answered, she sprang from the ground and hurried home.

Going at once to her room, she took from her desk three letters; bowing her head upon her hands, she whispered, "Whatever is is right, my love will guide me. I will be satisfied."

A messenger had brought her the first letter from the Metropolitan Club. She drew it from the envelope, and re-read the lines she knew she would have to answer.

"*Before you opened the envelope which holds this letter, Dorothy Sargent, you knew who was the writer, and you knew what he had to tell you.*

"*By breaking the seal you have proved you are willing once again to listen to me.*

"*I have returned to my native land after an exile of ten weary years. God knows I did my best to give my wife the love she craved, and he knows I did my best to make her happy, and was as true as steel to her, but in His wisdom, which I dare not question, He gave her pure mind the power of seeing beyond what I gave her, and the dear child returned to her Maker broken-hearted, leaving me and our four motherless children to you, my one love, my one thought, and my dearest wish.*

"*Would that you were poor, that I might give to you what you could not otherwise have!*

"*Nothing but pity for Marion's children, for my children, can tempt you to come to me now? Come! I will make you love me, I will, and you must know it.*

"*No man ever gave to a woman a purer love than is offered to you again.*

"*Give to me this one word I crave, in the name of the innocent woman who knew she held the heart that belonged to another. I cry to you—and not in vain?*" "JOHN H. NORTON."

Rigid and white as death she threw the letter on the burning coals, and watched the flames devour the paper till there was nothing left but a grey mass that trembled and fell to pieces as a whiff of wind blew across the grate.

Opening the second letter she read:

"DEAREST,—*For the years I have known and loved you, I have never till now dared to tell you of my love.*

"*You were rich, I was poor. Shame on me that I would so belittle you! As though you did not know an honest man's heart is worth more than Cræsus' wealth.*

"*You know what I have done in the scientific world, but you do not know that what I have accomplished has been through you, and that for you alone I have succeeded.*

"*I dare now to offer you the heart and life which will go on and on working for you, spurred by the glorious knowledge that you have said, 'I love you.'*

"*May I go to you and take you in my arms and hold you close to the heart that beats for you alone?*

"*That I have told you of my love makes me happy. That you will bid me come is the prayer of—*

Thine, "SYLVESTER NEWCOMB."

As the poor girl finished reading this letter, she threw it, as she had done the other, in the fire. As she watched it burn she said aloud, "I could be happy with him; his profession would be more to him than he imagines, and he might not see I cannot love as he does."

And she read the third letter:

"MY DEAR DOROTHY,—*You were a little girl when I saw you first. I loved you then because your beautiful eyes were so like those God had given to the woman I was soon to marry.*

"*You know of the short year of happiness which was granted me, and you know what a long, weary life I have had since my wife died.*

"*You, dear, have been, and are, the one woman in this world to whom I can offer myself and what is left of my life and heart.*

"*I do love you, not with the boyhood passion you may crave, but with the true and honest love of a man old enough to be your father. For years I have loved you thus, and would not tell you, dear. I wanted you to have the happiness which a younger man might give you, and I loved you so tenderly, I wanted you to have what would please you most.*

"*You know your own heart's story. I do not ask you to tell me anything, but, if you will be my wife, I will do all in my power to make you as happy as I know you can make me.*

"*Send me one word, dear, and I will promise to watch over the treasure God has trusted to my care, if you will bid me come.—Faithfully yours,* "THOMAS OTIS SEWELL."

"He asks so little! I ought to be able to live with him and be happy. I will be making less sacrifice if I say 'Come' to him, and his dear old gentle life will be a benediction indeed."

With tears in her eyes she laughed aloud as she threw this last letter into the fire, and while watching it burn she said:

"I can't marry them all."

Taking a sheet of paper in her hand and smoothing it gently, as though giving it a little blessing, she dipped her pen in the ink, and with a shudder as though it were with her blood she were writing, she wrote the one word—"Come!"

Folding the paper she put it in an envelope and sealed it.

She then drew another sheet from the case before her and wrote upon it—

"MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND,—*I love you too well to give myself to you, and myself is all I have to give.*

"*God grant you may find a woman worthy of your honest love, is the prayer of,* "DOROTHY SARGENT."

Inclosing this letter in an envelope and sealing it, she gave a sigh of relief, and took another sheet of paper, on which she wrote a similar reply.

And she sealed this, as she had the others, and went to the library, leaving all three of her answers on her desk.

Touching the bell in the hall as she passed through, the butler answered her call.

"James, tell Poole to bring me the three letters on my desk. She may stamp them first."

Her maid brought her the letters. Stepping to the table, she bowed her head and whispered: "God help me to direct these aright."

She directed one to John Norton, the second to Professor Sylvester Newcomb, and the third to Thomas Otis Sewell.

To which would the fateful missive go?

Louise Clark.

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From a Photo.

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TESTIMONIAL—Oaksey Manor, Malmesbury, 19/5/03. —LADY FAIRBAIRN writes: "Received the Skirt, with which she was greatly pleased, and hopes to order more soon."

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7/6 **Curb Chain Bracelet**, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 **Brooch**; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

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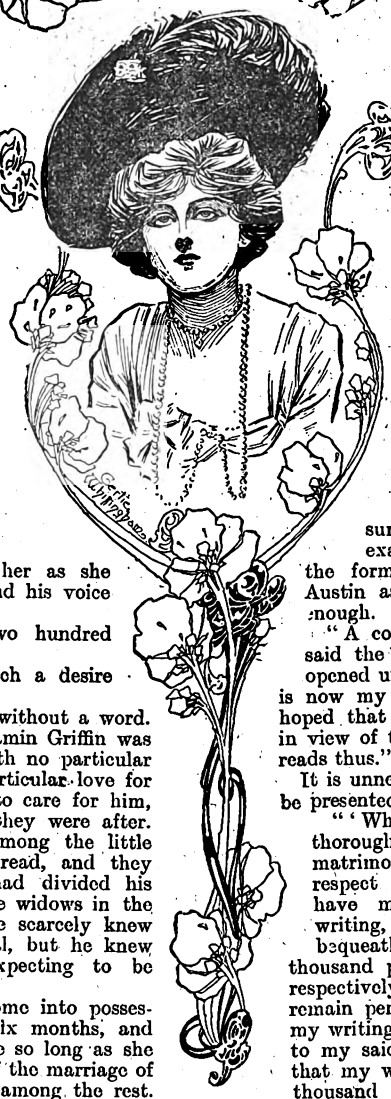

Telling How Seven Women—Wealth, and —Chose Between Love and the Result.

"WHAT does this mean?" he asked.

"Reuben——"

She hesitated.

"Well?"

"I fear—that an obstacle has arisen to our marriage."

"What obstacle could arise?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds have been bequeathed to me, on condition that I should not——"

Again she hesitated.

"Marry?"

"Yes."

He grew paler, and stood looking at her as she averted her eyes. Presently he spoke and his voice quivered:

"And you, choosing between the two hundred thousand and me, prefer the money."

"It is such a fortune, and I have such a desire for it!"

Reuben Austin, turning away, left her without a word. It was certainly a strange will, but Benjamin Griffin was a strange man. He died a bachelor, with no particular love for anybody and no one had any particular love for him. True, his few relatives pretended to care for him, but he knew that it was his money they were after. Consequently there was consternation among the little band of mourners when the will was read, and they learnt that the eccentric Benjamin had divided his fortune equally among seven marriageable widows in the town of Rathbone, where he resided. He scarcely knew them, for he avoided the sex in general, but he knew that they were all anxious—nay, expecting to be married again at no distant day.

The condition was that each should come into possession of her two hundred thousand in six months, and should continue in possession of the same so long as she remained unmarried; and in the event of the marriage of one, her share should be equally divided among the rest.

The seven widows walked out of the house. Before nine o'clock that evening there were seven miserable men in Rathbone. Six received peremptory orders to cease their attentions. The seventh, a good-looking young man with bright eyes and honest countenance, called on Mrs. Douglas, with what result we have seen. With her, as with the others, money overbalanced love.

The six other widows watched her house to see if he repeated his visits. They were wishing he would, for her share would then fall to them. The last week but one before the six months had passed, Reuben Austin was busy in his shop whistling at his work, trying to be merry, though he had lost twenty pounds since he lost his love.

"Reuben!"

"Good Heavens!"

That exclamation will help to convey an idea of the thrill that went through him at the sound of the familiar voice.

He turned and saw Mrs. Douglas standing in the doorway.

"Reuben, I shall not take the money!"

"Do you prefer me?"

"Yes."

"Dearest!"

It was in broad daylight or he would have caught her in his arms after the usual fashion.

Before the week was out they were married, and the other six rejoiced. In a day or two, according to notification, the heirs would hear from the executor.

Mrs. Austin, once Mrs. Douglas, was summoned with the rest. They found exactly the same company present as on the former reading. Everyone stared at Mrs. Austin as she came in, but she looked happy enough.

"A codicil to the will read six months ago," said the executor, "then sealed and not to be opened until now, was attached. That codicil it is now my business to read to you. It is to be hoped that no one will be unpleasantly disappointed in view of the terms laid down in said codicil which reads thus."

It is unnecessary to give it all here. Enough will be presented to make everything clear.

"'Whereas I, Benjamin Griffin, having a thorough disgust of money considerations in matrimonial projects, and entertaining a high respect for matrimonial affection and fidelity, have made my last will and testament in writing, bearing date, etc., and have hereby bequeathed the value of my fourteen hundred thousand pounds to seven widows of, etc., named respectively, etc., on condition that each shall remain perpetually unmarried; now I do by this, my writing—which I hereby declare to be a codicil to my said will—I do hereby order and declare that my will is that only the sum of one hundred thousand be under the provisions stated divided among said, etc., provided each shall, notwithstanding the temptation I have set in her way, remain true to her matrimonial engagement with the gentleman she now lovingly professes to be the choice of her heart.

"'In case one or any of the said, etc., should discard or fail to marry said man of her choice, I do hereby order and declare that the said sum or sums shall to her or them be forfeited; and if one or any of the said, etc., remain true to said, etc., share or shares falling to the lot of those who prove untrue, shall be given to her or them in equal shares.'"

"The hundred thousand pounds then falls to Mrs. Austin, who, I believe, is the only one among the within-named parties who has adopted the course which secures a title to the money bequeathed."

Six disappointed women filed out of the room. The rest of the fortune was divided among relatives.

"I am so glad that I was true to you, dear," said Mrs. Austin to her husband. "We will be so happy!"

Emily Howell.

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The Early Bird.

"You will come home early, won't you?" she said, as he was starting for the club. "Oh, yes; I'll come home early," he replied. "But, of course, dear," she persisted, "you understand that I mean early to-night, not early to-morrow morning?"

He Needed Prompting.

"You protest that you love me, Emily, but I am still waiting for the first kiss." "Well, why do you wait?"

A Wise Woman.

"They say her husband gratifies her smallest wish." "Very likely. She knows better than to have any big wishes."

Proof Positive.

Mabel: "I hope I didn't break Jack's heart when I refused him." Dora: "I don't think you did. He offered it to me the next day."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

She: "I shall have to refuse you again." He: "But this is positively the last time I shall propose." She: "Oh, well, that's different. Why didn't you say so?"

Cause For Grumbling.

"He tried to kiss me and I just told him to behave," said an irate young lady after a ball. "Well, did he kiss you?" asked her friend. "No. He behaved."

Happily Married.

Mrs. Nextdoor: "I suppose your daughter is happily married?" Mrs. Nagsby: "Indeed she is. Why, her husband is actually afraid to open his mouth in her presence."

Rough on Bertha.

Bertha: "I think Harry is soft enough for anything." Bessie: "So do I. Oh, by-the-way, dear, that reminds me. Last night I overheard him say he was going to propose to you."

A Great Attraction.

Fred: "So you are going to marry Miss Millyuns, eh? I don't see what you can find to admire in a girl of her stamp." Joe: "My dear boy, it isn't her stamp that attracts me; it's her cheque. See?"

An Apparent Deduction.

"This is a pretty time of night for that girl next door to be playing the piano!" remarked an indignant lady to her husband. "Oh, she's no respecter of time! You can tell that from the way she's playing!" rejoined he.

His Love Was Great But His Wealth Was Not.

Lover: "You are getting prettier every day." Sweet Girl: "Just now I am living on brown bread and water to improve my complexion." "How long can you keep that up?" "Oh, indefinitely." "Then let's get married."

Identification.

"Come here, my little Eddie," said a gentleman to a youngster of seven years of age, while sitting in the parlour where a large company was assembled, "do you know me?" "Yes, sir; I think I do." "Who am I, then? Let me hear." "You are the man who kissed sister Angeline last night in the parlour." Angeline fainted.

A Paying Profession.

"What's his business?" "Well, as near as I can make out he is matrimonial agent for his two daughters."

Rather Curious.

Watson: "Women are always curious." Johnson: "My wife isn't curious a bit." Watson: "Then she must be a curious woman."

He Was Bunkered.

Beatrice: "You know, Will said he'd like to be caught playing golf?" Patience: "Yes." "Well, I caught him on the links this afternoon. We're engaged."

A Most Unfortunate Scribe.

"He's an unfortunate man of letters." "Why, I never heard he was an author." "Well, he was the author of several letters that lost him a breach of promise case."

Not to Blame.

"Here, we have only been married two days, Clarence, and you're scolding me already." "I know, my dear, but just think how long I have been waiting for the chance."

Pa Mistook the Young Man's Mission.

"I am going to marry your daughter, sir," said the positive young man to the father. "Well, you needn't come to me for sympathy," replied the father. "I have troubles of my own."

Mutual Disapprobation.

Mrs. A. Cerbity: "You have accepted George? Why, you know very well that I don't approve of him." Her Daughter: "That's all right, mother. Neither does he approve of you!"

How Disappointed She Was.

Jack: "I have just received a telegram saying that a rich aunt, my only relative, has died and left me——" His Fiancée (eagerly): "Yes, and left you——" Jack: "All alone in the world."

Out of the Frying Pan.

Harris: "Walter has been looking pretty bad since his daughter got married, hasn't he?" Correll: "Yes; you see, he had no sooner got his daughter off his hands than he found he would have to put her husband on his feet."

She Anticipated Troubles.

Mabel: "Yes, dear, I will be a helpmate to you, and try to lighten the daily troubles and worries of your life as best I can." Arthur: "But I have none, darling." Mabel: "Oh, you old goose! I mean when we are married, of course!"

Hopeful Girl!

He (timidly): "Now that we are engaged, I—I presume I may—may kiss you as much as I please, mayn't I?" She (encouragingly): "Yes, indeed. Make the most of your time, dear. There's no telling how long an engagement will last nowadays, you know."

Fickle Woman!

"I am the unluckiest man alive!" "What's the matter?" "Why, I heard that she was engaged, so I went round and proposed to her, so that she wouldn't think I had been trifling with her." "And wasn't she engaged?" "Yes; but she broke it off. She said my love was more sincere than his."

He Came from Sussex.

She was pretty and sweet and poetic, and he was young and mischievous. "Oh, how I love to sit out here in the moonlight," she cooed; "to be fanned by the languorous perfumes of the roses and to be kissed by the soft airs from the south!" Then he kissed her and she grew indignant. "How dare you?" she almost sobbed. "Why, I'm a soft heir from the south," he replied. She didn't say anything when he kissed her again.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

After the Dance.

"I MET a young man at a dance recently," writes "ADA," "but did not care for him at all. The other day, I saw him coming along the street, and avoided him. Was this a breach of etiquette, and should I see him again. Am I forced to recognise him?"

* * * * *

It is largely a matter of choice whether or not a girl resumes the acquaintance of a man whom she has met casually. If you have some definite reason for disliking him, and not wishing to know him, you can avoid noticing him without breaking a social rule. On the other hand, I do not advocate "cutting" people without very good reason. If the young man was merely harmless, and not really objectionable, a bow from you would do no harm, and you would avoid hurting his feelings. At the same time, men should bear in mind that it is the woman's prerogative to signify whether or not she wishes to resume a man's acquaintance. If she definitely shows that she does not wish to do so, he should avoid, when next meeting her, giving the impression that he wishes to press his acquaintance on her.

Family v. Lover.

"A READER." I am always pleased to hear opinions of my readers on any question I may discuss in this page, even if they do not agree with my own. I do not pretend to be infallible, especially on such vexed questions as some readers submit, and very often there is a good deal to be said on the other side. A week or so back, I advised lovers not to omit civility and kindness to their sweetheart's families, as a girl resented anything like a slight on her people. Now you say "you would not give a snap of the finger for a girl who loved her family more than you." You add that, "if a girl truly loves a man, she will decide with him against the whole world."

* * * * *

Now, this sounds very pretty, and is, I know, what we are always taught in stories to believe to be right. But you must remember that there are times in the stages of love when a girl, though she may feel deeply drawn towards a man, is not disposed to take his part against those whom she has loved all her life—her parents. Anything like a slight to them might arouse such feelings of resentment that her whole attitude might be changed towards the man she thought she loved. When a man and woman are bound together in love, and any dispute arises in which the woman has to choose between her family and himself, I believe it is right for love to win the victory. But experience proves that a good many things may happen to destroy what is supposed to be "love," and the instance I gave is among them.

Is Twenty Too Young to Marry?

"Is twenty too young for a man to marry?" asks "PERCY," who is that age, and engaged.

* * * * *

In my opinion, yes. Another two or three years, at least, should elapse before you take the step. At twenty, a man is far from having reached maturity in mind or body, and to be saddled with the cares of a household, and perhaps a family, so early in life must affect his working powers in business.

A Too Flippant Girl.

"THOMAS" is troubled by a young lady who is too flippant. He thinks he is very fond of her, but finds that whenever he talks seriously to her, she turns it into a joke. She is very fond, too, of chaffing him, and making him a laughing stock, which "THOMAS" cannot bear.

* * * * *

If, after knowing you better, "THOMAS," the girl continues to tease you, and you still find that it makes you unhappy, I think you had better let the affair drop. If one person has a sense of humour, or is frivolous, and the other very serious, I do not think they can be very well suited to each other. You will both find the other a source of irritation as time goes on, for humour must be shared and not one-sided.

A Case for an Apology.

"I USED to go out a great deal with a girl friend," writes WALLACE, "but one day, I was worried over business, and said something which offended her. She left me soon after, rather coldly, and did not see me again for some time. Then I heard that another man was paying her attentions. Now I find that I am really much fonder of the girl than I thought, and that she is necessary to my happiness. But what am I to do? I offended her, and another man took my place."

* * * * *

There can be no possible harm in your offering your apologies to her for your rudeness, and asking permission to see her again. If she consents, then you may take it that she has forgiven you, and that she is not committed to the attentions of your rival. If otherwise, and she will not consent to your meeting again, you must realise that you have lost her, and I fear, rather through your own fault.

Love and Business.

"I AM in love with a girl," writes "UNDECIDED" (Johannesburg), "and thinks he returns my affection. My prospects are not very bright at present. Would it be right for me to propose to the girl, and tell her all, for it may be years before I can marry. Would it not be better if I avoided her altogether?"

* * * * *

You do not yet know whether the girl returns your love. Would it not be better for you to avoid even broaching the subject of marriage until you know her better? As to your prospects, tell her candidly what they are. It will be a test of her love to see whether she, knowing the truth, is willing for you to continue paying her attentions. As to the wisdom of your proposing, or avoiding her altogether, certainly the wiser course would be the latter. You have to make way for yourself in the world, and in a colony, and a man in that position should certainly give as much of his attention as possible to business. To be committed to marriage might handicap you in the struggle, and would be placing a great tie on the girl.

Cynthia.

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2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.

Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

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Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.

At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf

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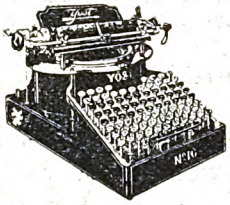

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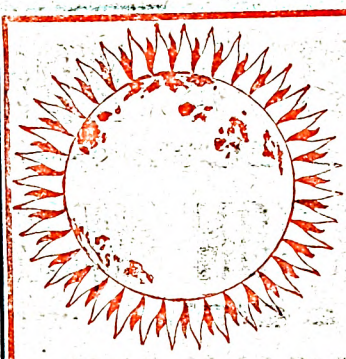

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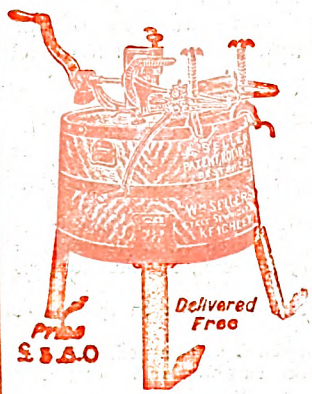

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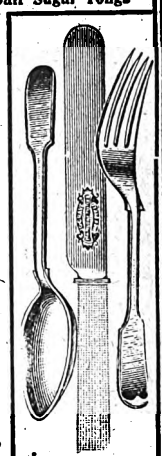

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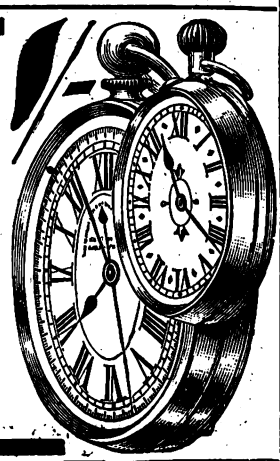

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 777.] Week Ending November 21st, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series.

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the racecourse, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him, but underwent another perilous adventure before the day was out.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel had arrived in Northampton, and would be with Sara the following day.

Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal; but Noel was very late, and Sara, fearing a trap, got on board a barge.

Imagine her horror when she found herself confronted by—Sidney Ilford! She was gagged and bound, in the power of Templeton and Co.!

Presently Noel appeared on the bank in search of Sara. He boarded the barge, but Ilford lied discreetly.

Sara's agony became too great to bear, for *Noel was about to leave!*

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

A HOUSE OF MYSTERY IN BIRMINGHAM.

THE moments of suspense that followed! For a moment a faint hope flickered that even at the last Noel would turn back to save me, and then the echo of his footsteps died away, and my heart sickened within me at the thought that he had gone.

He, my lover, had left me to the tender mercies of his enemies. The knowledge stunned me like a blow; I fell back almost fainting; my heart beat heavily, painfully, there came a horrible dryness in my mouth, my tongue was parched. I lay helpless as a log, all feeling, all emotion, numbed.

Since the evening of my flight from London I had suffered danger, anxiety, pain; but through it all I had been buoyed up by the hope of re-union with Noel, my courage had not left me, nor my endurance flagged until this moment, when it seemed my lover had abandoned me. To be in sight, in hearing, in reach of the woman he loved, and not to know that she was there! In my despair I was ready to judge him harshly, unkindly, yet all the time my heart was crying out for him. Noel, Noel! How I craved for his voice and touch!

After a while I was roused from my state of stupor. Opening my eyes I beheld Sidney Ilford bending over me.

"You're faint," he said, and looped back the awning, so that the fresh air might fan my face. He placed a cushion under my head, and presently reappeared with a cup of tea.

"You're just about done for," he said quietly. And then, "You had better listen to me and act reasonably. It isn't to be supposed I entertain very kindly feelings towards you, considering you've done your best to kill me. All the same, I don't want a dead body on my hands, and as things are now you look uncommonly like pegging out. You're white as death, except where you're pale green. If you'll undertake to keep quiet, not to shout or scream, or play me any tricks, I'll untie those ropes and let you walk about a bit; also I'll let you take a cup of tea. Now, do you agree?" I signed consent, and stooping down, he deftly slipped the gag out of my mouth.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked in a wild, trembling sort of voice.

"Uncertain. You'll be handed over to Templeton some time to-night, but for the next two or three hours you'll be here in my charge. If you'll give me your word not to try to escape, or to play up any of your dodges, as I said before, I'll untie you."

Aching in every limb, bruised in spirit, sick at heart, I was too weak to combat his offer. One stipulation I made, however.

"I'll be quiet for half an hour," I said. "That is to say, I won't call out or try to jump overboard myself, or to push you. At the expiration of that time my promise ends. I shall——"

"You'll be tied up again, my dear," he said facetiously. "I shouldn't let you go now if you did not look half dead."

I suppose I looked almost as bad as I felt, and Ilford, as I had already discovered, was essentially a coward. If I were to die upon the barge, it would be awkward for him!

Free from my bonds, I crept to the end of the barge, and watched the flat shores on either side with wide, despairing eyes. Through the grey light of the closing day the trees loomed ghastly and forlorn. The cries of the town in the distance came strange and hollow over the water. The horse plodding steadily along the towpath drew the barge slowly, monotonously on its course. We had reached a long stretch of the canal, there was not a lock in sight.

Ilford, seated at a convenient distance, near enough to watch my every movement, yet not so near as to endanger his safety should I break my word and attack him, smoked a pipe of peace. The boy lounged at the end, and lazily whistled an old tune. To all appearances we were a happy, peaceful trio, content with ourselves and our surroundings.

To my surprise, Sidney Ilford made no mention of the notes. I feared a cross-examination, or, worse still, an attempt to force them from my possession. He did not, however, refer to them, but smoked in silent satisfaction, casting quick glances in my direction every now and then.

I realised afterwards that my surmise as to the reason for his conduct was correct. The advent of Noel had startled him. For the first time, the possibility of the accomplished gang of scoundrels, of which he was a member, being brought to justice had occurred to him. He decided to minimise his chances of conviction, and to take no active part in my ill-treatment. He would deliver me into Templeton's hands, and then, his task concluded, could claim his portion of the spoil afforded by my capture with a light heart.

Across the water came the booming of church bells. It was half-past six—in another quarter of an hour my period of liberty would end. I must then decide on my course of action; I must either remain a prisoner on parole or make a bold attempt for freedom.

The rope that linked the barge to the patient beast of burden on the towpath creaked and groaned with the strain. If the rope should snap! The thought darted through my mind, bringing in its train a scheme, daring, and yet, it seemed to me, feasible.

If I could sever the rope, so that at any given moment the barge could be brought to a standstill, it would be a step towards my escape. Ilford and the boy would at once rush to see what had happened, leaving me free to—— I glanced down at the water with a shudder. Freedom to drown would be all that I should gain, it seemed to me.

And yet the water was not so very deep, nor the banks so very far away. The barge left to its own sweet way—the boy had ceased to manipulate the rudder—seemed steering for the right bank. I should be able, if its course were not altered, to jump to the shore. At any rate, it would be worth attempting. Even if I did not succeed in making my escape, I should at all events throw out the calculations of the firm. The barge might remain stranded for hours and hours, while Templeton fumed and fretted at the appointed place.

The rope was knotted round a short, thick post, heavy with tar, hard with exposure. It felt like iron to my slender strength; nevertheless I plucked at it, easing the knot with fingers that trembled with weakness and fear. As for my promise—well, I had given my word neither to call for help nor to jump into the water, further than that I had not gone.

Ilford, grown sentimental in the twilight, had fallen to singing a love song, the boy suiting his whistle to accompany him. Leaning on a pile of cushions the elegant Sidney flourished his cigarette, and smiled expansively. Neither he nor the urchin thought the forlorn-looking girl huddled by the rudder was even then contemplating her escape.

The rope yielded a little to my pressure, my fingers, aching with the task, knitted themselves about the heavy strands. With many a creak and groan the knot untwisted, the end at last lay loose between my fingers.

Shaking, I leant forward, my heart in my throat, waiting for some neighbouring church to sound the hour of my release. At last the welcome strokes fell on my ear. A sweet-toned chime announced the half hour over. It was a quarter to the hour.

Ilford, as well aware as I that the period for which I had pledged myself was over, glanced curiously in my direction. I rose quietly to my feet, letting the rope trail slowly through my fingers. Just as the end touched the water, a sudden shock thrilled the barge from end to end. There was grinding sound, and then——

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"We've stuck!" shouted Ilford, and rushing to where I stood, stooped, thinking to grasp the rope. The barge, deprived of its impetus, had grounded on a mud bank close to the shore. By the time Ilford had grasped the fact that he was cut loose from his horse, I had put my project into execution. Running the length of the craft I poised myself a moment on the stern, then sheltered from view by the tarpaulin, took a flying leap into the dark.

My feet slipped on a sloping bank. I had almost fallen back into the water when, throwing myself forward, I felt the grip of a strong hand.

"Now, then, my good woman, hold tight or you'll be in the water. Hullo! What's this?" and my interlocutor held up my iron-grey wig, half dangling down my back.

"Why, bless my soul, it's a girl! What on earth are you doing, my dear? Here, hold up a second; you'll be over!"

Giddy and dazed, I clung to him, and was half dragged, half carried to a safe distance from the water side.

At this moment there rose shouts from the barge. Ilford's voice, hoarse with rage, screamed out my name.

"She's a thief," he shouted. "Hold her till I get ashore. I tell you she's a thief!"

He ran frantically to and fro seeking the point nearest the shore. He was too great a coward to leap as I had done If I could induce this stranger to help I might get away before the craven found courage to face the jump.

"Are you a thief?" said the man bluntly.

"No, no," I answered. "It isn't true, indeed it isn't true. The men on board that barge—two men against a girl—want to keep me prisoner because I know certain things—bad things about them. You are so strong."

I glanced wistfully at his sturdy frame.

"Surely you'll help me. If not——" I turned towards the canal. "One can only die once," I murmured, and ran a step or two towards the water.

In a second his fingers tightened round my wrist.

"Nothing of the sort," he said sharply. "Whether you're lying or no, remains to be proved; for the present you'll come along with me."

Still keeping me prisoner, he led the way across a patch of market gardens, up a lane to the front of a large, well-built house.

The door stood open; I accompanied my host into a cheery sitting-room, where blazed a fire, in front of which there stood a table set for tea.

In answer to his summons a respectable-looking woman appeared, evidently his housekeeper.

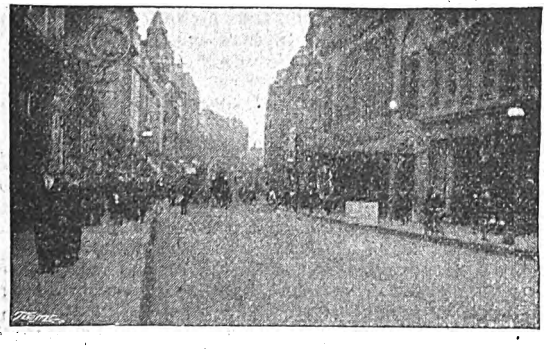
"Give this girl some tea," he said brusquely, "and keep her here till I return."

"You are going——" I interrupted.

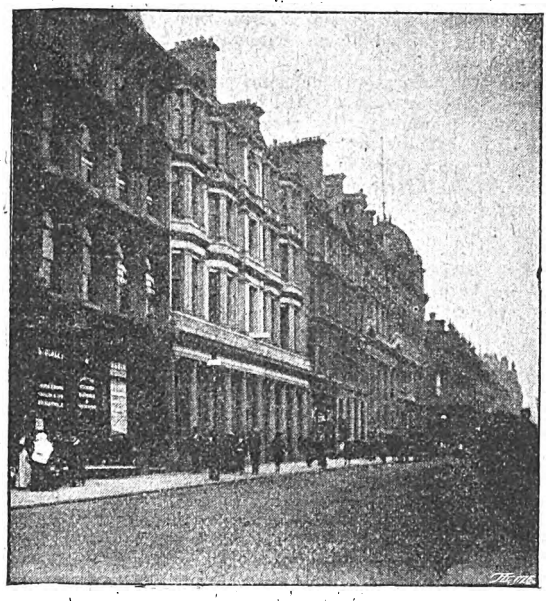
"To the canal, where I shall learn what those people on the barge have to say. I've heard your side of the story, I must listen to theirs."

"You won't tell them where I am?" I pleaded.

"Most certainly I shall, but"—he glanced at me narrowly—



New Street, Birmingham, where Sara arrived after escaping from her peril in Leicester.



Colmore Row, in which buildings the offices of Truscot Moran were situated.

"I shall not give you up without due warning. I shall come back shortly."

He left the room, locking the door behind him; I stood bewildered, gazing at the fire. Something arousing my attention, I glanced to the other side of the apartment, where hung a mirror on the wall. My own reflection greeted me; I started with surprise; no wonder the good man felt suspicious—never was so wild a figure seen out of an asylum!

My hair, loosened from its coil, hung limp about my shoulders, the rouge upon my cheeks showed up the whiteness of my face. My eyes, swollen and dark, protruded from my head. Add to that the grey wig that my host had rescued, and it will be readily understood that my appearance was not calculated to inspire confidence. I contrasted my haggard condition with Sidney Ilford's good looks and smiling manner, and concluded that judgment must inevitably go against me. When the master of the house returned he would hand me over to my captors, and all chance of my escape would be at an end!

I turned towards the housekeeper, who sat regarding me in stolid wonderment.

"Will you let me tidy myself?" I asked, "my hair looks dreadful," and I pointed to my dishevelled locks.

"You mustn't go out of the room," she said, "but you can put yourself straight here if you like."

Hastening to the glass, I managed to smooth my hair into order, and by dint of hard scrubbing removed most of the rouge from my face. Then I turned to the respectable person by the fire.

"What is your master's name?" I asked.

"John Wilson," she answered slowly. "He's a rich man and a just man, and——"

I interrupted her. "Do you know why he brought me here?" I asked. She made a sign of indifference. "I never question what he does," she answered. "He said you were to bide here till he came back, and"—she looked at me significantly—"here you'll stay."

I tried threats and pleading, besought and upbraided—in vain. Mr. John Wilson, it seemed, was master in his house, and his will was never questioned. Possibly he had a fancy for bringing waifs and strays to his hospitable hearth, perhaps—my cogitations were suddenly cut short.

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"Master's a justice of the Peace," said the housekeeper proudly. "He's got to inquire into the rights of things. Maybe"—she glanced at me critically—"maybe he found you trespassing?"

I denied the accusation vehemently, and forthwith plunged into a recital of the persecutions I had suffered from the hands of Templeton and Co. My story was interrupted by the return of Mr. Wilson—followed by Sidney Ilford.

With a desperate notion of self-defence, I grasped the poker and awaited their approach. Mr. Wilson took in the situation at a glance, and striding towards me, dispossessed me of my weapon before I knew what was going to happen.

"None of that," he said sharply, "you make the case against you look even blacker than before. This gentleman"—he motioned to Sidney—"declares you are a professional thief. He says you came aboard his barge this afternoon, disguised as an elderly woman, and asked if you might hide from some men who were pursuing you. He thought your tale strange, but in compassion for your agitation, allowed you to remain. Your subsequent conduct convinced him that your tale was false, and on observation, he recognised you as a clerk in the employ of his firm, a clerk who had embezzled money and stolen papers. Now"—he turned towards me severely—"now what have you to say?"

For a moment I hesitated, Sidney's story, with its cunning mixture of truth and falsehood, seemed impossible to disprove.

"What is your name?" said Mr. Wilson, prompted by Ilford.

"Sara Gillespie," I said desperately. Then, taking courage from the danger of my situation. "What that man told you is partly true, but most of his story is a lie."

Ilford started to his feet and commenced to whisper hurriedly in Wilson's ear.

As a result of his communication, the J.P. looked at me more sternly than before.

"Have you certain papers and bank notes in your possession that you took from the office of Templeton and Co., your late employers?"

"The papers had been obtained by false means. They—"

He interrupted me.

"I want a direct answer to my question. We will go further into the matter later on. Have you certain papers and bank notes, which you took—rightly or wrongly—from the offices of Templeton and Co.?"

"I will not answer," I said defiantly; "do your worst, I will not answer."

"If you refuse, I shall be obliged—on this gentleman's application—to issue a warrant for your arrest. Be advised, Miss Gillespie, tell me the truth. You are young, and I am anxious, if possible, to spare you disgrace. Have you the papers?"

I looked up at him, intreaty in my eyes. Had I seen ever so slight a softening in his face, had I read anything of pity—or of belief in my statement, my course would have been different. Grim and stern, he stood before me, justice he would have, the justice that judges from appearances, and appearances were dead against me!

"I have not the notes, I have not the papers," I cried, flinging the lie like a challenge in his face.

"It's false! false!" cried Ilford.

"If you doubt my word," I said, "let me be searched, that woman"—I pointed to the housekeeper—"shall prove that what I say is true. Let her go with me to another room, and search me."

Ilford protested noisily at the suggestion, but Wilson impressed by my earnestness, decided that the request was reasonable. Obeying her master's instructions, the woman lit a candle, and preceded me across the hall up a wide oak staircase, thickly carpeted, and so into a bedroom, lofty, cold, and hung with dark and heavy curtains.

I managed to close the door without slipping the latch; my guide, out of breath, sat down on a chair, and signed to me to take off my coat as a preliminary to investigation.

"In a minute," I said, "I'm tired; the stairs are steep." As I spoke I moved a thick rug aside, and folding it over my arm, sat down on the ottoman it covered.

"My brooch has caught in my collar," I said, "please bring the light a little nearer."

Grumbling, the woman obeyed, and advanced towards me with the candle. With a quick breath I rose as she approached and, flinging the rug over her face and head, sent her staggering back. The candle went flying to the floor, she groped wildly in the darkness, calling in a voice muffled by the thickness of the rug. Softly I stole through the door, across the landing, gaining, with swift and silent speed, the hall, before the worthy housekeeper had found her voice.

With bated breath I rushed past the parlour where Ilford was still holding forth, and so through the big door—open—thank Heaven, and into the sweet-scented darkness of the night.

How the housekeeper fared, what Wilson said, and Sidney Ilford felt, I could only form a guess. If their consternation were as great as my relief, they must have been miserable indeed.

For some little while I did not trouble as to the direction in which I was going, my only aim being to increase the distance between Ilford and myself.

After a half hour's rapid walking, I judged it safe to make a pause, and, resting on a convenient stile, thought out my next move. Two courses lay open to me. I could either return to Leicester—to Mrs. Goodman's house by the canal—there to wait Noel's return, or press forward to some safe hiding-place, from which I could communicate with him.

The latter seemed to me the wiser plan. My return to Leicester would be attended with an amount of risk I did not feel able to bear. Templeton and Co. would surely have spies posted in readiness and I should probably be seized and captured long before I reached my goal. I would go to the next big town, the larger the place the more easy it would be to hide.

I selected Birmingham, and decided to start for that city early the next morning. Meantime I must find some place in which to pass the night. A sharp walk brought me to a nest of cottages, where, after some tiresome explanations, I succeeded in securing a room. The night passed without peril. Early the next day I was abroad and taking the train from the nearest station, some miles beyond Leicester, arrived at New Street, Birmingham, about mid-day.

And at Birmingham commenced one of the strangest chapters of my life.

The platform at which the train drew up was thronged. The sound of many feet, ceaseless and hurrying, filled the great station. I was overpowered by a sense of insignificance and unimportance. The feeling was intensified, when at the top of a long flight of steps, leading from the platform, I found myself on the foot-bridge that traverses the station. Leaning against the railings, I stood dazed and bewildered by the crowd. A never-ending stream of humanity, to left and right, the currents hurry by, no loitering, no indetermination, but purposeful and strong, the throng sweeps by; artisans and operatives, clerks and bookmakers, work girls and pleasure-seekers, a dense mass hurrying over.

The spectacle took my breath away; I had not thought so wonderful a sight could be. London, with its teeming millions, vast resources, could not show anything so great. An ever hastening throng, purposeful and full of life, some on a wedding journey, others answering the call of sickness or distress, others again running a race with time—treacherous and implacable.

At that hour of the day traffic on the foot-bridge was at its densest. I leant closer to the railings, dizzy with the sound and scent of humanity. At that moment, forcing his way through the throng, came a man-servant, his arms full of parcels, and grasping a heavy package in his left hand. Immediately behind, flustered and concerned, followed a middle-aged woman, whose opulent silks and velvets intensified the plebeian appearance of her red, good-natured face and large, ungraceful body.

The man was overloaded, the weight he carried overtaxed his temper and his strength. Turning to answer an injunction from the lady in velvet, he got wedged in the crowd, trying to

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free himself he stumbled and fell, and, falling, dropped a heavy package on my foot.

Crying out with the pain, instinctively I tried to raise my foot and shift the weight. My efforts were quite useless, my struggles only served to give my ankle a great wrench.

I suppose it was not more than half a minute before, the centre of a sympathising crowd, I stood disencumbered from the package. Desirous, above all things, to avoid notice, I

Some of the houses in Russell Road, in which thoroughfare was the house where such strange occurrences happened to Sara.

disclaimed all offers of assistance, and essayed to walk away. The first step brought a cry to my lips, my ankle was throbbing violently, to walk was an impossibility.

Then it was that the owner of the packages, and the wearer of the velvet gown, rose to the occasion. Incircling me with a stout, protecting arm, she poured forth tearful regrets at what had happened—regrets that increased in volume when she discovered I had but just arrived in Birmingham.

"You must come back with me, my dear," she said. "Go to the hospital?"—as I urged the desirability of such a course. "I wouldn't hear of such a thing. Here, John!" to the burden bearer—"put these things down and help me take this poor thing down the stairs. The carriage is outside, my dear, a nice comfortable carriage, that will take us home in less than half-an-hour."

For a moment I hesitated to accept her offer. I had grown suspicious of my kind, and seemed to see the hand of Templeton and Co. in everything. I felt it would be wiser after all to go to the hospital, and yet the recollection that at a public institution, one is compelled to resign all right of judgment, all liberty of action, made me pause. The notes, the papers—into whose hands might they not fall? I glanced at the grieved face of the kindly woman who supported me. Whatever else was lacking in her countenance, candour and innocence abided there. It was preposterous to suppose the accident an outcome of the firm's villainy.

Clever as they were, they could not ordain that I should be injured by a type-writing machine—for such the package proved to be—at such and such an hour at New Street Station. The woman was evidently a person of means, if not of consequence; she would shelter, and possibly help me in my fight against my enemies and Noel's.

"I will come," I answered faintly, "and thank you very much."

With the assistance of Mrs. Moran, as I learnt my companion was called—and the faithful, if surly John, I reached the bottom of the steps in safety. True to her description, there waited just outside a smart-looking victoria, well built, well turned-out, drawn by a spanking pair of chestnuts.

The footman descended from his perch, moved the rugs, and assisted me to take my seat, with a countenance which displayed neither curiosity nor surprise. Mrs. Moran settled herself beside me, and John having disposed the parcels in safe corners of the vehicle, we set off.

Up Hill Street, with its atmosphere of grime and squalor, its hideous steam trams, the incessant clanging of whose bell send thrills of apprehension through one. Never have I seen such horrible conveyances as these same trams. Drawn by a locomotive engine, they belch forth huge clouds of black and noisome smoke, clattering about the lines with a jerky rattle that jars every nerve in the body of the unfortunate passenger.

My nerves were highly strung, and hence they appeared to me to be the acme of discomfort.

It seemed strange to emerge from Hill Street, dirty and narrow, into a splendid square. A magnificent site set round with tall, majestic piles, that keep a faithful watch and ward over the white statue of Queen Victoria that names the square. Dark and stately, the municipal buildings frown upon the street; the art gallery uprears its graceful tower against the sky. In the distance one catches a glimpse of the green trees and fountains against the University. A fair city, a brave city—one's heart goes out towards it, until passing the Town Hall, you find yourself once more in dirt and squalor, made doubly hideous by the dangers of the terrible steam trams. Just outside the Town Hall a shabby looking figure raised his hat, and gazed wistfully at Mrs. Moran. She flushed, looked uncomfortable, then suddenly returned his nod.

"That's Arthur Merridew," she said, "a late clerk of my husband's. He's very poor; I'm sorry for him."

Later I learnt to be sorry for him also.

From Victoria Square we went up Colemore Row, where Mrs. Moran pointed out her husband's offices. He was an engineer, it seemed, and held in high esteem by his fellow citizens.

I was destined to become closely acquainted with that office.

From Colemore Row we turned into a side street, and made calls at several mean-looking dwellings, where we left some of our packages.

"My pensioners, my dear," explained Mrs. Moran. "I have half-a-dozen old men and women, who look to me for tea and snuff, and little things like that. They used to be employed in my father's mill; I remember them as a girl; I don't like to forget them now."

Our calls necessitated a *détour*, but at last the carriage

The mysterious house overlooked the "Reddings." The photograph shows a tract of this land.

swung into the Bristol Road, a fine wide thoroughfare planted with trees, that shaded well-built dwelling-houses.

Leaving the slums behind, we bowled along towards the pleasant suburb of Edgbaston. In this part of Birmingham, the steam tram has given place to the electric-car, models of comfort, speed, and elegance.

From the Bristol Road we turned off to the left, until we came to Russell Road—one of the pleasantest thoroughfares

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imaginable. Mrs. Moran—who had been solicitous as to my comfort throughout the drive—pointed out an imposing looking residence as our destination.

"Here we are, my dear," she said, and beamed a cheery welcome.

The stolid footman assisted me to mount the steps, and guided me across the hall into a pleasant sitting-room. Mrs. Moran settled me comfortably on a couch, and bustled off to send for the doctor.

The latter appeared in due course, and announced that with a few days rest my ankle would be all right.

"She'd better not be moved, doctor?" questioned my hostess. "There, now, my dear, you hear what he says, you're to stay with me for a week at least."

She seemed genuinely delighted at the prospect, and after a few minutes thought, I agreed to remain. I told her my name and my profession.

"I'm a typine, Mrs. Moran, and I was told there were more openings for employment in Birmingham than London. Things weren't so overcrowded. I have no parents, no people—only"—my voice faltered—"only my sweetheart, Noel."

She suggested I might like to send a telegram to my lover. I was deliberating on the advisability of such a course, when our conversation was disturbed by the arrival of Mr. Moran.

Tall and dignified, with a cold manner, and eyes that read you through and through, I feared him from the first. A man of about thirty-five, younger by ten years than his wife, he impressed me with a sense of his capacity, of great abilities and illimitable ambitions, Truscot Moran would have sacrificed his dearest friend for his own advancement.

He listened to his wife's account of our acquaintance, and put a few sharp interrogatories himself.

"You're a typine, you say. Do you write shorthand?"

"Yes," I answered. "Are you in want of a clerk?"

"That's as may be," he replied, "while you're here, however, it will do no harm to see of what you are capable. Your foot will be well again soon, you tell me. Well, then, you might do some work for me on Thursday."

With a cool nod, he sauntered from the room, calling his wife to accompany him.

I lay back on the couch and wondered at the strange turn my fortunes had taken. At last, it seemed, I had found a safe resting place. Surely my troubles were over, I could stay here until my lover came for me, and that would be only a matter of a day or two.

I reached the telegraph forms my hostess had just left me, and proceeded to write a long, explanatory message to Noel. As I wrote the last word I remembered I had not the full address of the house I was in. I knew it was in Russell Road, but of its name and number I was ignorant.

Just as I was deliberating whether I could manage to cross the room and ring the bell, Mr. Moran returned.

"My wife tells me you want a telegram dispatched, Miss Gillespie. I am sending to the post-office—or, rather, I am going there myself. I shall be happy to send a wire for you at the same time."

"Thanks very much," I answered. "First of all I should like to ask your exact address. What number or——?"

"No number, Miss Gillespie. Russell Road, that is all that's necessary. Is your wire ready?"

He moved to the foot of the couch, waiting expectantly.

I was just about to hand him the message when I caught sight of Mrs. Moran standing just behind her husband.

The woman's face had whitened, her rosy cheeks were flaccid, her eyes frightened and full of apprehension. Her big frame shook as if with strong emotions, her hands clasped in each other in awkward supplication.

She made a sign towards her husband, then pointing to the telegram, violently shook her head.

"No, no!" she motioned with her lips. "No!" and clasped her hands. Then, shaking and cowed, she edged off through the doorway. Moran and I were left alone.

"Are you ready, Miss Gillespie?" His face relaxed into a smile; at times Truscot could be fascinating.

"It's very good of you to trouble, Mr. Moran, but on second thoughts I don't think I shall wire after all. Telegrams are such inconclusive and unsatisfactory things. They always frighten people, and when, as is now the case, there has been a slight accident, the news stated baldly and briefly comes as a terrible shock. I shall write a letter instead. Thank you all the same," and with a pensive look I tore the message into fragments and lay back upon my pillow.

"Please yourself, of course; still it seems rather strange not to acquaint your friends with your whereabouts."

"A letter will tell them everything more fully," I replied And with that he had to remain content.

Later in the afternoon I was helped upstairs to a bedroom. The house was large and of considerable architectural pretensions. The rooms, lofty and imposing, were handsomely furnished and in good taste. The walls were hung with pictures, all of them striking, some of them famous. My room, at the back of the house, had a pleasant view. From the bay window one looked over a green expanse of grass, trees, and hedges. This space of ground, traversed by foot paths, is called the "Reddings," and is as pleasant a spot as you could find in the environs of a great city. My room was daintily furnished, and with a due regard to comfort. I could have been peaceful and at rest, but for the strange warning I had received.

Why had Mrs. Moran signed to me not to give my telegram to her husband? Why?

My thoughts were interrupted by Mrs. Moran herself.

"Have you everything you want, my dear?" she asked. She paused upon the threshold, anxious, it seemed to me, to avoid a lengthy conversation.

"I want one thing," I answered, "and that very badly. I want to know why you distrust your husband, and why you feared to let me give him my wire?"

She came closer to me, with noiseless, awkward movements. Her large face, white and staring, gazed down at me.

"I—I'm strange sometimes," she answered, "and do queer things. You mustn't take any notice of me whem I'm like that. It's my head, I think; it aches and throbs, until I feel I shall go mad."

She lifted her hand to her forehead, then meeting my eyes flushed a dull red.

"Then there was really no reason why Mr. Moran should not have taken my telegram? Perhaps it is not too late to give it to him now?"

"Don't give it to him. Don't——" Her voice trailed off into a sob. "I can't say anything more, my dear, you must not ask me anything more. Just get well as soon as you can, so you can go away. It's better you should go away. I thought I should be able to have you to myself. I took a fancy to you, and planned for you to stay here altogether. But it's no use. It is not to be. Besides," her voice fell into a whisper, "you must go," she said, "or it will be with you *as with the others.*"

Eagerly I demanded an explanation of her words, but she broke from me, hastening out of the room. Left to myself, I thought the situation over. There were certainly grounds for alarm, but—and of this I was convinced—what I had to fear was something different and apart from the persecution of Templeton and Company. All the same the prospect of staying in this house, if only for a few days, was sufficiently alarming. Who were the "others," and what ill-fate had overtaken them?

It seemed to me more than ever necessary that I should communicate with Noel that day. There were pen, ink, and paper on the table, and before long I had written to my sweetheart, inclosing the letter in one addressed to Maggie Dunkley, at Northampton. Then I rang the bell, and asked the maid to request Mrs. Moran to come up to me.

The poor lady had somewhat recovered her spirits. She had changed her velvet gown for one of amber satin, and under the soothing influence of its magnificence was less pessimistic.

"I won't question you, dear Mrs. Moran," I began. "I don't want to know anything it would distress you to tell me. All I ask is that you post this letter yourself. There is a

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pillar box a little distance down the road, I noticed it from the carriage. It would not take you long to slip out and run across. Will you do it for me? *Please,*" I added, and, with a sudden inspiration, I clasped my arms about her neck and kissed her ample cheeks. The caress startled her. She strained me close and kissed me ardently.

"If I'd had a daughter," she cried. "If only I'd had a daughter!" and the emotional creature positively sobbed.

I endured her endearments for some few minutes. Then once more pressed my point. To my dismay she still proved obdurate.

"I dare not," she said, "and then it wouldn't do you any good. You must get well, and——"

Impatiently I interrupted her.

"If you won't help me, I must go myself." As I spoke I started from the couch and essayed to walk briskly across the room.

Alas! My fortitude could not endure such pain. I was forced to sit down, groaning with agony.

Mrs. Moran, genuinely distressed at my suffering, did her best to comfort me.

"Listen," she said. "I can't go out myself; my husband would be angry if I left the house so late, but I will send the parlourmaid, and watch her from the door."

"Do you mean the woman who waits on me?" I asked, with an instinctive dislike for her secretive eyes and furtive manner.

"Oh, no, not Rachael. She——" Mrs. Moran paused and bit her lip. "Janet shall take it; she's a nice bright girl. I can trust her."

I resigned the letter, and waited in anxiety till I received an intimation from Janet as to its safe postage; then, having managed to hobble to the door and lock it, made my way back to the armchair by the fire.

The evening passed quickly; the hours of ten, eleven, twelve resounded from the deep-toned bell of the hall clock. The house was hushed, long ago the servants had retired to rest, Mrs. Moran's wavering step had passed my door, her husband's heavy tread shortly following. The silence grew oppressive. I shivered, and glanced fearfully about the room. A stranger in a house of mystery; what evil might not come upon me before the morning?

I reproached myself for having yielded to Mrs. Moran's intreaty that I should go to her home. Yet what could I have done? Here at least my papers were left in my possession—my hand stole to my heart for re-assurance. In a hospital or infirmary that would have been taken from me.

And yet this place was very strange; through the darkness of the night, it might be even now, some evil thing was creeping near me.

I glanced towards the door. Did it move, did I see the handle turn?

With an effort of will I steadied my nerves sufficiently to take a long quiet look. I had been mistaken, imagination had played me tricks. The door was still fastened, securely locked.

If I could make up my mind to go to bed I might get rid of these strange fancies—this dark sense of foreboding that oppressed me. What could Moran do after all? I was in England, in one of the most enlightened cities of the Empire What harm could overtake me? It was not as if I had fallen into the hands of Templeton and Company. Then I might have cause for fear. And yet for all my reasoning, all my will, I could not shake off the terror that sat brooding over heart and brain.

My eyes, seeking to find something on which to rest, roved round the room. It was a large room, and at one time had opened into a smaller one. Now, however, the communicating door had been closed up, and papered over, only the fanlight gave sign that it had once been there. The long narrow pane of glass had an odd appearance without the door beneath. It fascinated me, again and yet again my eyes returned to the same spot.

Of a sudden the lamps that lit the room went out with the peculiar celerity characteristic of electric light. It was uncanny in the darkness, the fire had grown black and cold, not a spark of light came from its ashes.

As I sat, my heart beating heavily, a faint light streamed through the room. I raised my eyes, and with a thrill realised that it came from the fanlight. A moment, and then horror convulsed me. I tried to scream, but only a hoarse murmur came from my lips. There, staring at me through the glass, was, what seemed to me, *the face of a dead woman!*"

(The Birmingham episode concludes next week.)

His Little Joke.

AND THE HAPPY RESULT IT BROUGHT.

"THERE! I will wear Mr. Hoffman's red roses—they are so beautiful with my dress, and are so becoming to my complexion. Charley will be furious, of course, but I can't be troubled about his jealous whims. Put that lovely cluster a little higher in the puffs of my hair, Lizette, and loop my overskirt with the other. There, Miss Meyer, don't you like that?"

Miss Meyer was the young woman who had brought the dress home from Madame Dumesnil's. She was considered to have wonderful taste, and she always stayed to see the dress tried on, and make any alterations that might be needed, and suggest the ornaments to be worn with it.

She stood off at a little distance, with her head on one side, and gazed critically at the beautiful Miss Creighton: a beautiful little creature herself, in spite of a mournful droop at the corner of her mouth, and some faint little lines of care. Her very ideal of Marguerite in *Faust*, Miss Creighton declared her to be, with her childish face, pure, sea-shell complexion, and the blonde hair, which she always wore hanging in a long, heavy braid.

"I think it is perfect!" she said, after she had walked slowly round Miss Creighton. "There is nothing wanting. Those beautiful roses have added the touch of bright colour that was needed."

"It was just like Mr. Hoffman to send them. He has such exquisite taste!" said Belle Creighton, gazing delightedly at her reflection in the mirror; a tall, graceful figure, with folds of creamy silk and frost-like lace falling about it, a perfect face, dark eyes, both soft and bright, like a Spanish woman's, and warm black hair, in which the deep red roses "blushed and burned."

"I don't think he has any better taste than Charley!" said Nan Creighton.

Nan was a schoolgirl, and was looking on with admiration at her sister's toilet, and wondering if her time would ever come.

Belle's lip curled slightly, and she tossed a bouquet into Nan's lap.

"You may have his bouquet, since you admire his taste so

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much—nothing but common flowers! I shouldn't think he took the slightest pains, or considered my complexion at all."

"But Mr. Hoffman——"

"Pardon me—I take a great liberty—but what did you say the gentleman's name was?"

The little dressmaker's sea-shell pink cheeks had taken a deeper tint, and there was a startled look in her eyes.

"Hoffman. Carl Hoffman, the distinguished musician. You have heard of him, of course?"

"I hear but little of music now, and it is a great grief to me," the girl said, shaking her head sadly. "But the name startled me. It is long since I have heard it. I once had a friend of that name, but he is dead."

"I am so sorry for you!" cried good-natured Nan.

"Here, you shall have this bouquet. I don't care for flowers, unless I can wear them."

"Thank you. I love flowers, and I seldom have any," said little Miss Meyer, wiping away a tear, and taking her leave with a grave courtesy.

"Miss Meyer, be sure you come with my green dinner dress. Tell Madame Dumesnil I always want you to see my dresses after they are done, if they are only wrappers. Your taste is charming."

"I will tell her," said Miss Meyer gravely.

"What a queer, grave little soul that is," said Belle. "So different from the rest of Madame Dumesnil's flaunting, stylish shop-girls. I wish I could have her for a maid; she has twice as much taste as you, Lizette, with all your French airs."

The ugly, high-nosed Frenchwoman, dropped a curtsey, and said with a laugh, but with a spiteful accent:

"Mademoiselle is very good!"

"No, I am not very good," said Belle candidly. "If I were, I should take more interest in that girl, and try to find out what troubles her, and try to help her."

"And if you were good you wouldn't treat Charley Forester so badly," said Nan, who was very fond of her future brother-in-law.

"What do I do to Charley?" said Miss Belle indifferently, while Lizette wrapped her in her opera-cloak.

"You flirt outrageously!—that's what you do, and when he doesn't like it—as I should like to know who would—you say he is jealous, and threaten to break off your engagement. If I had such a noble, true lover as Charley Forester, I would be true to him."

"Oh, the wisdom and virtue of fifteen!" said Belle.

Mrs. Creighton came in at that moment, stately in velvet and point-lace and diamonds.

"Now, Belle, I don't want to see any flirting to-night! Everybody is beginning to talk about you and Mr. Hoffman, and Charley is downstairs, looking perfectly wretched. I know he dreads going anywhere with you. If you don't stop these performances you will be sorry!"

"Another variation on the same air!" said Belle, with a yawn. "Gay youth and hoary age both lift up their voices against me. No, mamma, you're not old; you look like a beauty to-night. But don't talk to me any more about flirting. If it isn't stupid enough to be engaged to one's third cousin, whom one has known all one's life, and played with when he wore knickerbockers, without being absolutely forbidden to look at another man! And am I to blame because they will follow me about? I should think it was bad enough to have Charley such a jealous idiot, without your taking his part. No; I am not going to break my engagement if Charley will behave himself; but if he is going to stick close to my side everywhere I go, looking as if he contemplated immediate suicide, glowering at every man who speaks to me, I can't endure it, and I won't!"

And Miss Belle sailed downstairs, with her head very erect.

"Oh, Nan, I hope you will never be the trouble to me that that child is!" said her mother, with a sigh. "I hope you'll never be so handsome!"

"I hope I shall be!" said Nan anxiously; "but I won't flirt—at least after I'm engaged, though I will flirt awfully before." (This last clause *sotto voce*). "Anyway, if Charley had as much spirit as a man ought to have, he wouldn't have it!"

Charley, a fair, handsome young man, but with a rather woe-begone expression, was pacing up and down the drawing-room when his betrothed came sailing in, in all her splendour.

His face brightened suddenly at sight of her.

"Belle, who was the girl that I met coming downstairs as I entered?" he demanded, neglecting altogether his customary affectionate greeting.

"Now he is going to rave about his flowers!" thought Belle. "One of Madame Dumesnil's shop-girls, who brought my dress home," she responded indifferently.

"A shop-girl! She looks more like a princess! The loveliest face I ever saw! And so much grace and elegance about her, too!"

Belle stared at him in unaffected amazement.

Never, since he became her devoted slave, at the age of eight years, had she heard him express the slightest admiration for or interest in any young woman.

And not a word did he say about his flowers, though he must have seen them in Miss Meyer's hand.

"She is rather pretty," said Miss Belle coldly.

"Rather pretty! Why, where are your eyes, Belle? She is a perfect beauty!"

"How do you like my dress?" asked Belle, changing the subject.

"Very much. Did she make it? I should know she had exquisite taste by her own get-up."

"Get-up! What do you mean? She had on a black cashmere dress, made as plainly as it could possibly be."

"Well, perhaps she had, but there was an air and style about her dress. By the way, Belle, what is the matter with you? It seems to me you are not looking quite so well as usual. Feeling a little fagged, are you?"

This was too much for Miss Belle, who was sure she had on the most becoming toilet she had ever worn in her life, and was looking more brilliantly beautiful than she had ever looked before. She turned her back upon him, and fortunately her mother appeared, and led the way to the carriage at that moment.

What had "come over the spirit of his dream" was more than Belle could guess.

Could it have been that little Miss Meyer, Madame Dumesnil's shop-girl? Belle had heard of love at first sight, and surely she was beautiful enough to turn any man's head.

But, then, Charley was in love with her—dreadfully so, he had seemed to be. About seven times as much so as she wanted him to be, she had been wont to say. Could such things be?

Revolving this problem in her mind, Belle was unusually silent and *distraite* all the way to Mrs. Maynard's, where the evening party was to be given. Charley, too, seemed lost in thought. As they got out of the carriage, Mrs. Creighton whispered in his ear:

"She shall behave better to-night, or I'll take her home!"

"Don't! Let her go to the end of her chain. I'm on a new tack!" he whispered in return.

Once in the thronged, brilliantly-lighted rooms, with the air heavy with perfume, and the band sending forth bewitching strains, Belle's spirits revived. If Charley wanted to fall in love with little dressmaking Miss Meyer, he might; she would show him that she didn't care.

Mr. Hoffman was there. He was a distinguished musician, who had recently come to the front, and he was "all the rage." He wasn't considered "eligible," of course, being only a musician; but he was so handsome and so elegant in his manner, that all the young ladies were bewitched with him. His hair was just touched with white, and he had a melancholy air, which made him all the more interesting. He was quite devoted to Miss Belle Creighton, and it could not be denied that she encouraged his attentions.

"It is perfectly shameful—the way Belle Creighton goes on with Mr. Hoffman!" remarked one young lady (who would have greatly preferred to monopolise Mr. Hoffman's attention herself). "And it's about the fortieth flirtation

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she has had since she has been engaged to Mr. Forester! And he goes mooning about, looking as doleful as an owl, and not speaking to anybody!"

But Charley was not as "doleful" to-night as usual. To be sure, he was not particularly devoted to the young ladies; but he did make himself agreeable to the dowagers, and he did not "stick to Belle's side," nor "look as if he contemplated immediate suicide."

Once, when they were dancing together, he said carelessly to Belle:

"How beautiful your roses are!"

And Belle replied enthusiastically:

"Aren't they exquisite? Mr. Hoffman sent them to me."

And, instead of looking angry or despairing, he answered indifferently:

"He has very good taste, then—a fine fellow every way, I think, and a real genius musically!"

Praise of Mr. Hoffman now! Belle looked at him in silent amazement, and he seemed suddenly to think that he was going too far.

"But I don't think it looks very well for you to dance every other dance with him, Belle!" he said.

Belle saw that that speech was the result of an afterthought and drew her own conclusions. He did not care now how much she flirted with Mr. Hoffman, but he did not wish to change his manner so suddenly that she should guess his secret. And he only said that it didn't look very well; the looks used to be the last thing to trouble him!

Belle did not feel at all happy; her flirtation with Mr. Hoffman had begun to seem a flat, stale, and unprofitable thing. But yet she was not going to wear the willow for any man. Charley should not see that she even noticed his indifference.

The next day came little Miss Meyer, with the dinner-dress. Belle looked at her with a new interest. She certainly was beautiful enough to make a man forget his first love, she decided. The dress was very pretty, and Belle's vanity caused her spirits to rise to the highest pitch.

"I wonder if Charley would say I didn't look as well as usual if he could see me now," she thought. "Miss Meyer couldn't look like this!"

"Run down and let Charley see you," suggested Nan, who was always present at her sister's toilets when it was possible.

"How came Charley here at this time of day?" she asked.

"He is here, talking to mamma in the library," said Nan.

Belle threw her train over her arm and ran downstairs.

Charley and his future mother-in-law seemed to be having an earnest *tête-à-tête*, which was suspended as soon as Belle appeared.

"'It was a beauteous lady, richly drest?'" sang Charley. "That is uncommonly gorgeous, isn't it, Belle? But I am not quite sure that green is your colour! Did that same little girl bring it home?"—eagerly.

"Miss Meyer brought it home," said Belle stiffly.

"It is a beautiful overskirt," said Mrs. Creighton, who was inspecting the dress critically.

Miss Meyer slipped and fell. Charley hastened to pick her up.

"Of course I don't pretend to be a judge," said Charley, "but it seems to me that if it were looped a little higher on the left side it would look a great deal better."

"I don't know but what it would," said Belle, with her mind wholly upon her dress. "I'll let Miss Meyer try it."

"Let her come down here and do it! I want to see the effect," said Charley, coolly.

Belle drew herself up haughtily, and was about to sail out of the room; but a new idea struck her. Should she let this cool young man think she cared how much he admired a pretty shop girl—think that she was jealous of him? Perish the thought!

"Ring the bell, Charley, and I'll send for Miss Meyer."

Miss Meyer came, grave and quiet, as usual, and made the proposed change in the overskirt.

Charley expressed his approval enthusiastically, and Belle, being on the watch, caught him bestowing a very admiring glance upon the beautiful dressmaker. It was very doubtful whether little Miss Meyer had the benefit of it, however, for she scarcely looked up.

When she had gone Charley drew a long breath.

"That is the most exquisite creature I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose she could be induced to sit to an artist? Will Van Amsden would give his eyes for a chance to paint her!"

"I don't know. I never thought of trying to lead her out of her proper sphere in any way. She has very good taste, and suits me as a dressmaker, and that is all I know about her," said Belle icily.

"I think you and Will Van Amsden had better not meddle with a pretty dressmaker," said his future mother-in-law. "You would only turn her head with your flatteries!"

"But such beauty as that ought not to blush unseen—now, you know it ought not! Why, I don't believe there's a woman in the kingdom who could hold a candle to her! And she has such a lovely expression—such a sweet, appealing look in her eyes——"

Belle went out and banged the door at that moment.

Could it be possible that a faint, smothered laugh sounded in her ears as she ran upstairs? She thought not, for surely her mother would not stoop to laughter with that graceless fellow! She was vexed with herself for showing that she was angry, and resolved that it should be the last time she would give him that satisfaction.

She went upstairs and sent Nan out of her room, was cross to Lizette, and snubbed little Miss Meyer and dismissed her. She resolved to punish her lover by not making her appearance again that night, not suspecting that he meant to go away before dinner. But shortly after the door closed upon little Miss Meyer she heard it close again, and, looking out of the window, beheld Charley following closely in Miss Meyer's footsteps.

The dressmaker crossed the street, and Charley crossed also.

The pavement was icy, and little Miss Meyer slipped and fell.

Charley hastened to pick her up.

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"Just the chance he wanted! And the artful little minx probably did it on purpose!" thought Miss Belle in her anger. But on purpose or not, Miss Meyer had evidently sprained her ankle. She tried in vain to stand.

"A very interesting situation," thought the unsympathetic Belle.

She saw Charley point to the house, as if suggesting that she should be carried there. But Miss Meyer shook her head decidedly. Then Charley hailed a passing hansom, put her into it, and, oh! climax of horrors! got into it himself also.

"Ah! he is the true gentleman!" said Lizette, who was also looking out of the window. "As polite to the poor little modiste as if she were a lady! And truly she could not get out of the carriage alone, if her ankle is sprained or broken, as it seems."

"I'll break my engagement!" resolved Belle. "I've threatened it often enough when I didn't mean it; but now I will do it. This is a great deal more than his being jealous!"

In the meantime Charley was divided between sympathy for poor little Miss Meyer's sufferings and gratitude for the accident which had given an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

He accompanied her home, and made himself as agreeable as possible to the motherly old woman with whom she lodged. Little Miss Meyer's shy gratitude to him was very pretty to see, but he stayed only long enough to obtain permission to call again when she was better, and hurried in search of a doctor to send to her.

Then he hastily dispatched a messenger with a note to Mrs. Creighton, directing it carelessly, so that it looked as much like Miss as Mrs., and, oh, artful Charley! directing the messenger to say it was for Miss Creighton.

Charley's handwriting was well-known, and the note found its way at once into Belle's hands. She opened it and read:

"DEAR MRS. CREIGHTON—*Fate has favoured me, and I have made the acquaintance of the lovely little dressmaker, and I think I am right. I felt so strongly attracted to her the first moment that I saw her. I know you will be my friend in this, but how shall we break it to Belle, who, I am afraid, cares more than he deserves for a man who can, at most, give her only a divided heart. Think as kindly as you can of one who once hoped to be your son.* "CHARLES FORESTER."

Poor Belle sank down on the floor, not quite fainting, but feeling that her life, or all that made life worth living, had suddenly come to an end. Charley loved her no longer! Her mother was to help him break the news to her! This was so much more dreadful than her wildest fancy! And how cool he was about it!

But then her conscience whispered to her that in the three years that their engagement had lasted, she had sometimes been decidedly "cool" in declaring to him that she would flirt with whomsoever she liked; that she never would marry him, and that she did not "care a bit" for him. Poor Belle! She knew, now, whether that last statement was true or not. Oh, how much dearer to her was one hair of his head than Mr. Hoffman or the dozens of other men whose attentions and flatteries she had received and encouraged.

But she had fairly worn his love out, and the natural result had come. She had only herself to blame. But nobody should know she cared; her pride should sustain her even when they "broke the news" to her!

She re-sealed the letter carefully, and sent it to her mother, but no comment upon it passed between them.

A week passed and she did not see Charley. Another week, and he only wrote her a cold and careless note, saying that he was "very busy."

Then one day at the breakfast-table her mother began with the air of one who has a weighty matter on her mind:

"Belle, I have something to tell you."

Belle, who had grown visibly paler and thinner in these last two weeks, nerved herself for the coming blow.

"Charley has discovered that Miss Meyer is much above her station."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Belle, unable, with all her pain, to resist a touch of sarcasm.

"She has a sweet voice which has been very carefully cultivated. I went to see her yesterday, and heard her sing. She is anxious to find pupils, and I am confident that she can. She promised to sing. She has a very sad story, poor child. I am going to arrange a little musical evening on Thursday next. She came over from Germany to meet her lover and found that he was dead. She was detained after she had secured passage on a vessel by a long illness, and the vessel on which she was to have sailed was lost, with all the passengers, so that her lover, before he died, supposed her to be dead. She was homeless and friendless here, and had no resource but her needle."

"She has found friends now," said Belle coldly.

"Why, Belle, I am ashamed of you, not to show more interest in this poor girl! It is not at all like you!"

"With such devoted friends she doesn't need my poor assistance," said Belle, as she rushed out of the room, to hide a burst of tears.

Pride led her to don her bravest attire and her brightest smiles on the evening of her mother's little *musicale*; led her also to greet Charley with an assumption of gay indifference, which, unfortunately, did not accord well with her altered looks.

It was a small and select assemblage which Mrs. Creighton had gathered together for the purpose of displaying her *protégé's* talent.

Mr. Hoffman was there, handsome and melancholy as ever. Little Miss Meyer came in and took her place at once at the piano.

Mr. Hoffman volunteered to play her accompaniment. As he drew near she turned as white as a lily, and stretched her hands out towards him, crying:

"Franz! Oh, my Franz!" and fell fainting in his arms.

"Lena! My little Lena! Has the sea given up its dead?" he cried.

Miss Meyer did not sing that night. Charley drew Belle away into a quiet corner as soon as possible.

"I knew just how it was going to turn out, and I wanted to tell you before, but your mother thought it was better not. You don't look downhearted, Belle, but I was afraid—really a little afraid—that you cared for Hoffman!"

Belle drew herself up haughtily, but a little smile stole around the corners of her mouth.

"I should think you were the one to look downhearted!" said she.

"About Miss Meyer? That is my little joke! Were you really a wee bit jealous, Belle? Then I haven't plotted in vain! You see the way of it was this. Hoffman and I were better friends than you knew. He told me his story one day. I think partly because he knew I was jealous of him, and he wanted to assure me that I needn't be. When he first came to this country, and for a long time afterwards, he was very poor. At last he scraped together enough money to send for his sweetheart, but the vessel on which he supposed she sailed was lost, with all the passengers.

"Then he came here, and having good luck, he dropped his own Christian name, Franz, not wishing to be known as the poverty-stricken fiddler who had only played for balls and parties. He showed me his sweetheart's picture, and told me his heart was buried with her, and he should never care for any other woman. The moment I saw Miss Meyer on the stairs that day I knew she was the original of that picture! I saw that you did not like my being interested in her. Ah, Belle, I believe I should have lost heart entirely if it had not been for that sign that my darling did care for me, and I determined to try you a little in that way, while I was finding out whether she was Hoffman's sweetheart. Your mother planned the denouement. She thought we might be mistaken, and it was better not to raise false hopes in them. It seems that Hoffman had disappeared so suddenly from his few friends that they thought him dead, and told Miss Meyer so. Now, Belle, I want to know if it is true that without the existence of love there can be no jealousy?"

"Oh, Charley, I have been so wretched!" murmured Belle with her head on his shoulder. "I'll never flirt again!"

Henry Laroche.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

III.—THE DILEMMA OF BETTY CARTERET.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

A WOMAN, still fair, as the dying rays of the sun fell on her luxuriant brown hair, and touched with almost youthful bloom the thin cheeks of her earnest face, stood before her easel, painting with all her mind and soul as well as with all her strength.

It was a well-proportioned face, and a good face, with the look of calm contented waiting that comes to those who have learnt the lesson that happiness is not the lot of the many, but of the few—let those be thankful who can find peace.

But with a smile that softened her features, with a tenderness that was beauty in itself, she turned towards the radiant vision that burst impetuously into the studio, though she only said:

"Betty, child, when will you learn to come in gently."

Betty Carteret was indeed (as the old folks say) "a sight for sore eyes," "sweet and twenty," she radiated joy and life from the top of her curly head to the tip of her slender, arched foot.

"Oh, bother!" she cried, running across the room and throwing her arms round her sister's neck. "Now, Katie, you bad old thing, what *do* you mean by refusing Sir Edward Fairbairns? I have just met him looking as glum as an owl, and I know what that means."

"Oh," said Kate, disengaging herself and turning to her easel again, "I was very sorry. I had hoped I had made it plain to him long ago, and that he would spare me the pain of a direct refusal."

"Why could you not marry him? He is very nice! Now don't turn away like that; look me in the face and tell me."

Thus adjured, Kate turned round, but could not help a girlish-looking blush from stealing over her face as she replied:

"You know I am not free, my heart was given eight years ago."

"I knew it was that old tale," she cried contemptuously, "but, Katie, you really *are* absurd! Your engagement to Geoffrey Hilton came to an end five years ago, and, of course, you are free, and so is he."

A spasm of pain disturbed the serenity of the elder sister's countenance, and, putting down her brushes, she passed her arm round Betty's waist, and sat down by her in the broad window-seat.

"Betty, darling, you were only a child of fifteen when he went away, and you could not understand my reasons for acting as I did. Geoffrey was an engineer, but there was little hope of his getting on in the old firm, and we had been engaged for three years. Then came the chance for him to go out to the mines in South Africa, and I could see he was wild to go, but did not like to leave me to more weary years of waiting. I loved him too well not to wish for his happiness, so I bade him go, and go free. I would not have him hampered by me in any way. He was not to go out merely with the idea of getting a home together for me as soon as possible, he was to be absolutely free to choose the path most likely to lead to ultimate success."

Betty gave her sister a warm hug, and said:

"You are a dear, unselfish darling."

But Kate shook her head and continued:

"He knew I made enough to live on; he could not know mother would die a month later. He thought I was happy and comfortable with my painting to fill my mind, and mother and you to——" She hesitated and then went on: "To fill my heart." Then, with a sudden compunction for her hesitation, she added impulsively: "You have been the joy and comfort of my life."

"And I?" cried Betty, enthusiastically, "what should I have done without you? You have been mother and father and sister and all to me."

Kate could not repress a sigh as she added:

"What shall I do when you get married?"

"Oh," said Betty airily, "I shall not marry at all. We shall be the two old maids of Thorn Cottage."

"*You* do not look cut out for an old maid," said Kate, gazing fondly at the lovely face beside her.

"On the contrary, I 'feel a vocation' for it," said Betty gaily. "The truth is that Geoffrey will come back and marry you, and what will become of poor little me then?"

Kate blushed once more, but replied slowly:

"It may be he is married already."

But a few days later came the letter for which Kate Carteret had waited so many years. It was a short note from Geoffrey saying he was sailing immediately for England and hoped to find a welcome waiting for him from his "old friends at Thorn Cottage, Crowbury."

"Why, Katie, how handsome you are," cried Betty, looking with wonder at her sister's transfigured face.

"Nonsense!" said Kate, "remember I am past thirty, and faded and worn."

But Betty put a dimpled hand over each of her shell-like ears and stopped her sister's mouth with a kiss.

"I won't hear such rubbish. You *are* beautiful, and he will love you more than ever when he sees you," and then she ran away, laughing over her shoulder at her blushing sister.

It was true that hope had brought a renewed youth to the

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elder. Her eyes were brighter, her step lighter, and a faint pink shone in her cheeks, and the eye of love would be able to find all the beauty of twenty-two in thirty, with character and spirituality added thereto, but if the eye of friendship only looked upon her, it would see only a good woman, whose youthful beauty was faded with watching, waiting, and anxiety.

At last the anxious weeks of waiting were over, and Geoffrey Hilton arrived. The years that had turned Kate from a charming girl to a grave woman, and Betty from a lively child to a lovely girl, had made but little difference to the man of twenty-nine who presented himself before the sisters one glorious autumn evening at the cottage. His shoulders were broader, his face more bronzed, and his manner more assured.

The fate of three was settled in the first few minutes as Geoffrey held Katie's hand, and each eagerly scanned the face of the other.

Thought Kate with exultation:

"He is just the same, my noble love!"

Thought Betty with a strange, tense feeling at her heart:

"He is very handsome, and I think his love must be worth enduring much to gain."

Thought Geoffrey, as his eyes wandered from Kate to Betty:

"Poor Kate looks much older, but good Heavens, how lovely Betty has grown!"

The succeeding month only served to intensify these first impressions. Geoffrey spent nearly all his time at Thorn Cottage, and the inevitable crisis approached nearer every day.

Kate with quiet, serene happiness in her heart, went about her usual duties, managing the house, caring for Betty, visiting the sick, and painting with an added power from the joy that pervaded her being. Content to see Geoffrey every day and to wait till he should ask her for what had been his for so many years.

Betty was possessed with a feverish restlessness that lent a brilliancy to her eyes, and a brightness to her complexion that Geoffrey thought made her almost too beautiful for earth. She hardly knew what had happened to her. Sometimes she was unreasonably happy, and at others more miserable than she had ever been in all her happy life, and over these moods she seemed to have no control; they were something outside herself.

At last it came.

One evening the little maid ushered Geoffrey into the drawing-room where Betty sat alone gazing at the fire that leapt and crackled in the grate. Her eyes were full of tears, she knew not why, for she was not sad.

She jumped up at his approach, but forebore to ask for lights lest he should see the tears that were yet in her eyes.

"Sit down and wait for Katie," she said hurriedly, "she has just gone to see poor Mrs. Smith who has a tiny baby, and is ill with pneumonia, so Katie goes every evening to bath the baby and settle the mother for the night when the nurse comes and takes her place."

Geoffrey hardly seemed to hear what she said, he only knew they were alone, and he had never seen anything so lovely as her graceful figure with the fire-light glancing on her rounded cheeks and lighting up her curls.

His silence and the intentness of his gaze made her nervous, and for the sake of saying something, she said:

"I like this light, don't you? It is so full of mystery."

For answer he leant forward, taking her two hands in his, and saying in almost a whisper:

"Little Betty, oh, little Betty, the mystery is here, in us. Since the first moment I saw you in the setting September sunshine, I have known there is no happiness for me apart from you. Darling, tell me, do you love me?" And he strove to draw her to him.

A flood of joy that was almost pain, swept over Betty, and for a moment she yielded to his gently compelling arms, then it receded and horror overwhelmed her in a black tide.

She pushed him back with all her might, her face so white which a minute before had been rosy.

"But it is wrong—wicked——" she stammered. "How can you? Think of Katie."

"Katie!" he cried, "but that was all over years ago. We certainly were engaged, but she in her wisdom broke it off, and now—oh, Betty, listen to me. I love you, I love you. You are the only woman in the world for me. From all time it was ordained that we should love."

But Betty could only refuse steadfastly to listen, though it was music to her ears.

"I—I—thought you came here because you were going to ask her again."

"Betty, child, what are you running your dear little head against? It is certainly true, if you must know, that it was in my mind when I set out for England to see if she were still unmarried and willing to have me, but," he added with passion, "when I think of my feeling towards her and compare it with the love I have for you, I know that you are my real mate, my second self."

"But," murmured Betty faintly, "what if *she* thought—as—as—I did?"

"Nonsense!" he said firmly. "Katie is much too sensible a woman. She gave me up five years ago, and now any one can see she is wedded to her art. She has no place for me, or any other man, in her happy, well-ordered life. If I thought otherwise"—and his brow darkened—"if for a moment I thought she had continued to consider herself bound to me all these five years, and waited for me to return and claim her, if I thought that," he repeated, turning almost fiercely to her, "I would never have said a word to you of my love—I would have married her, and before God I would have made her happy. But now," he said, turning tenderly to Betty, who, cold and rigid, was gazing straight before her seeing nothing, "we know it is not so. Love me, my darling, and let us take the happiness that God has given us. She would be the first to wish us joy."

"The first to wish us joy?" Yes, Betty felt in her heart perhaps she would, but it would be from a broken heart.

"Give me time; I cannot answer you now," she cried brokenly, and left the room hurriedly.

Katie, coming in ten minutes afterwards, wondered to find the room empty and dark, and the fire nearly out.

For hours Betty sat huddled up in the window-seat in her bedroom, feeling not the cold of her body for the misery of her soul. Why was this sacrifice, not only of *her* happiness, but also of his, demanded of her? Why was the fate of three persons given to her, who had hardly ceased to be a child, to decide? Over and over again her numbed brain formed the words:

"He loves me, and I love him, but he would marry her if I told him the truth. Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?"

L. Hughes.

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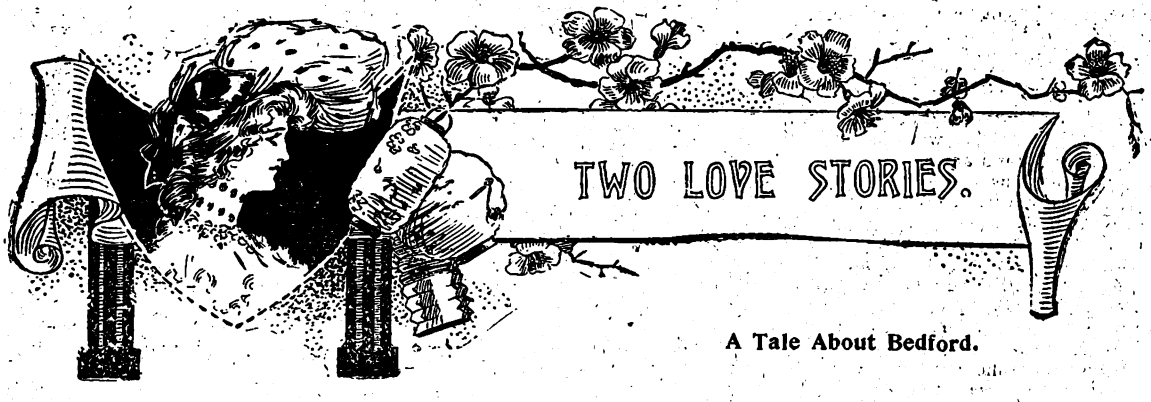

A Tale About Bedford.

WHEN Colonel John Bolders retired to Bedford on half-pay, he naturally took with him his three most cherished possessions.

These were a son called Tom, a prize bull-dog called Chutney, and a temper called snappy.

The house he occupied in De Parys Avenue was semi-detached, his neighbour being a widow some fifteen years younger than himself. On the afternoon of the Colonel's arrival he went out accompanied by his little son and Chutney to inspect the garden at the back of the house. After a brisk march round, the old soldier's curiosity was satisfied, and he finished his cigar on a bench in the middle of the lawn.

The boy, however, continued to play about until he presently found himself opposite a break in the hedge, through which he could look into the next garden.

Scarcely five yards away from him he saw a little girl of about the same age as himself, sitting upon a basket chair. To his intense surprise she suddenly began to call out in a very persuasive voice: "Tom! Tom! Come here, I want you!"

The boy stood hesitating for a moment. She could scarcely have seen him, for her chair faced in the opposite direction, and, besides, he had only that moment appeared at the gap in the hedge. But he had heard his name called distinctly, so he passed into the other garden and walked towards the girl. She turned as he approached.

"You called for me?"

She shook her pretty little head silently, too shy to speak.

"Oh, but you did! I heard you distinctly!" cried the boy.

"I only called for Tom."

"Well, I'm him."

"That doesn't sound right," she answered gravely. "You shouldn't say 'I'm him,' you should say 'that's me.'"

"Well, they're both right," he protested. "I'm him and that's me."

"But you can't be him and me as well."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's this way. Now listen very closely, please, and don't wriggle. I called him and him's Tom, and me's I and I'm Eileen, and you're not either of us," she added triumphantly.

"Yes, I am, I'm Tom," he protested.

"Is that your name?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see now. But I was calling our cat. See, there he is going down the path."

The boy turned round again and saw a magnificent Persian cat trending his way daintily down the garden. A presentiment of evil occurred to him.

"Don't let him go through into our garden," he cried. "Chutney would kill him straight off."

"I don't know Chutney."

"He's dad's bull-dog."

"Well, he mustn't." And the child's lips began to quiver, "and you're not a nice boy at all. Here's mother coming, I'll tell her I mustn't play with you."

Tom stood irresolute as the girl ran to meet her mother. And whilst matters were at this stage there was a sudden hoarse growl from Chutney, followed by a snarl from the Persian, and then the latter raced along the garden-path into the house, followed by the ungainly form of the bull-dog.

The lady who had just come out caught her daughter up in her arms, and followed the two animals into the house.

Meanwhile the Colonel had been aroused by the noise of the combat, and now found his way through the gap in the hedge into his neighbour's garden.

"Tom, what are you doing here? What's the matter? Who's hurting Chutney?"

The question was answered automatically, for the bull-dog presently appeared in the kitchen porch, whence he ambled sideways towards his master. He was followed at a respectful distance by a servant girl who carried a broom-stick, and looked "as though she would an she dared."

"The hugliest hanimal I hever set heyes upon," she cried, "folks as keeps bull-dogs needs keepin' theirselves." And she nodded to her own mysterious thoughts. "Straight weskits for man and beast and no queschuns harsked," she muttered, and then with a sudden glance at the indignant Colonel, "Was you pleased to hown this luvly dog, sir?"

"Pleased and proud," snapped the old soldier. "Have you a message to deliver to me? If so, deliver it, and go away."

What she would have said to this terrific insult cannot even be imagined, for at this moment Mrs. Howard herself reappeared and bade Jane return to the house. The Colonel was already hatless, so he bowed profoundly and then took the war right into the enemy's country according to his habit.

"I regret exceedingly, madam," he began, "that your people should have been allowed to plague and ill-treat my poor dog as they have done. A poor, timid, mild, inoffensive animal that wouldn't hurt anybody——"

"After it had eaten them," retorted the lady with some warmth. "Your dog should be kept under better control, sir. It is dangerous, especially where there are children."

"You are mistaken there, indeed. It wouldn't hurt a child for anything."

"You must allow me to believe my own eyes, sir. Eileen,

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come indoors at once, and please remember you are not to play with that little boy any more."

The lady turned and walked majestically into her own house, with her little daughter dragging at her hand and stealing a wistful look towards her new playmate. The Colonel stalked back to his own territory, where he ordered seven days C. B. for Chutney, and threatened Tom with a similar punishment if he spoke to the little girl next door. And so the great feud began.

* * *

It might have been expected that a quarrel arising out of a misunderstanding would soon have righted itself, especially as the parties concerned were next-door neighbours. But when you get an old soldier with a villainously quick temper opposed to the widow of an old soldier who had a still more "Indian temper," and when both parties are too honest to claim they are in the right and too proud to admit they are in the wrong, a trifling disagreement may drag on for a long time.

One evening the Colonel took a turn in the garden just after sunset. As he sauntered quietly down the path, he took out a cigar and proceeded to cut it. At the same moment he heard the sound of voices whispering. He stopped suddenly and silently, his first thought being that burglars were hiding, waiting till the early morning before they commenced operations.

The old soldier felt that he was in for a treat. It was not heroic work certainly, but it would serve, and anyhow the odds were against him. Before deciding on his plan of campaign he resolved to draw a little closer and try to learn something of the enemy, and with this idea he crept quietly down the path until only the hedge separated him from the burglars. For by this time he had discovered that they were in the next garden.

"Not that it makes any difference," he thought sturdily, "If I found a man robbing my bitterest enemy I'd capture him as a public duty."

Indeed, if the truth must be admitted, he was rather pleased than otherwise at his discovery, for the service he hoped to render to his neighbour might prove a means of reconciliation to that lady, without any loss of dignity on either side. Such a reconciliation was ardently desired by the Colonel who liked courage wherever he met it, and was delighted with the undaunted manner in which Mrs. Howard had repelled his onslaught. So he came closer, and this is what he heard:

"It's only a few years more," whispered Burglar No. 1, "and then we shall be old enough to marry and it doesn't matter what they think, because we shall be so happy together."

"I hope so," whispered Burglar No. 2, "but you can please yourself anyway because you're a man, Tom, and men always have their own way. I've heard nurse say so, and she said it killed pa, becos he'd have lived longer if they'd conterdicted him offener."

The Colonel crept away with a grim smile lurking about his grizzled moustache. And just as he got to a safe distance he heard the voice of Jane calling in the sweet accents of Cockaigne:

"Miss Heileen! Miss Heileen! Come here at once! Where have you been, you naughty child?"

"I've been talking to Tom ever so long," said the child happily, "and he's ever such a nice boy, and we're going to make mother and Tom's father be friends, and then we're going to be married. And they won't be lonely becos we' going to live in Tom's house and his father will come and take care of mother, and we'll go and see them quite often, you know."

The Colonel had not intended to punish his son for disobeying instructions, seeing that the information had been obtained by eaves-dropping. But the boy, hurrying back to the house, suddenly ran against his father in the dark, and explanations were inevitable.

"Where have you been?" said the latter, in a gruff voice, that was absolutely belied, if Tom could only have seen, by the pride that shone in the Colonel's eyes.

"I've been talking to Eileen, dad."

"Humph! Direct breach of instructions. Three days C. B.," growled the Colonel.

The little fellow saluted in military fashion as his father had taught him, but made no complaint. They returned to the house together in silence. When they reached the door, the Colonel stooped and kissed his son.

"I'm going out to smoke," he explained. "Good-night, my boy."

"Good night, dad."

Colonel Bolders, left alone in the garden, lighted his neglected cigar carefully and slowly. Then he blew out the match and dropped it very deliberately to the ground.

"If that lad doesn't rebel," he thought grimly, "I'll drive him out of the family. But I'm not afraid that he'll disgrace me. He won't tell a lie to save his life, but, all the same, he won't have his love affairs interfered with by a chuckle-headed old fool who's ashamed of himself and daren't say so."

"So they're going to be married and leave the grown-ups to take care of themselves. No, not quite that, to take care of each other. Humph!"

* * * * *

On the following evening, when the Colonel returned from his customary stroll, he inquired whether Tom had gone to bed. The servant to whom he spoke appeared rather surprised, but said that the boy had gone out about an hour previously, and had left a note for his father in the drawing-room.

The Colonel hurried along the hall and soon obtained the important document. It was written in a very straggling fashion with sundry blots and smudges, but the boy told his tale with commendable brevity.

"DERE DAD,"—he wrote—"*I'm runing away with Ileen becos we are both miserble and we are going to be married, and Please excus haste.—Your loving son,* "TOM."

When the Colonel had read this letter twice over he put it into an envelope addressed to Mrs. Howard, and desired that it might be delivered to her at once.

Then he set off to find the truants which was by no means an easy task, for there were several streets, along any of which they might have gone. The first, and perhaps the most likely way led him through the centre of the town, for he thought the two children would simply have wandered out of De Parys Avenue into High Street, without giving a thought to their pursuers.

But just as he crossed the Square, two persons passed him on the other side. They were Mrs. Howard and Jane, and they passed the Colonel at a quick pace, apparently without having noticed him. And as they went down the High Street, he changed his mind suddenly and turned to the left.

He soon reached the Embankment, and here a fresh terror gripped his heart. He glanced swiftly along the course of the river. There were two people standing a little distance away, gazing earnestly into the moonlit water. The Colonel gazed also, but could see nothing. He was beginning to

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run along the Embankment, eager to know what the other party had found, when they moved slowly away.

He sank upon a seat with a hoarse cry of relief. The doubts and terrors that had assailed him vanished in an instant, and he rose to his feet again to recommence the search. There was no time to be lost, for even as he moved there came on a heavy shower of rain.

With this new source of anxiety, he turned hesitatingly from right to left. Then he decided to cross the river and search the meadows at the other side. But this time he felt hopeless from the first, for the runaways were not likely to have come to such an open place.

The rain was still pouring down as he turned the corner of the band-stand, but what cared he? There before him lay the two children! Tom sat propped up against the side of the stand with the girl's head resting upon his knee. She had evidently fallen asleep in that position, and he had taken off his little Eton jacket and laid it over her shoulders to shelter her from the driving rain.

The Colonel cleared his throat gruffly as he approached.

"Tom," he growled, and then with a sudden change of manner, "stand up, my boy, and put on your coat. I'll carry Eileen."

The boy rose and trotted home by his father's side in silence. Even when they reached the High Street and were joined by Mrs. Howard and Jane, he seemed to take but little interest in the meeting. And as for Eileen she slept soundly until the following morning, when she wakened in her own cot.

Mrs. Howard and the Colonel were silent also, but there was no hostility between them now. Neither liked to make the first advance, however, although they both tried to coax their stubborn tongues to speak. And so the great opportunity passed away and they parted at the garden-gate with the merest formula of politeness.

Tom's unusual silence was explained the next morning. He awakened with a severe cold, which threatened to turn into pneumonia. The doctor shook his head very seriously, gave careful instructions to the housekeeper, and went his way, after promising to call again later in the morning.

Meanwhile the boy called unceasingly for his little playmate, until the Colonel at last resolved to sacrifice his pride, and to ask if she might come in. But just as he had made up his mind the doctor reappeared.

"Going to beg for the little girl?" he said. "Humph!" Would it relieve you in any way, Colonel, if I called on Mrs. Howard and asked her. I know her very well, and——"

"No, sir, said the other sturdily," "I appreciate your motive. I suppose you have heard of our little squabble."

"That is so, Colonel, and I thought——"

"No, thank you. I'm very grateful, doctor, but this is a case where it wouldn't be right to beg a favour by deputy. I'll go at once and get it over."

The two men left the room together. The Colonel saw his visitor off, and then made his way to the front door of his neighbour's house. He rang the bell with some misgiving, for the errand he came upon was not much to his liking.

"Is Mrs. Howard in?"

"No, sir, she went out only half a minute ago; said she'd be some time."

The Colonel groaned audibly.

"Which way did she go? Can you tell me?"

"I can't, sir, she left the house by the side door."

"Thank you, I'll call again." The poor father turned away with the boy's cries ringing piteously in his ears. He unlocked the door of his own house and entered slowly and almost unwillingly, wondering what he should say.

As he opened the bedroom door, he found to his surprise, that his son was fast asleep, and his breathing was almost normal. Someone rose from a chair by the window, someone whom the Colonel in his trouble had not noticed until then.

"I have taken a great liberty," she whispered, "but your boy caught his illness entirely through the care he took of my little girl, and, as I know something of nursing, I felt bound to offer my services at any rate."

The Colonel grasped her outstretched hand, and then, with a sudden gesture that sealed their reconciliation, he raised it to his lips.

"I have been to your house," he whispered, "to beg your forgiveness for my rudeness, and to ask if your child could pay a little visit to Tom. They're so fond of each other, they've quite mapped out their lives together."

He came to a stop, as a particular portion of the plan proposed by Eileen occurred to his memory. And Mrs. Howard, looking at him, blushed suddenly and turned towards the sleeping boy.

Wal Frank.

Your Editor Chats.

THE third Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 651, and I still keep open my offer of ONE GUINEA for the best solution of the difficulty.

I know my readers like to have an opportunity to show their powers of lucid reasoning, and they have in "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret" an excellent field for argument.

An answer is wanted to the question which concludes the story, "Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?" and the guinea goes to him or her who sends in what I consider to be the most all-round satisfactory reply. Write clearly, on one side of the paper only, and do not exceed one hundred words.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 27th of November. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard" must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 20th.

I AM glad to be able to say that "A Criminal Millionaire" is very popular with my readers. When an author with the reputation that Mr. George Griffith enjoys contributes a serial great things are always expected, and I feel assured now that nobody will be disappointed, for the appreciatory letters that have come to these offices concerning "A Criminal Millionaire" have been as congratulatory as they are numerous.

Wilfrid Ellerton's adventures in the Underworld, the machinations of Isolo Staunton, and the development of the suspicions of Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, will make very interesting reading for the forthcoming instalments.

ON page 665 there appears for the first time "Our Bachelor's Observations." These are contributed by a bachelor on our staff, who spends the best part of his day evolving epigrams and cynical sayings. But, as "there's many a true word spoken in jest," the feature will prove most instructive.

THIS is a little foreword to let you know that the Christmas number of *Short Stories* is in preparation.

I may truly state that this will be a colossal production, surpassing anything that has ever yet been brought out, and that, as you all know, is saying a good deal. It will be published on December 15th, and will consist of sixty-four pages, brimful of absorbing literature.

As an indication of what may be anticipated, you will be glad to hear that W. Pett Ridge, the well-known humorous author, is contributing an excellent story, one of his very best. This is just one of the tit-bits.

Your Editor.

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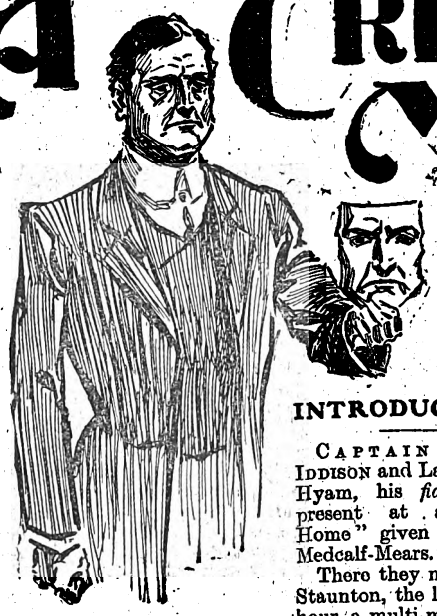
POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE



By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton has told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor, and marvellous are the things that now happen.

Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

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THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Underworld.

WHILE Herarra's visitors were talking in his almost magically luxurious reception-room, his second in command, Andrée Ducos, a man who had once been a captain of Engineers on the general staff of the French Army, but who had betrayed his trust, had re-opened the door leading from the Central Chamber to the gallery.

He posted an armed sentry on each side of it, gave a few orders to a couple of subordinates, and presently a procession of about a dozen of the slave-workers—for these descendants of the old sea-warriors who had been so strangely entombed in the Underworld, were now nothing better than this—came out from one of the five tunnels which led into the chamber towards the door.

Each was carrying on his shoulders a small square box, which was evidently very heavy for its size. Ducos went before them into the gallery, and stood beside the entrance to the lift. Each box bore a letter and a number, and as it passed him he checked them off on a tally-sheet. When the lift was full he closed the water-tight door and told the captain of the *Isola* that his first consignment of cargo was ready.

As soon as the answer came back over the wire the covering plate slid back, and the lift returned to its place in the hull of the yacht. The operation was repeated six times before the conversation in the reception-room was finished, and by that time considerable material had been provided for the further mystification of the civilised world on a subject in which it had been for some years both deeply and angrily interested.

When the lift descended for the seventh time Ducos closed the doors and informed his chief by telephone that the transfer of the cargo was complete and that the lift was ready.

"Well, gentlemen," said Herarra, as he put back the receiver. "my lieutenant informs me that the work is done, and the lift awaits your pleasure"

"Then, my dear Herarra," said Don Ramiero, rising from the soft, silken-covered cushions on which he had been reclining, "I think we had better thank you for your generous hospitality in just one more glass of this very excellent wine of yours, and then get back to the other world. I don't think there is anything more of importance to say."

"No, Señor, I think not," replied Herarra as he opened another bottle of champagne and the golden-haired attendants presented the foaming glasses on their silver salvers. "I fully understand the instructions with which I have been honoured, and you may be confident that they will be carried out to the letter. As I said before, when my esteemed guest wakes he will begin a new life in a new world, which I shall do everything in my power to make a pleasant place of residence for him. Saving only release, and the sight of earth, and sea and sky, all that man can desire shall be his."

"Not by any means a bad exchange," laughed the captain of the *Isola*, with a comprehensive glance about the splendid apartment. "There's many a poor fellow wasting his life up yonder trying to keep a maimed soul in a starved body, who would be glad enough to say 'good-bye' to sun and stars on those terms, and your guest will be more than foolish if he gives way to any vain regrets for what he can never see again. Well, Señor, since we must go, here's *au revoir*, and success to you and your wonderful kingdom under the sea."

"And to that I will add many pleasant days and years for its new citizen," said Don Ramiero, also raising his glass. "By the way, Herarra," he went on, with a glance at the three girls, "you will have to find our young friend a wife. Certainly there should be no difficulty in pleasing him in that respect, and, of course, nothing could reconcile him more quickly to his change of worlds than the loving companionship of, for instance, one of these ladies of your submarine paradise."

"I have promised, Señor," replied the Spaniard, setting down his empty glass and taking a cigar from one of the girls, "that nothing shall be wanting to complete the happiness of his new life with us. Surely you do not think that I could forget the most important consideration of all. Certainly if I did it would not be long before my good wife reminded me of it. Women, you know, are the same all over the world—and under it too."

Don Ramiero took a last look at Ellerton, who was still breathing quietly, and lying motionless on the divan, and turned away thinking, not, perhaps, without a twinge of regret, how tremendous a difference he had been the means of making in the fate of this man, and in that of the girl who was even now, perhaps, dying a mental death for love of him.

When the lift had carried his visitors back to the yacht, and his domains were once more absolutely shut off, as every dweller in them save himself believed, from the world above, Herarra closed the gallery door and told his lieutenant to send the four bearers who had carried Ellerton from the lift to him. One of the sentries was sent to fetch them, and when they came they stood in a row before him with hands behind them, and heads downbent, like so many chidden schoolboys.

"Sigur, Elfreth, Jan, and Gurt," he said in sharp, stern tones, "you have done work to-day which you are now ordered to forget. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, lord, we understand," they replied together, speaking mechanically like a chorus, and bowing their heads still lower.

"Good," said Herarra, "and when you forget that, remember also that you have never seen the stranger, and that you do not know how he came here. If he learns anything it will be the boiling lake for all of you. You know the law?"

"Yes, lord, we know it," they murmured again, "we will obey."

"You had better," was the harsh reply, "and now, to reward your obedience, you are released from more work to-day, and you shall be made happy. Ducos," he went on, turning to his lieutenant, "send them away to their quarters and fill them with rum till they can't lie still without holding to the floor. They'll have forgotten all about it by the time they come to their senses again."

"Very well, sir," answered Ducos with an evil grin, "there's nothing like a good drunk now and then to keep these animals in their proper places. Jacques here will take care that they don't know the difference between up and down inside an hour."

"We thank you, lord," came the mechanical chorus again, and then the grinning sentry marched the serfs off to, in the most literal sense, drain the cup of their degradation to the last drop.

As soon as he had settled this little business, Herarra returned to the reception room to do something which was a good deal more important, for now the time had come to rouse Ellerton from his drug-slumber, and to introduce him to the strange world which, according to the decree of its absolute ruler, was to be his dwelling-place for the rest of his life.

The three girls were still in the room when he returned, for he had told them to watch the sleeper.

"Brenda," he said to the tallest and, perhaps, the most beautiful, "this is the stranger who has come from very far away, from a place like the shining world which your old traditions tell of, but he does not know where it is or how he came here, for he has been mad since then, and, moreover, he has sinned very deeply against the lord of this cave-world where we dwell, and whose word is law to all of us, and so he is banished for the rest of his days. Do you understand all that I am saying?"

"Yes, lord," the girl replied in a very sweet voice, and in English which had a strange, old-world sound. "I have remembered all your words, I shall not forget them."

"That is very good," he continued kindly, laying his hand gently on her silken-gold hair. "And do you also understand, Thyrza and Myra?"

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The other two bowed their heads, and said in their low, sweet voices, "Yes, lord, we have heard and understand."

"Now, I have told you this," he went on, "because you have seen him brought here, and because you are to wait on him, and bring him food and drink, and play on your harps and zithers, and sing to him when he desires it, for it is the will of him who commands, that this stranger shall be treated kindly and punished only with banishment. But he is to learn nothing of how he came here, or who came with him, or why he is here. If he learns that, then, beautiful as you are, and obedient as you have always been, you will not escape the death of those who disobey."

They instinctively shrank away from him and went nearer to each other as he spoke the last few words, for the death was a very terrible one—nothing less than being flung from a ledge of rock into a lake of boiling, sulphurous water twenty feet below it. Then Brenda crossed her hands over her breast and said:

"Lord, we will obey," and the others followed her example.

"Very good again," he said going towards the divan. "Now, Thyrza, go to the kitchen and bring a pitcher of hot water, and you, Myra, bring the tray with the spirits and a glass. Brenda, do you go and stand at the end of the divan there, so that when our guest's eyes open they may look upon the fairest face and form in Cave-Land."

The girl's eyelids rose for a moment, uncovering a pair of great, lustrous eyes, blue as the sky they had never looked upon nor ever would while Isolo Staunton remained lord of this hidden realm. An almost imperceptibly faint tinge of pink came into her cheeks as she looked at Ellerton's sleeping face, and then her eyelids fell again, and she did as he had bidden her without a word.

When Thyrza came back with a long-necked silver jug, of apparently old Norse workmanship, in her hand, Herarra mixed a glass of old liqueur brandy and water, and when he had taken a sip at it to try the strength, he slipped his arm under Ellerton's shoulders and raised him to a half-sitting position, telling Thyrza to pile up the cushions behind him. Then he took a spoon, and, while Myra held the glass, opened his mouth slightly with his left hand and poured a few drops into his lips.

After the third application of the hot spirit his jaw moved, and there was a convulsive motion of the throat. Then Herarra dropped the spoon and held the glass to his lips. A few drops went down and then a few more, mechanically swallowed, then came a little gasping cough, and his eyes opened.

For a full minute they wandered hither and thither over the gorgeous draperies of the walls and ceiling, the gleaming mirrors, and the splendid ornaments and furnishings of the great chamber. Then they seemed to get the focus of things. At length they rested on Brenda's lovely face, framed in its shimmering halo of golden mist.

"Mercedes! Darling, have you come back to me, or am I dreaming still? I have been ill, or sleeping, or both, a long time, eh? But I have dreamt of you—but, no—you—yes, you are beautiful, but you are not Mercedes. Who are you? And you, too. You are not Señor Valdez or Doctor Billaud. Where am I—what have you been doing with me? I am not dreaming still, am I?"

The words came feebly and jerkily at first, but they quickly gathered strength and coherence until the last were almost angrily spoken. As he looked at Herarra he sat up suddenly, and while he was staring into his eyes he put out his hand mechanically and took the glass from him. He drank nearly half the brandy and water in quick gulps, and with each gulp his strength seemed to return in waves of warmth. Then he fixed his eyes on Herarra's again and said suddenly in Spanish:

"You—you—where have I seen you before? No, no, I can't remember now. My head's too weak still. But I have seen you somewhere, and I shall remember soon. Who are you? Don't you recognise me? What place is this I've been brought to? I was on the yacht with Mercedes and the rest of them only—no, how long ago is it?"

Herarra did his best to repress a violent start and did not quite succeed, for he, too, had been wondering where he had seen his guest before. He remembered now, and in his recollection he found a very good personal reason for obeying his instructions to the letter.

"My dear and honoured Señor," he replied in his softest Andalusian, "permit me to offer my most thankful congratulations on your very long-delayed recovery. Do me the favour of taking a little more of the spirit. You are still a little weak. Ah, yes, that is well. Now will you lie back and take some rest?"

"I may as well do that," replied Ellerton, sinking back on the cushions which Thyrza had piled up behind him. "But you have not answered my questions. Who are you? What place is this, and how did I get here from the yacht? Come now, I must know that at once."

Herarra looked steadily at him for a few moments. Then, seeing no further sign of recognition, he shook his head, and said:

"My dear Señor, I am deeply sorry that I cannot answer all your questions because I do not understand them; but I will answer some since you seem to have forgotten. I am Leon Herarra, a dweller in Cave-Land like yourself. This is one of the apartments of your dwelling. Of any yacht—whatever that may be—or of her you have called Mercedes, I know nothing. Nor do I know how you came here, if not, like myself and the rest of us, by the usual process of being born here. You have been ill for many weeks, and it may be that in your fever you have dreamt of many strange and impossible things that your eyes have never seen. But you are well again now, and you will soon forget these and return to your old life."

"My old life, man! What the dickens do you mean?" exclaimed Ellerton, sitting up again and staring angrily about him. "I know nothing of this place. I never was here before, and though I seem to have seen you before, it certainly was not here. And yet you have the assurance to tell me that I was born here! It's a lie, and you must know it, whoever you are. I was on board Mr. Staunton's yacht—only a short time ago, and I can prove it——"

He stopped short. Could he? A numbing sense of some horrible mystery descended swiftly upon him. The stimulus of the brandy was dying away fast. The shock was too great for his drug-enfeebled brain. The lights and the mirrors grew dim. He uttered a gasping little sigh, and fell back on the cushions, almost into Thyrza's arms. When he woke Herarra had gone. A soft hand was gently bathing his forehead with a sweet-smelling essence, and a lovely girl was waving a fan of snowy feathers over his face.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Financial Mystery.

On the evening of the day on which the *Isola* dropped her anchor in the pretty little harbour of Monaco, and Doctor Billaud had kept both his promise and his prophecy by delivering his patient to her father perfectly cured in body and mind, save for that one little cloud which had descended upon her intellect and utterly blotted out all recollection of the happenings of that fatal morning on which he had formally announced the death of Wilfrid Ellerton, a somewhat important meeting of four

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persons took place in the private office of one of the Assistant Commissioners of Police at New Scotland Yard.

The Commissioner's guests for the time being were the Deputy Master of the Mint, a Treasury Solicitor, and a fair-haired, blue-eyed, pink-and-white complexioned, harmlessly insignificant-looking little man whose official position was Chief of the English Department of the International Secret Police.

His name was Stanislaus Smith. Of course he had a dozen or so official *aliases* only too well-known to cosmopolitan criminality, but that was his real one.

No man in Europe or America had run more distinguished criminals to earth, or exposed and wrecked more artistically-designed schemes for the swindling of the simple than Stanislaus Smith, but at last he had been compelled to confess that, for the time being and, until some quite unexpected revelation happened, he was quite as much at sea as the Assistant Commissioner himself, and that was saying a good deal.

At length Ellerton's eyes rested on Brenda's lovely face, and he mistook her for Mercedes.

There had been silence in the room for some few minutes, during which the Commissioner and the Deputy Master had been running through several wide-margined pages of figures and statements, the latter in French, German, and Italian, while Mr. Stanislaus Smith conversed in scarcely audible tones with the solicitor from the Treasury. Then the Deputy Master, looking very grave and troubled, left the desk and took a vacant arm-chair, crossed his knees, and placed the points of his fingers and thumbs together in an attitude of anticipation.

"Well, gentlemen," the Commissioner began, leaning his elbows on the sloping front of the desk, "I am afraid that we must confess that, up to the present, no solution, by which I, of course, mean no logical, practical solution of this extraordinary problem seems to be any nearer to us than it was to the West Indian authorities some twelve years ago, when, as you know, a similar puzzle on a smaller scale confronted them. And yet, as far as I can see, there is no possibility of doubting the facts, is there, Sir Edward?"

"Not the slightest," exclaimed the Deputy Master, uncrossing his legs and sitting bolt upright. "There are the facts, and we cannot get away from them any more than we can explain them. That is the most exasperating part of the whole business.

"If there is an industry in the world that ought to be capable of exact checking as to its output it is the minting and distribution of money. Every civilised country in the world keeps the most exact returns. Fraud on the part of mint officials or workmen is simply impossible. Any attempt at trickery would be discovered within a week.

"No, I say again, and I think that Mr. Dennison and Mr. Smith will agree with me, that, so far as the mints of the civilised world are concerned, it is hopeless to look to them for any clue to the mystery—for that, after all, it is. What do you say, Mr. Smith?"

"I quite agree with you, Sir Edward," replied the detective in a voice that was almost as soft as a woman's. "It's a little humiliating, I must confess, for people of experience in matters of this kind to have to admit that they are beaten, even for a time, but after working on the case with my European colleagues for over a year now, I'm afraid we've got to say that we are just about where we started."

"And yet surely," said the Treasury Solicitor, taking his monocle out of his left eye and looking critically at it, "if the age of miracles has really passed, there must be some human explanation of the thing. It can't be possible to swindle the whole civilised world in this way without someone giving the fraud away. Whoever the principals are, they must employ hundreds of agents all over the world, and surely if the Governments put their hands in their pockets and offered a really big reward, say a hundred or even two hundred thousand, with a guarantee of indemnity, someone would be tempted to give the show away."

"I'm afraid that you are hoping rather too much, Mr. Dennison," replied the Commissioner, taking up a few foolscap sheets from his desk. "We have now practically complete returns from every country in the world which mints its own coinage, and these returns show, as far, of course, as can be ascertained, the excess of coinage in circulation over the output of the mints.

"We ourselves have, roughly speaking, about two and a half millions' worth of silver coin, and half a million's worth of gold, which Sir Edward confesses himself quite unable to account for. Germany is nearly four millions to the bad in silver and nickel coins, and more than a million in inferior gold. France and Russia have lost over ten millions between them on gold and silver coin, and as much again on notes,

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which not even the official printers can tell from their own work. Our advices from the United States show that the Washington Mint and the Assay Office are some fifty million dollars wrong in their calculations as to coin, while the surplus of notes amounts to nearly twice that sum.

"Italy and Spain, too, have been flooded with silver coin with which gold has been bought, and then, as in the other cases, the gold has vanished. The same thing, only on a greater scale, of course, has happened in Austria, and even in Japan. The Banks of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and our Colonies, as well as those of Europe, are beginning to gravely doubt their own paper.

"And yet, as is the case with multitudes of coins which cannot have issued from any authorised mint, the counterfeits are so perfect that they cannot be told from the real things. Even the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street can no longer boast that her promise to pay cannot be successfully imitated; and when it comes to that, gentlemen, I think you will agree with me that matters are becoming rather serious."

"They are so serious," assented the Deputy-Master, "that if some means cannot be found of discovering and putting an end to these amazing frauds, the financial balance of the world's markets will be upset, and I need hardly say that that would mean something very like the control of the world—for it must be confessed that modern civilisation rests upon a cash basis—by those who command the sources of these mysterious supplies. They exist somewhere and they simply must be discovered if Society is not to be swamped by this unceasing flood of illicit money."

"Of course, everyone must agree with you there, Sir Edward, as far as the theory goes," said the Treasury Solicitor, screwing his glass into his left eye, "but the difficulty is in the practice. To my mind the most extraordinary part of the puzzle is the fact that, as Mr. Smith will tell you, the police of Europe know every professional coiner and counterfeiter in and out of prison, and they are also absolutely convinced that if all these gentry were allowed to join forces and work without let or hindrance for a couple of years on end they would not be able to account for a hundredth part of this mysterious output of coins and notes."

"Yes, that is perfectly true, Mr. Dennison," said the detective, suddenly waking out of what appeared to be a very brown study, "and I can tell you something else which, in its way, is even more curious than that. These coins and notes which come from no one knows where, are so perfect and they are produced in such quantities that, as an old expert at the game was telling me only last night, the regular professional cannot make his craft pay, so he is going out of business and taking refuge in burglary.

"The one fact that we may make sure of, gentlemen," he went on more seriously, "is this. The people who are working this world-wide swindle must not only have great capital—which, of course, they have now—but they must also have a perfect organisation and, what is more important than all else, they must have some place or places, which the rest of the world knows nothing about, in which they can carry on the practical, mechanical part of their work—work which, I think, Sir Edward will agree with me in saying, must at least be equal to that of the English Mint and the Bank of England put together."

"Undoubtedly," said the Deputy-Master, "if anything I should call that a low estimate. And yet it seems utterly incredible that such a vast industrial organisation, as we know it must have been for the last four years at least, can exist in any part of the known world without being discovered. To my mind it seems utterly absurd, and yet, unfortunately, it is only too true."

"That, after all, is the crux of the question," added the Solicitor. "Half the detectives of Europe and America have been trying for years to catch the people who pass these notes and coins, and they have not caught one. They have only caught the agents of the pettifogging practitioners who make half-crowns out of pewter pots and Britannia metal spoons, or idiots who think they can reproduce notes by photography. The trouble with these people, whoever they are, is that they turn out as good stuff as the mints and the banks do. No, we shall never catch them on bad quality. I daresay we ourselves have changed hundreds of their coins—and a good many of their notes, too, perhaps. Is not that possible, Sir Edward?"

"I am afraid it is only too possible," was the smiling reply. "You see, these people are really practical bimetallists. As mere silver at the present price, four five-shilling pieces, allowing for the expense of minting, would be worth about nine shillings; but, as fourth parts of a sovereign, they are worth twenty, and, of course, the same is true in degree of shillings, francs, marks, dollars—in fact, of any silver coinage on a gold basis. Given the plant and a safe place to work it in with plenty of raw material, and the profits would be at least a hundred per cent., and on the notes it would be about a thousand, or more. I fully agree with Mr. Dennison that the only way to put a stop to this ruinous work is to discover the place or places in which it is carried on."

"Quite so, Sir Edward," said the Commissioner, drily, "and since it is plain that such place or places must exist somewhere, and as they must of necessity be pretty large, we have got to find them, even if they are located at the poles. I am sorry that, after all this time, we have not been able to get any further than theory. We must hope that Mr. Smith's little trip to Monte Carlo may lead him to something like a clue."

"I most sincerely trust so, sir," said the detective, in a by no means sanguine tone, "but until I know what my colleague Trapané may have to tell me, I am as much in the dark as you are as to possible results. At the same time the very satisfactory powers which the British Government has been good enough to vest in me by your hands to-night cannot fail to be of the greatest service in following up such clues as we may have the good fortune to discover."

"There's one thing," added the Solicitor, who was also going to the Paradise of Knaves and Fools on a sort of semi-official holiday, "if M. Trapané has really got anything to work on, and he's hardly the man to be fooled by a canard, the field will be both narrowed and crowded—narrowed as to space and crowded as to possible criminals—if I may put it so, and surely if any definite traces of this cosmopolitan swindle ought to show themselves anywhere it ought to be there."

"I am not without hopes," said Mr. Smith, looking at his watch and rising. "We know, of course, that the flood of the silver tide has set in very strongly towards the 'Tables,' and that much larger quantities are in general circulation than usual. And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me, I must go. I have a good many scattered threads to gather up and place in other hands before I start to-morrow."

He and the solicitor left the building together and strolled round by the Embankment in the direction of Northumberland Avenue. Though not exactly officially connected, their duties had brought them together on many occasions and, from being professional acquaintances, they had become fast and confidential friends. Arthur Dennison was recognised at the Treasury as quite the smartest of rising men in his department, and, although not quite thirty-five, that is to say, some seven years the great detective's junior, he was nearly always chosen for what appeared to be the hopeless cases—which was the principal reason why he had been asked to select Monte Carlo as a specially interesting place in which to spend his leave.

"If you have half an hour to spare, Dennison," said Mr. Smith, "I should be very glad if you would come with me to the Hotel Victoria. I am staying there at present with my wife and daughter, whom, strangely enough, you have never met though we have known each other so long. I should like to have a little chat with you, and you shall have some music if you like."

Although it seemed a little late to be asked to meet ladies whom he had never seen before, he knew his friend well enough to feel pretty certain that it was not altogether a social invitation, and so, as he had nothing particular to do before morning, he accepted. He knew nothing of Mrs. and Miss Smith beyond

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the fact that they lived almost constantly abroad, chiefly for the purpose of completing the vocal and musical education of Miss Smith.

"Ah, I am glad you can come," said Mr. Smith, "but, stop, I think that is one of my satellites across the road. Will you excuse me a moment? I will overtake you by the Avenue Theatre."

The next moment he had disappeared into the shadows under the railway arch. Dennison walked on and stopped at the theatre to light a cigarette. He had hardly got it well going when a young man of about his own age, fresh-faced and blue-eyed, with a soft hat poised rather rakishly on a very musical-looking mop of light brown hair, came up to him, and, throwing back the cape of his opera-cloak, asked him in very pleasant foreign English if he could favour him with a light.

Dennison handed him a match, almost without looking at him, but to his intense astonishment, when the stranger had lit up he passed his arm through his and said in familiar tones:

"Thanks, and now I am entirely at your service."

Dennison was too well practised at the game to make the slightest sign of astonishment. He took a few slow puffs and said quietly:

"Remarkably well done, my dear Smith, and in excellent time. Your man, I presume, had everything ready. But may I ask why such a respectable member of Society finds it necessary to visit his wife and daughter at a first-rate hotel in other than his proper person?"

"My dear Dennsion," he replied, once more affecting his excellent foreign accent, "I must first ask you to understand that there is no such person as Mr. Stanislaus Smith staying at the Hotel Victoria. You are going to be the guest of Herr Stanislas de Ronski, the not altogether unknown Polish violinist."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dennison, this time fairly startled out of his self-control; "de Ronski—you——"

"Hush, my friend, or, as they say on the boards, we shall be observed. Come along, and the mystery shall be explained to you."

A young man, of foreign appearance, asked Dennison for a light. It was Stanislaus Smith, the detective, admirably disguised.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Double Identity.

If Dennison had had any doubts as to the double identity of his companion while they were in the street, he would have lost them as they entered the hotel vestibule, for not only was Mr. Smith saluted with more than usual deference by the heavily gold-laced porter and his satellites, but the major-domo himself, who happened to be passing across the hall just then, bowed to him with something more than condescension, and said politely:

"Good evening, Herr Ronski!"

A few people looked round as the well-known violinist bowed and murmured his reply to the greeting, and a page-boy came forward to perform the unnecessary task of escorting them to the lift which led to his suite of apartments on the second floor. They hung up their hats in a tiny anteroom, and then Mr. Smith opened an inner door and said, still in his accented English:

"Mr. Dennison, will you do me the honour of entering?"

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A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

He went in past him as he held the door open. It was a snugly-furnished sitting or dining-room of the best hotel sort. His host closed the door and turned the key. Then he went to the side-board, unlocked a spirit-case, got out a couple of glasses and a siphon of soda, and said:

"And now will you help yourself and excuse me once more, only for a couple of minutes? I will tell the ladies that you are here."

"Of course, my dear M. de Ronski," laughed Dennison, doing as he was bidden. "I hope, however, that you will apologise for my very untimely intrusion. I should be ashamed of myself if you had not made me so deeply interested."

"Which of itself is more than ample excuse, if any were needed," smiled Mr. Smith, as he disappeared through a curtained doorway at the other end of the room.

Dennison took a couple of sips at his whisky and soda and began to walk up and down the room, wondering not a little at the very strange revelation of the last ten minutes or so.

He knew that his friend and semi-colleague was, in his profession, a quick changer of character and appearance; but that he should combine two such utterly different and contradictory personalities as those of the cleverest detective and one of the best-known violinists and composers in Europe, was a trifle hard of belief, even for a man of his very considerable experience.

Presently the curtain was drawn back, and Mr. Smith returned. He still kept his admirable and, thanks to its simplicity, impenetrable disguise, but he had discarded his frock-coat and fancy waistcoat.

So perfectly did he play his part that Dennison had already begun to look upon him, in a certain measure, as a sort of new acquaintance.

"A thousand pardons, my dear friend, for keeping you so long," he said, "the truth is that we start the morning after to-morrow, and the ladies——"

"Yes, of course," interrupted Dennison, "that is just why I ought not to have come in. Naturally, your wife and daughter will be busy with their preparations."

"Pray say nothing more about that," replied Mr. Smith, "and now let us join them."

When Dennison went through the curtained door he found himself face to face with one of the most exquisitely graceful women he had ever seen. She was of medium height, but her perfectly-proportioned figure and the lofty pose of her head made her look almost tall.

Like a great many men who are really excellent judges of female beauty, Dennison never troubled about details. If anything was wrong in feature, carriage, or dress, it struck him instantly as a discord in music or a blemish in a painting would have done. Madame de Ronski, as her husband styled her during the introduction, and as Dennison ever after addressed her, commanded his complete admiration—and there were very few men who would have differed from him.

She might have been anything between thirty and forty, and she was younger-looking than young women of twenty-five. Her clear olive skin was without a wrinkle or a blemish. Her thick hair was blue-black, without a shimmer of silver, and her eyes and lips were still those of the seventeen-year-old Polish school-girl who had fallen in love with her cousin—and his violin—and had lived happily ever after.

During the introduction, another door had opened, and a tall slim figure in white, relieved by a broad belt of gold brocade and a ripple of blue-grey chiffon, flowing from neck to waist, came into the room. Dennison at once recognised her as the daughter of Madame de Ronski, despite the fact that her head was golden-crowned and her complexion as delicious a blending of milk and rose as he had had the good fortune to look upon.

"My daughter Paula, Mr. Dennison," said her mother, moving aside.

He concealed what might have been a visible start by a rather lower bow than usual.

Then he looked for one brief instant upon the most lovely face and into the most bewildering eyes that he had ever seen, and said almost involuntarily—for he was a man who never paid a compliment:

"Your daughter, Madame de Ronski! Surely——"

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Smith, with undisguised pleasure, "so you are going to say what everyone else says, are you! Mother and daughter! Absurd, is it not? And yet Paula is already a year older than her mother was when she made me the happiest man on earth."

"Of course papa could not help saying that," laughed Paula—and Dennison thought that he had never heard such exquisite music in his life. "He always says it when someone gives him the opportunity, but whether he wants to make me out older or mamma younger than our birthdays, no one but himself has ever found out."

"Nor ever will," said Mr. Smith, looking from one to the other with the frankest and most pardonable admiration. "But come," he went on, a little more seriously, "let us sit down and talk quietly, for the subject is a somewhat grave one."

"Very well," said Paula, with a swift glance at the door to see that it was shut. "And now, I suppose, we are going to hear more State secrets. But then, of course, Mr. Dennison is quite accustomed to those things, and so perhaps even you will hardly surprise him."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss de Ronski," said Dennison. "As a matter of fact I daresay that your father could astonish people a good deal more experienced than I am if he chose to."

Mr. Smith sat down in a chair almost facing him, and, with a swift look across the room at his wife, he said, still speaking with his perfect foreign accent:

"I have asked you to pay me this little visit this evening, Mr. Dennison, not only for the pleasure of introducing you to my wife and daughter, but also, as between ourselves, to discuss a little matter of business.

"These ladies," he went on, "are not only my wife and daughter, they are also, if they will allow me to use the expression, my accomplices."

"I beg your pardon, M. de Ronski," said the Solicitor to the Treasury, sitting bolt upright in the chair, "accomplices? Surely that is hardly a term that you would use with reference to——"

"Ah, yes," exclaimed his wife, leaning forward in her chair and looking at Dennison with an expression in her eyes which could not be translated into words:

"You see that we are all conspirators here, but within the four corners of the law. And as my husband has told you, I suppose, we are here in—well not exactly the same character as that in which we are known on the Continent."

"My dear Madame, please allow the rest to be taken as said," he interrupted. "It is, of course, entirely my loss that your husband has not given me this pleasure before, but, like other deferred pleasures, it is all the greater for being deferred. He and I, as I suppose you know, are old friends, professionally and otherwise, and I need hardly say that——"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Smith, "we will also take that as said. You will accept us, that is to say, myself, my wife and my daughter as conspirators, and now I think we may proceed to business."

During the few moments of the silence that came after these few words, Dennison leant back in his chair and looked round the room with raised eyelids, which meant a question.

"I am all attention, M. de Ronski," he said. "I am only here to learn. And now what is this conspiracy?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, getting up and putting his back against the door. "I have told you that we are conspirators to a certain extent. I have worked with you officially and unofficially, directly and indirectly, for some years now, and we have got to know each other fairly well."

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"Really, I must say that the balance of the knowledge appears to be on your side so far," said Dennison, "and therefore I am at a disadvantage, because, you see, to all intents and purposes, I made quite a new acquaintance to-night."

As a matter of fact he was rather more at a disadvantage than he thought of at the moment, for, as he spoke, Paula's eyes were looking straight into his, and they were not the sort of eyes that a man of his age and temperament ought to look at if he wanted all his wits about him, and so he just added, with a note of interrogation in his voice:

"Yes, and as to business?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, turning the key in the door and going back to his seat. "As Stanislaus Smith I have discovered certain facts which by themselves might not have been of any great value. As Stanislas de Ronski, the husband of my wife and the father of my daughter, I have been able, with their assistance, to discover other facts which may possibly, I might say, almost certainly, lead us to something like a definite conclusion."

He paused for a moment and shut his eyes.

"As to the silver problem?" asked Dennison, looking first across the room at him and then into Paula's eyes again.

"Is that not so, papa?" she said, with just a little faint flush of colour in her cheeks. "I think you told us this afternoon that the comedy was developing into tragedy?"

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Smith, getting up again and facing Dennison with his hands clasped behind his back. "There, you see, you have one of the conspirators. Will you tell the story, Paula, or shall I?"

"My dear papa," she replied, "it will be impossible for me to tell it as you could, and even if I could I wouldn't."

"Very well, then," said her father, with his almost womanly laugh, "then I will tell it."

His voice and manner changed instantly. In a moment de Ronski, the musician, disappeared, and Mr. Smith took his place, and he went on in a voice so changed that Dennison for a moment looked up as he might have done if another person had entered the room.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Dennison, that within the last six months or so four murders have been committed in the north, south, east, and west of London, and that the whole police force, including the Criminal Investigation Department, have been absolutely at fault, not only as regards the criminals, but also as to any motive for the crime or crimes."

"I know that," said Dennison, getting up from his chair with something like a jerk, "but surely if this has anything to do with the silver problem, you would have mentioned it this evening at the Yard."

"No, sir," replied Mr. Smith, "that is just what I should not have done, and that is also the reason why I and my wife and daughter are going to Monaco the day after to-morrow. Is not that so, Francesca?"

"Yes, that is so," replied his wife, nodding and smiling as though she was talking about some quite ordinary social event. "Here," she went on, taking a five-shilling piece out of a little silver chain-bag which hung on her chatelaine, "is one of the coins in question."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dennison, as she handed it to him, "then this will be the first authenticated one that I have seen."

He balanced it on the forefinger of his left hand, took a half crown out of his pocket, balanced that on his right forefinger, and rang the two coins. The ring was absolutely true.

"Yes," he continued, "now I see what Sir Edward meant about practical bimetallism. That is just as good a five-shilling piece as they could make at the Mint or anywhere else; possibly a trifle better. It's simply perfect as far as I can see. And now may I ask where that came from?"

"That, my friend," replied Mr. Smith, taking the coin from him and looking almost affectionately at it, "that is one of fifty-seven pieces of different denominations which were found inside the straw mattress on which the man Gunton died somewhat suddenly and mysteriously six nights ago in the three pair back attic in Luton Street off the Caledonian Road; and I could show you a couple of hundred more of equally

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excellent manufacture found in Yeoville Street, Brook Green; St. James's Square, Walworth Road; and Elmer Road, Kilburn."

"What!" exclaimed Dennison. "Why, those are the very places where all these murders have been committed. How is it that our people didn't know about that?"

"Some of them did," replied Mr. Smith, drily, "but not many. It was thought best to let the mystery remain mysterious. You see, we didn't want any newspaper Crime Investigators meddling with a serious matter like this, and so the murders were just treated *as* murders. There was absolutely no clue in any of the cases except these coins, and of course it would never have done for the imaginative reporter to get hold of *them*. It was only to-day that we of the International Police felt at all certain of our ground, and my principal object in asking you to come in this evening was to place the facts at your disposal. It is possible that they may be of some use to us when we renew our acquaintance in Monaco."

"I quite see what you mean," said Dennison, just a trifle touched in his professional pride. "You are perfectly right. It is the worst defect of our system that even official secrets do not remain secrets very long. But I suppose I am at liberty to let the Commissioner have what you have told me?"

"That," said Mr. Smith, looking him straight in the eyes, "is, of course, a matter for your own discretion; but I should be obliged if you would not say that the information comes from me. You see, my position is a rather delicate one. I am not in the employment of the British Government alone, and I could not make a statement like this officially I have given it to you because we are friends as well as fellow-workers, and because I know that you will make the best possible use of it. Personally, and with all due deference to the authorities, I should be inclined to say that, for the present at least, the fewer people who know a thing like this the better."

"In other words," laughed Dennison, "you don't want me to say anything about it. Very well. It's your information, not mine, after all, and I'll hold my tongue till you think it advisable to speak. Meanwhile, I suppose I may take it that you and your colleagues have sufficient reasons for believing that the finding of these coins is more of a consequence than a coincidence?"

"Undoubtedly. You know as well as I do that in the pursuit of the criminal we have to take the law of averages as practically true. This might have happened, possibly, in two of the cases; but in four, improbable. Which means that, for all practical purposes, these four men were agents of the Syndicate, or whatever it is, which is flooding the money markets of the world with illicit issues of coin and notes which have so far proved to be indistinguishable from the legitimate article."

"And, having got themselves suspected of treason, they were got rid of," interrupted Madame de Ronski, looking up from the five-shilling piece which she still held in the palm of her hand. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, I fully believe that in the end we shall find that this is the real explanation. It is, of course, a very terrible thing to have to believe that any man or association of men should have such a tremendous power in their hands; but it really seems to be so. These men were agents who were suspected of the intention to betray their trust, and you know, when great issues are at stake, it is usually enough to be suspected."

"Yes," replied Dennison slowly, "and that is another reason why the less we say about this particular aspect of the puzzle the better. Madame de Ronski, I have learnt more than I expected to do to-night; but, pardon me, is it quite safe for you to carry those coins in your purse?"

"Perfectly safe!" exclaimed Paula, rattling her own chatelaine. "I have some of them here too, and I daresay I shall spend a few to-morrow. And when we get to Monte Carlo, and you make the acquaintance, the real acquaintance, I mean, of your old friend Papa——"

"There is no reason unless Mr. Dennison has another engagement, why he should not do that this evening," said Madame de Ronski, looking across the room at her husband. "Is there, Stan?"

"Personally, I know of none," said Mr. Smith, with a note in his voice which told his guest that, for the present at least he had discussed the problem of the silver criminals and their victims as far as it was possible to do so with profit or entertainment. "Dennison, you thought, I daresay, down yonder by the Avenue Theatre that you had made a new acquaintance. So, in a sense, you did, and now, if you like, Paula shall introduce him to you."

"It would be difficult to tell me of anything that I should like much better," he replied, as Paula rose from her seat and went into the inner room in obedience to a glance from her father. "Mr. Stanislaus Smith, I believe, I know fairly well, but Herr Stanislas de Ronski is still to some extent a stranger to me, and I need hardly say that I shall be only too delighted to know him better."

"Very nicely put!" laughed Madame, as she got up and went to the piano. She sat down and within the next half minute Dennison heard a swift ripple of liquid melody come from somewhere and go to nowhere.

He was not a musical man, but he knew music when he heard it, and he had not often heard such sound-magic as he now heard rippling from the carelessly touched keys. He leant back in his chair, stretched out his legs, and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets.

Paula had brought a very shabby looking violin case into the room and opened it. She took out of it a violin, even shabbier than the case, and gave it to her father.

Then, as it seemed to Dennison, the piano and the violin became wedded, even as his host and hostess were, and Paula, with her eyes alight, crossed the room and said to him in a low, clear whisper which then and long afterwards was to him the sweetest music that he had ever heard:

"Now you shall hear the song of the ocean on the shore, and the murmur of the waves under the moonlight. Listen!"

Their eyes met, and while many unspoken words were passing from soul to soul, Madame de Ronski laid her fingers on the keys of the piano and Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings of the violin. Dennison shut his eyes and listened, and to him the rest was a dream of blended melodies.

And so he began his knowledge of the new acquaintance whom he had known for so long.

Dennison had no very clear idea as to the numbers which he had heard, and that, as he expressed it afterwards, was the greatest tribute that he could have paid to the perfection of this music.

He listened entranced, for he had never heard such music as this before, and he was almost on the point of starting up from his seat when he looked across the room at Paula, caught a flash in her eyes, and saw her hand uplifted.

The next moment there fell a swift silence—and then something else came from somewhere. He knew that it was only the piano and the violin, but they were now as two kindred souls; they were speaking together in slow and solemn strains, which had a wordless wail of human misery in them.

Madame de Ronski looked round smilingly at him, and her fingers wandered back over the keys. Mr. Smith put up his bow, and Paula rose from the sofa, folded her hands behind her, and, as Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings, and her mother struck the opening chord, she sang a sweet hymn. Then the wave of melody rose again, and she sang with such pleading emphasis as he had never heard put into words before.

"It is rather curious," said Mr. Smith, laying his violin on the top of the piano, "that such a splendid hymn as that should be the battle-song of the most merciless of the so-called civilised nations."

"Ah, yes, is it not?" exclaimed Madame de Ronski, as she rose. "Mr. Dennison, I am a Pole, and I know, as my ancestors have had only too good reason to know before me, what a ghastly mockery that is. Peace, peace! No, where the shadow of the Russian Eagle's wings falls there can be no peace save that which the sword makes—and that will come to pass when the sword has nothing left to slay."

"Or the Slayer himself is slain!" murmured Paula.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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OUR BACHELOR'S OBSERVATIONS.

It's hard to flatter a sharp girl.

A DEAD love can never be revived.

BETTER be not at all than not be honest.

HAPPINESS is a ray of sunshine between two clouds.

BAD luck generally follows in the wake of bad habits.

CUPID is always shooting and continually making Mrs.

How can a woman keep her secrets when her eyes tell tales?

WHEN a man is hopelessly in love it greatly increases his sighs.

IF a young woman bids you take heart, you can probably take hers.

IF you are unable to find an opportunity go to work and make one.

A WOMAN has ideals till she gets married, a man after he gets married.

AN enraged man tears his hair, but an enraged woman tears her husband's.

ALL girls are always looking for an ideal man. Did any girl ever find one?

WHEN a man flatters himself that he knows a woman, he—flatters himself.

WHEN two women talk, the subject of their conversation is conspicuously absent.

SPEAKING of coincidence, it is worthy of remark that kiss, miss, and bliss rhyme.

How many people live on the reputation of the reputation they might have made?

IT is easier for some men to talk all day than to keep their mouths shut five minutes.

A LITTLE man should never marry a large widow. He would be the widow's mite.

HALF the men make love to a girl for the sake of talking about it to some other man.

ADVICE would be an awful thing if it were not for the fact that we can take it or leave it.

IF girls don't marry some men for their money, I'd like to know what they do marry them for.

WHEN the accepted lover says "Mine own," he feels a good deal richer than many mine owners.

THERE are occasional moments in every old bachelor's life when he is glad he never married.

ONE woman always pays more attention to what another woman has on than to what she says.

THE wise girl doesn't waste her time on the young man who wastes his time kissing her hand.

WHETHER the child is impudent or clever depends on whether he is your neighbour's or your own.

WHEN you hear a fellow referred to as a ladies' man, you may be sure that none of them want to marry him.

ALL waves are more or less dangerous, but the waves of a pretty girl's handkerchief are usually more so.

THE woman who wears her feathers in her bonnet won't let her little boy rob birds' nests because it is cruel.

WHEN a girl says emphatically that she won't, it is morally certain that she will; when she says she will, will she?

THE truest and best friend a man can have is a wife who does her best to keep him in the straight and narrow path.

LONG engagements are expensive affairs in Russia. The bridegroom is expected to send his *fiancée* a present every week.

WHEN a girl is in love her thoughts are about equally divided between the last time she saw him and the next time he is coming.

A GIRL may say she is surprised when she receives a proposal, but down in her heart she is wondering why the young man waited so long.

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The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a Salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year, to a girl.

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2. *What famous British Soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.*

BEGIN TO-DAY.

Other Sets of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tue day.)

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and the answers to others you will have to search for in books. Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper, numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1 immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it. Anybody may help you, provided you say who. No competitor must be over twenty-one years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears, and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

OUT TO-DAY.

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THE MARK ON THE WALL.

The Story of a Mysterious Omen.

PERSONALLY I think this is a most unsatisfactory story, and I have no doubt many people will agree with me. It is not a ghost story in the accepted sense of the word, for no ghost and no inexplicable noises were seen or heard, but notwithstanding all my efforts, I can find no explanation for what I am about to relate.

"I sometimes wonder if the place is damp and does not suit Edith," said my brother after his first greetings as I stepped out of the train on to the platform of Whitefield Station, "but she was all right the first month we were here, and it is only lately she has seemed so nervous and out of sorts. I am very glad you have come, Claudia; perhaps you will be able to cheer her up."

My only brother had married my dearest friend, and they had settled in a charming house at Whitefield, a tiny village in Kent. This was the first time I had been able to stay with them, for directly after their wedding I had been obliged to go abroad. Now, however, I had come for a long visit, and I was sorry to hear from Percy that Edith was not well. Certainly the place did not seem damp at first sight, and as we approached the house I exclaimed with delight, for I have seldom seen a prettier house than that low white one with its green verandah and gaily-filled flower-beds.

Edith was sitting on the verandah, and as she came to meet us I was startled to see the change in her. She looked thin and worried; every now and then she glanced behind her with a frightened air, and all the time her thoughts were evidently far away from our conversation. Her efforts to appear natural and at her ease were palpable but they were unavailing. My brother looked meaningly at me, and I understood his wish that I should not appear to notice her curious behaviour.

We had tea, and visited the nursery to see what its parents thought the most wonderful baby in the world, a soft little pink-and-white chubby person of about three months old, whom Percy proudly spoke of as "my son," and then I was shown all over the house and garden. Certainly, so far as I could see, there seemed nothing in either the one or the other to account for Edith's nervousness. The house was particularly cheerful, with large sunny rooms and everything planned for comfort and ease.

We spent a pleasant evening, and when I went up to bed Edith came with me and we gossiped together for a long time. At last she wished me "Good night," and was just going when I said on the spur of the moment:

"What a delightful place this is. You must be glad Percy bought it."

In a second the frightened look which had faded from her eyes while we were talking returned.

"It is the only thing he has ever done that I dislike," she said. "I hate this house! I—I—I wish I had never entered it!"

"But why, dear—what is the matter, Edith? You must have some reason. I can't help seeing how ill and unhappy you seem. Won't you tell me?"

"Yes, I have a reason," she said. "Perhaps I will tell you some day, but not to-night. Perhaps you will find it out for yourself. Yes," she continued in a lower tone, as if speaking to herself, "if she notices it, it will prove I haven't fancied it all!"

She departed and I thought of her strange words for a long time before I could sleep. The only solution of them that I could discover was that the house was haunted, but as I had never heard any rumour of the kind, and it seemed about the most unlikely house imaginable to be so, I scouted the idea and waited anxiously for the morning and some explanation.

Percy went up to his office in London every day, and on the morning after my arrival he went off as usual; and after Edith had attended to her household affairs we took our work and went out into the garden.

We talked about all kinds of things, the house, the baby, the place, the news of the day, but Edith carefully avoided all reference to her strange words of the night before. After about an hour she said she found it too hot in the garden, and we moved into the drawing-room. Edith settled me in an armchair facing the fireplace and a door leading into the conservatory. She sat by my side, and I noticed her eyes constantly stared at the wall opposite to us. I looked at the wall myself, and I noticed at once that on one side of the fireplace, just above a small water-colour painting, a piece of the paper had been torn so that the white wall showed. It struck me as curious that Edith, who was the soul of neatness, had not had this repaired, or at least had not hung the picture a little higher so as to hide it. As I looked more carefully at the mark it struck me also as strange that the paper should have been torn off so neatly; the mark was in fact a perfect square about the size of a copy-book. In spite of myself my eyes kept seeking it, and although I knew it must be imagination it seemed as if sometimes it changed colour, not altogether, but as if streaks of a pinkish shade moved up and down on it. It must be the shadow from the curtain, I thought, and I said to Edith:

"What a funny mark that is on the wall. It almost looks as if the paper had been cut away on purpose. I wonder you don't move the picture so as to hide it."

"Thank Heaven!" was her extraordinary reply. "*You* see it, too, then. It isn't all my imagination!"

"Of course I see a mark on the wall; any person not blind must see it!" I answered.

Edith got up from her chair and stood before me. "I am the only person in the house who can see it," she said impressively. "None of the servants can see it, none of the visitors, Percy declares I am dreaming when I speak to him about it. To the eyes of everybody who has been in this room except you and I that wall is entirely covered with paper and there is no mark on it.

"Listen; I will tell you all about it. About a month after we came here Percy and I were sitting in this room one evening, and when I looked up I saw what I thought was a

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shadow on the wall. It was that mark. I asked Percy to look at it and said how odd it was that a piece should have been torn off the new paper like that. He said he could see nothing and that my eyes were deceiving me. At first I thought they might be, but the next day the mark was still there, and there it has been ever since. Percy thought it was because I was not very well just then; and still I see it, and as you see it, too, it proves it must be there."

"What did the doctor say about it?" I asked.

"Oh, he was like Percy and thought I imagined it. He can't see anything either. And as for moving that picture to cover it, it can't be done. I have moved the picture again and again but the mark moves, too, I imagine. At any rate, it is always just above the picture, and I feel sometimes that it will end by driving me mad!"

I did not speak for a moment or two. I am absolutely healthy, I have no nerves, and not a scrap of imagination, and what Edith had just told me seemed impossible. Still, there was the mark without a doubt, and it seemed extraorninary that no eyes but hers and mine could see it.

Edith continued:

"I hate this room! And I never sit in here if I can help it, and I haven't told you quite all now. The mark *moves*. I mean something moves on it, like a shadow going up and down. I am sure it means something horrible, and I am frightened. Oh, Claudia, how glad I am that you have come, and that you can see it, too!"

"I certainly thought I saw something moving on it," I said; "anyhow, there is no use in terrifying yourself over it. It can't hurt us, and all we can do is to watch it carefully and wait for something else to happen."

That evening I asked Percy if he had ever heard anything about the house being haunted.

"Certainly not," he replied. "I suppose Edith has been telling you about the mark on the drawing-room wall. It is only her imagination. Doctor Bourne thinks she wants a change, and I want to take her and baby to the seaside as soon as I can manage it. I believe the shadow from the curtain falls on the wall, and that Edith has thought so much about the mark she fancied she saw that now she honestly believes she sees it. Hallucinations, I am sure, and I hope, Claudia, you will try and get the idea out of her head. No one else can see any mark at all. It is only a fancy of Edith's."

"It is no fancy," I answered, "for before Edith had said a word to me about the mark I saw it and asked her what it was."

Percy stared.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What has happened to you both? I always thought that *you*, at least, were a sensible woman, and now you go and imagine this rubbish!"

"I am bound to believe what I see," I said, "but I am not in the least frightened about the mark, and I intend to try and find some explanation of it."

Percy only laughed.

"You want a tonic as well as Edith," was all he said, as he walked away.

Neither Edith nor I mentioned the mark to him again. It still remained on the wall, and often when we were watching it I thought I saw strange signs moving across it. One day it occurred to me what they were. They were letters, blurred, misshapen, and many of them only half-formed. I suggested to Edith that we should write down all the letters we could make out, and when we did this we found that they formed a sentence:

"Beware of journey twenty-first July."

"It must mean that something dreadful will happen on that day!" said Edith, and I agreed with her that the words were a warning, but for whom or against what I could not imagine. We decided not to tell Percy what we had discovered for he regarded the whole affair as a phantasy of our brains. However, one good result ensued from our making out the sentence; the mark disappeared, and we were no longer worried by seeing it each time we entered the

What Clever Folks Eat.

PROVERBS, even when untrue (which is rare), are invariably at least based upon truth. "What is one man's meat is another man's poison" was said so long ago that no one knows the origin of it; but its accuracy is proved by the different fare preferred by various celebrities.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace finds fish diet best for brain work.

Mr. G. B. Shaw is a vegetarian.

Mrs. Langtry prefers plain fare, and little of it.

Mr. George Gissing would like to be a vegetarian, but confesses himself unable to live without meat.

Mr. R. G. Knowles eats rich food, pastries, &c., and drinks ice-water, yet declares himself well and happy; while Mr. Hall Caine owns to being "a constant martyr to all the troubles that attend diet," but neglects to tell us what he eats.

Well, well, we are not all cast in one mould, that's clear. How all the world must envy Mr. Knowles, while forced to adopt for itself Mr. Hall Caine's description!

And yet ability to digest rich foods is nothing but what should be the attribute of everybody; as it invariably is of people who fortify their digestive organs with an occasional dose of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. In that way one can ensure the healthy action of the liver, a plentiful supply of pure blood, and freedom from constipation and all the other pains and penalties which are summed up in the one word—indigestion.

Though Mr. Robert Duffield is devoted to agriculture, and has lived all his life in one of the healthiest counties of England, he has not escaped the universal complaint. "My trouble was indigestion," says Mr. Duffield. "I had no appetite, and became listless and unfit for work. Food caused me pain and wind in the stomach. A constant feeling of bilious sickness at last turned to violent fits of vomiting, of which I would sometimes have three or four in a day, which reduced me to a state of trembling, like one with the ague. A private doctor giving me no hope, I went into hospital for five weeks, where my condition improved a little; but I had no sooner come out than I was as bad as ever again. After I had suffered for five years, a friend advised me to try Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. Then my relief began. Soon afterwards all my ailments left me, and I returned to work. My health has ever since remained good, though I am now seventy-four."—(Signed, Robert Duffield, Letheringsett, Holt, Norfolk, August 28th, 1903.)

The diet of clever folks differs as greatly as their abilities. But that which makes any wholesome diet possible to everybody is always the same, and its properties are unrivalled.

A Thirsty Soldier.

EIGHT shillings for half a pint of water! This enormous price was paid by a soldier while marching to Khartoum to relieve Gordon. Could it possibly be worth the money? The soldier says that it was, for it revived him when his tongue was parched and his lips swollen from thirst. Though eight shillings so greatly exceeds the price, it is not more than the value of a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup, which restores the tortured dyspeptic to health and ease.

Mr. A. E. Sharpe, of 17 Spencer Road, Seven Kings, Ilford, says: "Indigestion and the troubles it gave rise to—heart-palpitation, headache, nervousness, loss of appetite, &c.—made my life wretched, and reduced my weight from 12 stone to 8 stone 6lb. I could not sleep at night and would get up in the morning feeling as weary as when I went to bed. I had no heart to work and would sometimes have to leave off and sit down on my stool, a prey to melancholy. My nerves were so shattered that I dreaded the railway journey to and from the City. Nothing benefited me until I took Seigel's Syrup. That is the medicine which cured me and restored me to my former self."

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drawing-room. Sometimes we spoke about it to each other but we were so relieved at its disappearance, and the date mentioned was so far away (this being only the middle of August), that by degrees we forgot about it, and by the time I left Whitefield Edith was her old bright, cheerful self, and had almost forgotten all the terror she had suffered.

Well, the winter passed away and summer came round again, and Edith invited me to go and stay with her again. Even returning to Whitefield did not recall the events of my previous visit to my mind. We had so much to talk about, and the baby was so charming now that he was beginning to walk and talk, that nothing else seemed worth consideration.

Percy was going away for the week-end to stay with some friends at Richmond. He would return by his usual train on Monday afternoon. I think I shall never forget that Monday. It was a glorious summer day and we stayed in the garden all the morning with the baby. After lunch Edith suggested that we should rest in the drawing-room as it was really far cooler than the garden. We provided ourselves with books and settled ourselves in the two most comfortable chairs. I suppose the heat made me drowsy, for I fell into a doze from which I was roused by a touch on my arm. Edith was standing by my side, staring, livid-faced, wild-eyed, speechless at something on the wall behind me. I turned, and saw—the mark again. In an instant everything came back to me, but before I could speak Edith's voice sounded, hoarse, strangled, from her pale lips.

"Claudia, this is the day—Percy—he returns to-day. 'Beware of journey twenty-first July,' it said. I shall never see Percy again, I am sure!"

She broke down utterly and sobbed, while that horrible mark looked down at us with the words now standing out clearly on it. This was the twenty-first of July, and Percy was the only person we knew likely to be journeying on it.

The necessity for action roused me. My first idea was to go off to London myself, but there was no train till five, and by the time I reached Charing Cross Percy would be in the train on his homeward journey. Besides, though I hated to think of it, the warning words might apply to me.

I consulted the "A. B. C." The train he always came by was an express, leaving Charing Cross at six and arriving at Whitefield at twenty minutes past seven. Then there was a slower train leaving at half-past six and arriving at half-past eight. This was the last train of the day.

"We must wire to Percy not to come home to-night," I said.

Edith only cried on.

"He would take no notice," she said. "If we wired that without any reason he would naturally take no notice, and if we gave the reason he would still come because he would think we were mad. You know, when you were here last summer, he always declared we imagined the mark. No, he will be killed, I know; there will be some accident to the train. I shall be a widow to-night and that precious baby fatherless!"

She wept hysterically.

"Don't be silly, Edith!" I said sternly. "It is no good to behave like that. We must *do* something, and to wire to Percy is the only thing we can do. I will go to the village now and send a telegram."

I went and dispatched a message to Percy, begging him, "for a good reason," to spend that night in town, although I had but little hope he would take any notice of it. Nor was I wrong, for a reply came from him, saying: "Expect me by usual train; do not understand your message."

Then, indeed, we despaired. Edith gave way utterly and kept urging me to save Percy, to do something. I did not see that there was anything I could do. Occasionally I went into the drawing-room to see if the mark were still there, but there was nothing to be seen, and I tried to think that the whole thing was a horrible dream. Finally I went to the station to meet the six from London.

It arrived safely, but Percy was not in it.

"He missed it, I suppose," said Edith hopelessly; "but it makes no difference. He will come by the next and be killed just the same."

But I felt more hopeful. Warnings are not always infallible. One train had arrived safely, why should not the next? The time for the next train to arrive came and passed, the time it would take Percy to walk the two miles from the station came and passed, but he did not come. We could not hear from him for the telegraph office closed at six. I suggested going to the station again, but Edith would not let me leave her, and the two servants objected to walk down that lonely road at night either singly or together.

That was indeed a night of horror. We feared we knew not what; at one moment we professed to think the whole episode of the mark on the wall nonsense, at another moment we felt it must be a true warning. We invented excuses for Percy being kept all night in town; we alternated between hope and fear. The hours dragged on, the morning broke, and as the clock struck six I heard the click of the garden-gate; up the path came Percy, safe and well. Before he could open the front door we were with him, and in the first joy of seeing him whole and unhurt we forgot to wonder how he had arrived at that hour, for the first London train did not reach Whitefield till half-past eight.

"I came by a special," he said. "I couldn't get here sooner because the line was blocked. I couldn't wire as the office here is shut and I knew you would be anxious. You have heard, of course?"

"Heard?" Edith echoed. "Heard? We have heard nothing. What has happened? Oh, Percy, how thankful I am that you decided to obey my telegram in the end. I am sure something would have happened to you if you had come last night. The mark——"

"But I didn't obey your telegram," he interrupted her. "I thought you were two silly, fanciful women, and I intended to come by my usual train as I wired to you. But at the last moment, just as I was leaving the office an old friend of my father's turned up unexpectedly, and I had to see him. Then I made for the six-thirty. I got in a block and was delayed some minutes and the office clock must have been slow, for I reached Charing Cross in time to see the last Whitefield train steaming out of the station. Was it Providence, I wonder, or what? I stayed at the Morgans for the night, and it was only very early this morning I heard what had happened. The six-thirty met with an accident and ran off the line and——" He paused.

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked quickly.

"If I had been in that train you would never have seen me alive again, I think!" he answered. "There was only one first-class carriage, and every passenger in it was killed!"

* * * * *

Now, can anyone explain this story?

Claudia Ashton.

STONEBROKE: "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" Heiress: "I don't know. If he's anything like me he would."

EDITH: "Is it true that you are engaged to Jack?" Mabel: "Yes, but you are not to mention it. I'm not quite sure that Jack knows it as yet."

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Catarrh Claims New Victims Daily.

It is estimated by the medical profession that more than one half of all diseases are produced by taking cold, that is by an acute catarrhal condition. Unfortunately, this truth is not generally recognised. The victim of a cold looks upon its symptoms as merely a temporary affair, and in the majority of cases the cold is allowed to linger on until it assumes a chronic state. The chronic cold becomes chronic catarrh, silently and insidiously producing general weakness and often attacking the lungs, stomach, liver, or kidneys in the course of the disease. A very thorough treatise on this subject, together with much good advice, is contained in the last *Review of Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases.* With the *Review* is also included a "Supplement" describing the success of a new treatment in such a large number of different forms of catarrh that everyone can find something of interest. A free copy of this medical work can be obtained post free by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10, Marble Arch, London, W. With the *Review* there is also a Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice by post. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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Badly Expressed.

"AH," he protested, "my love for you is the greatest thing in the world. It is larger than the world. It is wider than the sea. Let me pour it into your ears?" "Sir!" ejaculated the fair maid. "Do you mean to insinuate anything about the size or shape of my ears?"

She'd Make Sure of That.

MISS DE PRIDE: "I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth!" Rival Belle: "Indeed you wouldn't! I'd take him myself then!"

In High Society.

MAY: "Do you think one should marry for love or for money?" Chaperon: "My dear, love is an excuse for marriage, but money is a justification."

How Beautiful 'Twould Be!

"I'M going to hug you!" he cried. "Forewarned is fore-armed, you know." "Four-armed?" she murmured, blushing vividly. "Would that you had been forewarned!"

Obstacles in the Way.

HARRY: "Blanche says she has insuperable reasons for remaining single." Horace: "Yes, I know what they are." Harry: "Then she has told you?" Horace: "No; but I have seen her."

She Was a Girton Girl.

HE: "Darling, name the day!" Blushing Maid: "I regret I cannot, as it is already called 'Wed-nesday,' derived from the Saxon 'Woden'; I shall, however, be happy to designate a date."

To Arms!

"YOU have had some experience with the fair sex," said the inexperienced youth who had been jilted; "what is the best way to get round a girl?" "With your arms!" tersely replied the old-timer.

Nothing Very Extraordinary.

BERTHA: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

Edgar Eagerly Entices Edith.

EDGAR: "Miss Edith. I—er—have something most important to ask you. May I—that is——" Edith (softly): "What is it, Edgar?" Edgar: "May I—Edith, would you be willing to have our names printed in the papers with a hyphen between them?"

Easily Removed.

"Do the girls here really affect men's clothes to any great extent?" inquired the tourist. "Oh, no!" replied the gallant native. "No? I thought they did." "No. Of course, a little complexion powder or rouge may stick to a fellow's sleeve occasionally, but that could hardly be said to affect the clothes."

Would Not Be Quite Proper.

"CAN we squeeze in here?" said the young man with the red necktie, as he and his young lady got into the well-filled omnibus. "Well, I 'specs you kin if you want to, master," replied the man from the country, "but I'm thinking it would look a trifle better if you reserved that mark of affection till you reached the girl's home."

Far Worse.

WIFE (bitterly): "You deceived me when you married me." Husband: "I did more than that—I deceived myself."

He Was Thunderstruck.

HE: "You are the first girl that I have ever loved." She: "Darling, I believe you!" He: "Heavens! You are also the first girl that ever told me that."

Her Candid Opinion.

HE: "Do you think a fellow ought to be locked up for stealing kisses?" She: "No-o, hardly. But I think he ought to be tied up." So now they're engaged

More Jealousy.

MISS PASSAY: "Yes, and when he proposed, I tried hard not to let him read any encouragement in my face, but he did." Miss Peppery: "Ah! I suppose he could read between the lines."

Then There Was Trouble.

MOTHER: "So you enjoyed your walk, Kate? Did you go all that distance alone?" Daughter: "Oh, yes, mamma, quite alone!" Young Brother: "Then, how is it, Kit, you took an umbrella out and brought back a walking-stick?"

Naturally!

MISS UGLYMUG (an heiress): "Mr. Cashunter, you are the first man who ever kissed me in my life. Do you believe me when I tell you this?" Her Affianced: "Believe you? Well, I should say so." And now the engagement is declared off.

An Objection Overruled.

MISS HOCKHEIMER: "No, Mr. Pinkenbergh, I am sorry, but I cannot marry you. I could never love a man with red hair." Mr. Pinkenbergh: "Dot vas notting. My barber tells me dot at der rate my hair is falling oudt I vill be completely bald in one year."

Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder.

"WHILE my daughter was playing the piano last night a strange man stopped at the door and asked to be allowed to give her half a crown." "Was he such an ardent music-lover?" "No; he said it was merely a thank-offering because he didn't live next door to us."

George Didn't Keep His Promise.

"GEORGE said he'd die if I didn't marry him." "And still you refused?" "Yes. I wished to find out before promising whether he really loved me as much as that or not. Oh, Harriet, I'm p-p-perfectly miserable. He seems to be wretchedly healthy, and I d-do love him so much."

It Really Meant "Evelyn Cavendish."

ANGELINA: "That was a lovely engagement-ring you gave me last night, dear; but what do those initials, 'E. C.' mean on the inside?" Edwin (who has bestowed the ring before, and had it back): "Why—er—that is—don't you know that is the new way of stamping eighteen carats?"

They Were Only Minor Indications.

"HAS my daughter, sir," demanded the stern father, "ever given you reason to think she would listen to a proposal of marriage from you?" "Well," said the young man, twirling his hat in his hand, in an embarrassed manner, "except that she calls me 'darling,' and always kisses me when I bid her good-night, I can't say that she has."

He Was Used to Being Dunned.

ETHEL: "Oh, Tom, what a pity it is you are not rich! They say that some of these millionaires don't dare to leave the house for days at a time, because they receive threatening letters, saying that something dreadful will happen to them if they don't pay the writer sums of money." Tom Hardup: "Pooh! Why, I get plenty of such letters."

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(The most nutritious)
COCOA
And take no other.

HAIR DESTROYED.
Send us an envelope (stamped and addressed), and you will learn how to remove permanently all superfluous hair FREE OF CHARGE. (Send no money).—Address, in confidence, CAPILLUS MFG. CO., 57 Century House, Regent Street, London, W.

To CURE Drunkards

MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"*I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him.*" With the

FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

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How to have a beautiful face and figure. How to have beautiful eyes and hair. How to curl the hair naturally without curling pins or tongs. Little people can be made tall. Noses that are red or ugly shape can be cured, and looks greatly improved.

This Pretty Book will be sent FREE. Ask for "BEAUTY'S BOUDOIR." Stamp must be sent for postage. Peralia Perfumery Co. Dept. (S.S.) 73 Camden Street, North Shields, Eng.

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have brought health to thousands of ailing women the wide world over, by relieving distressing complaints, and giving tone to the system generally. Avoid injurious imitations.

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300 Gold Medals, &c.

Cocoa

Half a tea-spoonful is sufficient to make a cup of most delicious Cccoa.

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Cool Love Letters.

"My lover," writes "BEATRICE," "writes very cool love letters. He seldom tells me anything but just news, and yet, when we are together, he is very affectionate. Do you think this coolness in writing letters means that he is only a little bit in love with me?"

* * * * * * *

Not necessarily. Many men are not clever enough to express their feelings in writing, while others—those of the plain, practical, common-sense kind—dislike writing their thoughts, but prefer to express them. Trust your lover, and judge by his personal actions, not by the tone of his letters.

Breaking an Engagement.

I AM very sorry, "E. R.," that you have had to break off your engagement. But as you say your late *fiancé* indulged in bad habits, such as drink or gambling, you were, no doubt, quite right to let the affair drop. If the influence of a woman is not sufficient to take a man from such habits during courtship, it is scarcely likely to avail after marriage.

* * * * * * *

As to presents and letters, yes, it is usual to return them. The ring should, of course, be returned. As to the letters, it is a matter of choice whether you return them or destroy them. Ask the man if he would like to have them back. As to your other question, I should certainly advise you not to see him if you can possibly avoid it. As you have definitely made up your mind to cease your relations with him, it would be better not to resume it on the basis of an impossible acquaintanceship.

The Fair Stranger Again.

"ON my way to business," writes an anonymous correspondent, "I invariably meet in the train a young lady. I am anxious to speak to her, but am at a loss to know how to do so. I see her five times a week."

* * * * * * *

I should avoid wishing to speak to strange, unprotected young ladies in a London railway carriage. Certainly I cannot advise you in such a matter. If a man is fortunate enough to strike up an acquaintanceship with a girl through meeting her in a train, it must be due to some mutually expressed desire to know each other. If the girl to whom you refer wishes to know you, and could do so without embarrassing herself, probably she will give you an opportunity to speak to her. But I cannot advise you to make overtures to her. If that kind of thing were regarded as correct, there is no knowing to what attentions young ladies might not be subjected when out by themselves.

In Doubt.

"I HAVE been meeting often a young man who treats me with every respect, and says he could never love another girl as he loves me. I like him very much myself, but know very little of him. We met at a party. He is twenty-seven, I am eighteen. Would it be right to listen to him?"

* * * * *

As you were introduced to him at a party, I suppose you have some means of finding out something about his position and character. If you are satisfied, then I should just act as my own feelings dictated. As you like him, then give yourself every opportunity of improving your acquaintance with him. Do not be afraid because he is several years older. Twenty-seven and eighteen are very good ages for a match

An Unreturned Sentiment.

"DAISY" writes: "Some weeks ago I met a young man at a party, and we walked home together. I fell in love with him. Since that he has not written to me, or given me any reason to suppose that he wished to resume our acquaintance. On the evening in question, however, he was most attentive. Well, acting on the advice of a friend, I wrote him a letter on the pretext of wanting to know somebody's address. I thought he would reply by saying he hoped to see me again. Instead of that, however, he merely gave me the information, and wrote an ordinary polite letter. How would you advise me to again hint to him that I wish to know him better?"

* * * * * *

You had better let the matter drop, "DAISY." You did quite as much as a girl should to give him an opportunity of writing to you in the needfully tender strain, and as he did not take the chance offered him, you must conclude that he is not so eager for the friendship as you are. No girl should let it appear that she is angling for a man, as that lessens his respect for her, and, in some cases, men have been known to take advantage of a girl's admiration without serious intentions. These things lead to heart troubles, and should be avoided.

Love versus Song.

"ROMANY" has a lover. She also has a voice. The two have lately run rivalry for "ROMANY'S" attention. She is a member of a chapel choir and a choral society, and sings a great deal at concerts and "socials." This takes up four of her nights a week. Her young man does not object to her singing in the chapel choir—as why should he?—but draws the line at the other functions which take so much of "ROMANY'S" time. "ROMANY" is willing to give in, but does not want to offend the people who ask her to sing.

* * * * *

Well, I think your young man has a good deal of right on his side. Four nights a week is a great deal of time for any girl to give to singing, unless she does it for a livelihood. He has a right to claim that you should give more time to him, as you are to be married in a year. Besides, you will have to give up some of your engagements then, and if you must offend your friends in any case by withdrawing from their concerts, it might be as well now as then. At the same time, I do not see why you should not occasionally give them your services. It is a very nice accomplishment for a girl, and should not be dropped. But I think your lover is right when he objects to a steady four nights a week given to it. Try to reduce the number.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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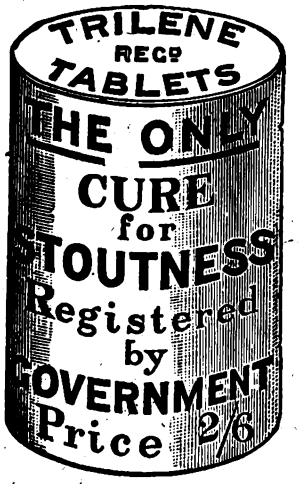
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be CURED by taking

TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

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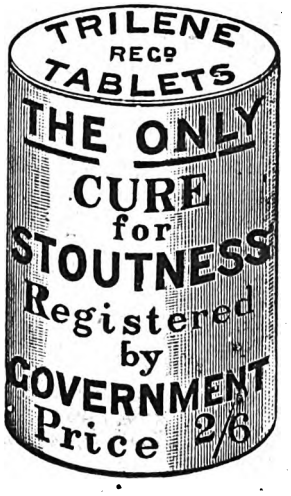

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk; either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 14 stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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Every woman should keep a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** handy, and on the first sign of any derangement of the system, a dose should be taken, and further trouble and anxiety will be averted.

Since **BEECHAM'S PILLS** have cured tens of thousands in this and every country of the globe, just ask yourself why they should not equally prove a boon to you!

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Sold Everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 pills), 2/9 (168 pills).

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 778.] Week ending November 28, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Sara snatched the key and grappled with the servant, whilst the poor girl who was doomed to die made her escape.

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(An Exciting Incident from this week's "The Pursuit of Sara." See inside.)

VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE

The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
COUGHS, COLDS, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA, CATARRH, WEAK LUNGS, and CHILDREN'S COUGHS.

BRONCHITIS AND ASTHMA

Veno's Lightning Cough Cure
Produces its most brilliant effect in Chronic Bronchitis and Asthma. It effects astonishing cures in the worst and most persistent cases.

Rev. W. W. TULLOCH, D.D., Bonar Bridge, Sutherlandshire, writes: "July 22nd, '03.—I have been a martyr to asthma all my life and lately to chronic winter bronchitis. I have found Veno's Lightning Cough Cure a valuable medicine."

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Mrs. ADA S. BALLIN, 5, Agar Street, London, Editor "Womanhood," and a great authority upon children's diseases, writes:—"Veno's Lightning Cough Cure is an exceedingly successful remedy; it is very pleasant to take and the relief it gives is very rapid. The preparation is perfectly safe for children."

W. LASCELLES-SCOTT, F.R.M.S., in his Certificate of Analysis among other things says:—"I have pleasure in certifying that in my opinion VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE is an exceptionally pure, safe, and effective preparation

LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES **9½d.** Regular Sizes, 1/1½ and 2/9.

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THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

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CURES IN TEN MINUTES

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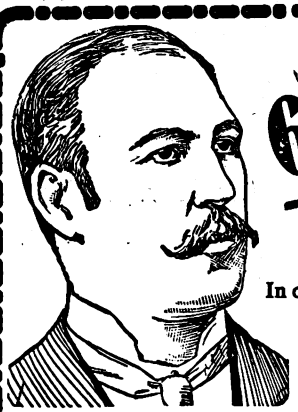

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 778.] Week Ending November 28th, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series. **Start To-day.**

The Pursuit of Sara

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. The first-named before very long induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate*. He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes, and she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse. He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the racecourse, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel would be with her the following day.

Overcome with joy, Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal.

She was secured on board a barge by Sidney Ilford, and when Noel presently came to seek her, Ilford was enabled to conceal Sara, and much to her chagrin Noel left.

Sara made a dash for liberty and reached Birmingham. At New Street Station a heavy parcel fell on her foot, hurting her ankle.

The owner of the parcel, Mrs. Moran, offered to take her home and tend to her injury, and Sara accepted her hospitality.

While in this house Sara received vague warnings which she was at a loss to understand, till one evening she saw, through a fanlight, what she took to be *the face of a dead woman.*

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THE TERROR AT BIRMINGHAM.

THE emotion of horror dominated me. Fear came to me and trembling; my flesh shivered, my heart seemed turned to ice. The face, livid in colour, was not emaciated; as I looked I saw the lips, blue-stained lips, twitch over the teeth. The eyes, glassy and staring, were of a sudden galvanised to life. The fanlight, that, working on a hinge, opened into the room in which I sat, was gently pushed an inch or two. The catch that held it shut, had been left unfastened, so that it swung softly back.

Through the aperture a hand and arm appeared, and something white was dropped on the floor; and then the face vanished, the fanlight closed, the light went out, and I, alone in the darkness, was left to solve the meaning of the mystery.

Through the night I sat, cowering in the chair, my eyes turned, now towards the fanlight, now towards the floor. It was too dark to distinguish what it was that my ghastly visitant had dropped. The electric light was still refractory and the dawn was distant by some hours. I could not summon to my aid sufficient resolution to leave my chair, my ankle throbbed, my body ached, and yet I had not courage enough to go to bed.

Perhaps in my sleep that ghastly face would look at me, those thin, claw-like fingers point at me!

Who and what was this thing? The face was a dead face, and yet—could it be that some person, woman it might be, had put on a mask to frighten me?

No, no mask could alter in expression as the face had done. Could it be—sinister recollections stole across my mind; strange tales of men who had kept their victims under lock and key, administering to them some slow and subtle poison. The memory of a picture that I had once seen came back to me. A girl with wizened form, and death-like countenance. I had been told it was the study of a girl poisoned by lead.

"*It will be the same with you as with the others!*" Mrs. Moran's words came back to me at this moment. Perhaps "one of the others" was in the room next to mine, suffering agony, or—the thought chilled me again to horror—*dead*.

If only the day would come; so slow, so dark were the hours. Never had the torch of morning tarried so long to light the East. I tried to force my thoughts to other things, for fear of the dread that weighed on me. I strove to recall fragments of verse, to evoke some kindly image of security.

At length the blackness of night gave place to the grey of a quiet dawning. I watched till the light stealing between the curtains at the window touched the edge of the carpet; then waited breathless while it crept by slow and sure degrees across the room. Now it was even with the couch, another minute it would reach the table, now, with a cry, I stretched out my hand. The light had fallen on a letter lying on the floor.

The distance from my chair to where the letter lay was but the matter of a yard or so. I dragged myself towards the spot and clutched it eagerly. Scrawled in pencil, on a half sheet of paper, was the following:

"I am kept here against my will by my uncle, who desires my death. Will you help me to escape? Say nothing to anyone, but if you will help me knock three times on the wall—under the fanlight.

It was a woman's writing, and showed signs of great agitation

I managed to reach the wall, and gave three distinct raps on the panels; a minute or two elapsed, and then three fainter raps assured me that the message had been understood.

It remained for the occupant of the other room to reopen communication. It did not seem as if her life were in immediate danger, otherwise her appeal would have been even more strongly worded. I decided I could do nothing until the morning. By that time, if I could snatch a few hours' rest, I should be better able to judge the situation. The terrors of the night had left me utterly worn out, and I fell into a sleep sound as a child's.

I did not get up till late the following afternoon. My ankle was less swollen. I was able to walk a few steps without much pain.

Mrs. Moran waited on me herself. I saw neither Rachel the grim, nor Janet the frivolous.

"I hope you had a good night, my dear," she asked kindly. "My husband's niece sleeps in the next room. She's ill, poor thing, and inclined to be restless. Did she disturb you at all?"

"Not in the least," I answered, ready and unashamed. "What is the matter with her, Mrs. Moran?"

"The doctor says it is blood poisoning, my dear; but I think she's in a decline. All her family are consumptive; a pretty girl she used to be, and full of fun. It's sad to see how terribly she's altered."

"Has she lived with you long?"

"She came to us two years ago, when her father died. Truscot was left her guardian. He was very fond of her, and is so now, for that matter, though she's taken a turn against him. She and Arthur Merridew, the young fellow I pointed out to you, took up with one another. I like Arthur myself, but he was nothing of a match for Lesbia. My husband opposed their engagement, and discharged Arthur from his employment. That was in January—nine months back. Lesbia took it to heart terribly, and has pined away ever since."

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Twenty-one next month—if she lives till then she'll be her own mistress, and can marry whom she likes. But——" Mrs. Moran sighed, and dropped her hands helplessly beside her.

My pity and my curiosity were roused to the highest pitch by this statement. I longed for the evening, when the unfortunate Lesbia would perhaps give me her account of the story. Meanwhile, anxiety on my own account had not lessened. I had hoped Maggie would wire to me on receipt of my letter; as the hours went on without bringing the expected telegram, I began to speculate upon the chance of Noel answering my appeal in person.

Every knock at the door set my heart in a flutter; it might be that my lover himself had come.

By half-past nine I had worked myself up to a terrible pitch of excitement. I felt I could not bear another hour of suspense. Just as I had made up my mind to quit my room and gain the hall—preparatory to going out—Mrs. Moran hastily appeared.

"Here!" She struggled for breath, and thrust a letter in my hand. I slipped it in my bodice—none too quickly, as things happened. A step sounded outside my door. Truscot Moran's voice asked in mellow tones if I were better.

"Much better, thank you; almost well," I answered. "Mrs. Moran has been so good to me."

"I—I just brought up some grapes," she faltered. "Miss Gillespie said she had a fancy for them," and the poor thing pushed a plate of fruit towards me.

"Quite so. Did I hear the postman just now, Mary?"

"Yes, it was a letter for me," she answered, "a bill, I should say," and she handed him the missive deferentially.

He accepted the statement, though I do not think that for a moment he believed it. Together they went downstairs, wishing me "Good night." Barely had the echo of their steps died away before I locked the door and opened eagerly my letter.

It was from Maggie, and contained bad news. She wrote

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coldly, almost angrily. Briefly she stated that, owing to my rashness, everything had gone wrong. Had I waited at Mrs. Goodman's I should have met my lover, and my troubles would have ended. As it was, not only had I been tricked by Templeton and Co., but, as she feared, Noel also. He had received a message purporting to come from me, addressed from a house on the outskirts of Leicester.

Without waiting to consult Jim and Maggie, who were still searching for me by the canal, he started off, leaving the note with Mrs. Goodman. On their return, finding him absent, my friends, suspecting mischief, set off for the address mentioned. No such street or house existed! It was evident that Noel had fallen into a trap; at the present moment he was perhaps in the hands of the firm.

Not wishing to act on her own responsibility, Maggie wrote to me for instructions. Should she go to the police and tell them of Noel's disappearance, or, should nothing be done in the matter?

The news maddened me, my own position—alone in a strange house, surrounded by mystery and peril—faded into insignificance beside the thought that harm had come to Noel.

I would wire to the Dunkleys that night, and tell them at all cost to go to the police; alas! even as I hurried impetuously to the door, the insuperable obstacle of my lameness came home to me. I could not go out myself, nor, in face of Mrs. Moran's warning, could I send anybody else.

I must wait, hardest of all tasks, for the morning. Then come what might I would leave the house.

Shortly after midnight I heard three faint raps on the wall. I answered the signal in the recognised fashion, and a few minutes later the fanlight was softly pushed back, and the face, that awful livid face, looked down at me once more. Mounting a chair, I reached towards her.

"You are ill," I said softly; "what is it?"

"I am being poisoned," she answered, in a thin, quavering voice. "In the food I eat, the air I breathe, in my clothes, in the very paper on the walls of my room, there is poison. It chokes me, kills me, turning me slowly but surely from a living woman to a dead one. My uncle wants my money. Next month I am of age, and I can make a will and leave my fortune as I wish. If I die before that time, my fortune comes to him, my father's brother, the man who swore to love me as his own child. At first he was not unkind to me, later, when I learnt to love Arthur Merridew, his clerk, he changed. It did not suit him that I should marry, he wanted my money for other very different purposes. And so he sent Arthur away, and for me he planned a cruel and lingering death."

"But the doctor," I urged, "what does he say?"

"He is an old man and very stupid; he will not listen to a word against my uncle, and ascribes my complaints to a disordered brain. I cannot escape by myself; I am too weak, and the house is too well guarded. I know I must die, there is no hope of saving my life. But"—she stretched out a claw-like hand in piteous pleading—"but I don't want to die here; I must see him—see Arthur, before I go. If I could be with him a little while; just a few short days, it would not be so hard. Will you help me?" Her eyes, alight with fever, burnt into mine; the face, discoloured beyond recognition, worked convulsively.

"I will do my best," I answered; "at any rate, I can inform your lover as to what is happening. First of all, however, tell me why your aunt doesn't interfere?"

"She believes as the doctor says, that I am suffering from blood-poisoning—she does not suspect her husband of foul play. Besides, there is a reason, a great reason why she cannot, dare not, interfere with anything he does. She was married before she met uncle, and by her first husband she had a son named Dick. My uncle has discovered something about him and threatens to have him prosecuted whenever my aunt remonstrates; she's not a bad woman, but a very weak one."

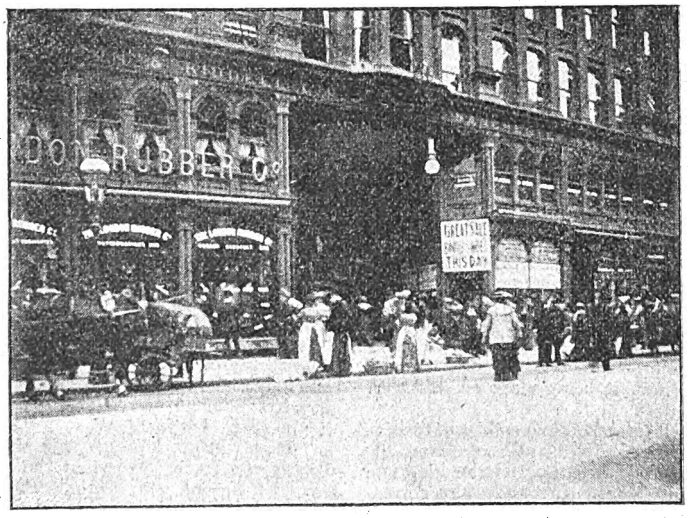
"Tell me," I said, "have there been any girls here before I came? Mrs. Moran said something about certain lady companions she had had?"

"Two girls were engaged at different times to stay with Aunt Mary. They were both orphans, without friends or families. They both died within a twelvemonth of their coming here, and"—her voice sank to a low murmur—"the lives of both were insured in favour of my uncle."

I shrank back aghast and trembling at her words.

"You need not be afraid," she went on with a horrible laugh, "you'll be quite safe—until you are insured. Be careful," she added, "not to let him know where your people live, he will get their consent to the insurance, upon some plausible pretext, and then you will have difficulty to refuse."

"I shall not stay here after to-morrow," I said, gasping. "I'll get out of the house as soon as it is light."



The Great Western Arcade, the place appointed for the meeting between Sara and Mrs. Merridew.

"You won't leave me? You promised you'd help me. For the love of Heaven don't break your word."

"I can help you more easily outside the house than in it."

"Indeed you are wrong; at any moment my uncle may make up his mind to bring things to a quick conclusion. If you are in the house, you may be able to stop it, you may—oh!"—the poor thing began to sob in a fashion terrible to witness—"don't leave me, help me, for God's sake, help me to go to Arthur."

Against that plea I could not steel my heart. She, like me, was persecuted for the sake of the man she loved. I would do my best to help her, so long—I had to insist on the proviso—so long as her interests did not clash with Noel's.

She seemed comforted by my assurance, and with many thanks, crept softly from the fanlight back to her own room.

The next morning I was early astir; my ankle, though weak, pained me much less; with care, I felt sure I could get about as much as I wished. I came downstairs at the summons of the gong to breakfast. Mrs. Moran raised hands and eyes, in protest at my foolhardiness, but Truscot praised my courage and welcomed me enthusiastically.

"I suppose you are not able to come down to my office to-day, Miss Gillespie, otherwise I could install you as my assistant immediately; I have a lot of work on hand, and both my clerks are laid up with influenza."

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"Indeed, I am quite recovered," I said, with a smile, misleading as his own. "I'll be at Colemore Row by twelve o'clock, Mr. Moran, and shall expect a hard day's work."

I left the house a little after ten; with the aid of a stick I found I could walk without great inconvenience. Still my progress was necessarily slow, and I was glad to hail a cab which I encountered at the end of the Russell Road.

I directed the man to drive straight to the chief post office, an imposing building facing Victoria Square.

Leaning back, I surveyed the panorama of the streets; noting once more the sharpness of the contrast between the fashionable thoroughfares—Corporation Street, with its costly shops, New Street with its bristling activity—and the squalor of the side streets, through which one caught a glimpse of slums, black and festering cancers that eat into the very heart of the great City.

During the drive I decided on my plan of action. I would wire instructions to Maggie to appeal at once to the authorities. Meanwhile, I should remain at Truscot's house. There, whatever peril I might run, I was safe from Templeton and Co., in another place I might fall into the hands of the enemy. Besides—and this weighed with me—I had promised to help the unfortunate Lesbia, I could not turn my back on the unfortunate girl.

My telegram dispatched, I sought Mr. Arthur Merridew. He was engaged in a small office in Cherry Street, at the princely salary of a pound a week! A shabby, careworn youth. I was not impressed by his manners or his looks, until I mentioned Lesbia.

Then a smile flashed into his eyes that utterly transformed him. He became young, ardent, almost good-looking.

"She sent me a message?" he said; "how good, how dear of her."

He did not seem to have heard of her illness, and was horror-stricken when I told him of her condition.

"We cannot talk here," he said, "we may be overheard. These people know Mr. Moran well. I shall be free about five o'clock, if you will meet me in the Art Gallery, we could discuss matters undisturbed.

I agreed to the proposal, and, it being close on mid-day, took a cab to Colmore Row.

Mr. Moran's offices were well furnished in a solid and respectable fashion that reminded me unpleasantly of Great St. Helens. One large room opening into another smaller one comprised the suite. I found Moran surrounded by correspondence. He greeted me with a nod, and signed to me to take a seat at the table, and commenced to dictate the answers to his letters.

"You'll do," he said shortly. "You're as smart as I thought you were, and that's saying a great deal. I'll give you two pounds a week, if you care to come to me as typine. You can stay at Truscot's house into the bargain; you'll be a nice companion for my niece. Didn't know I had one?"—he laughed unpleasantly—"I'll introduce you to-night," he said abruptly, and recommenced his dictation.

He kept me hard at it till close on three, when we were interrupted by a caller.

Mr. Moran motioned to me to retire into the inner room, where I found a typewriter located. The latch of the door was defective, so that it did not quite close, any secrets that Mr. Moran and his visitor may have discussed, however, were rendered inaudible by the click of the machine—besides, their voices were quite low.

I heard the man depart, Mr. Moran accompanying him to the landing. In a minute or two the former returned; some one was with him, a man with a heavy step, and—I guessed, a portly figure.

"How's business?" said the new-comer.

He had a smooth, insinuating voice, a voice that of a sudden set the room whirling round me, and made my fingers shake and quiver on the keys.

"Templeton!" I gasped, and, panic-stricken, thumped the typewriter, fearing lest silence should arouse suspicion.

I did not catch Moran's reply—I was listening so eagerly to my enemy's next words.

"I'm glad to hear you're prospering. How's the niece? What, not pegged out yet? Good gracious, what constitutions these young people have! Now, there's a girl of ours—the firm's, I mean, who has been through enough trouble and anxiety to kill a man twice over, and yet she's still alive and apparently unhurt."

"Who is it?" said Moran. "The girl who stole your notes? Some of your people sent me a bill describing her. Red hair, green eyes—isn't that it? Doesn't sound very attractive."

"That's the girl. I've reason," Templeton seemed to draw nearer the other, "I've reason to believe she's here—in Birmingham. I've set our best men to trace her out, but so far it's no go. She's covered her tracks so safely, there's no unearthing them. Now you, as a local man, may know better how to set about the business, we *must* find her, it's more important now than ever."

"Why, has the value of the document she stole gone up?"

"That's so. It's worth more now than it ever was. The reason"—Templeton hesitated, in my anxiety to catch what followed, I raised my fingers from the keyboard, not daring to press a single letter.

"We've secured Noel Masterman, and put him in a safe, sure place. Nobody—except a factory girl, at Northampton, and she can't prove it—knows he is in England. In his absence we are authorised to deal with his estate. We can and will deal with it, most expeditiously—only——"

"I understand," said Moran, "everything is to your hand except the deed, and that——"

"Is in the hands of Sara Gillespie. The question is, will you help us to find her?"

"What are your terms?" said Moran brusquely

"How much do you want?"

"A fourth of the estate."

"Preposterous! Do you take me for a fool?"

"I take you for a hard-headed man of business, Templeton, and, as such, I give you three minutes to consider my offer. If the girl is to be found I shall have to devote money and time to the business. I shall have to run considerable risks. The longer she remains hidden the less your chance of success. At any moment the bubble may burst. Masterman may escape, Sara Gillespie——"

"That will do, Moran," said the other, "I don't want to discuss any more. We want the girl, in fact, we must have her. I'll accept your terms. Find Sara Gillespie, and you stand in with the three of us. A fourth of the estate to each."

"I will produce the lady," answered Moran, "there's no fear as to that."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and walked across the office, towards the room in which I sat. I counted his steps, one, two, three—Good Heavens, in another second he would reach the door—and I—I, who had fought so long and so painfully for Noel, would find defeat.

I covered my face with my hands, leaning my head upon the table, and waited—as I think a victim must wait for the executioner's knife—for Moran to denounce me.

A heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder, sick unto death I turned. Through the half open door I caught a glimpse of Templeton. His back was towards me, he stood waiting, impatient for Moran to return. Could I make a dash for freedom—rush through the door, past Templeton, and out into the corridor? I might have done so, but for my ankle. As it was I made a step across the room.

Truscot caught hold of me, smiling at my torture of suspense.

Then, with a little laugh, he released me.

"Get on with your letters, my dear," he said, "you're not wanted in the other room this afternoon."

I dropped back limp as a rag into my chair, unable to realise that the danger was past. I understood it thoroughly, however, when, some ten minutes later, Templeton having departed, Moran reappeared.

"Well," he said, "are you going to thank me for what I've done? Poor little girl, you're quite white. You're shaking," and he stroked my face in a caressing fashion, that sent the

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blood flushing to my cheeks. He noticed my discomfiture, and seemed annoyed at it.

"You're wonderfully sensitive, Miss Gillespie, considering the adventures you have passed through. Come, don't you think you owe me some gratitude for what I've done for you?"

He leant towards me as he spoke; Truscot Moran was going to kiss me! As his face, handsome, despite its evil mouth and eyes, came nearer, a flame of anger, indignation, and contempt, rose within me. He was the only person who could help me, the one man who stood between Templeton and me; but all considerations of the kind went down before my indignation. I struck at him with my clenched fist, leaving a mark upon his evil, smiling face.

He fell back with an oath.

"That will do," he said slowly, as, frightened at my own temerity, I gasped forth some sort of an apology. "I'll conduct all further negotiations with you on strictly business principles, Miss Gillespie, be sure of that," he sneered as he spoke, and my heart contracted miserably.

"I've undertaken to hand you over to Templeton on conditions which you overheard this afternoon. I shall keep my undertaking, the only thing left for me to decide is when I shall complete the contract, whether, in short, I shall inform Templeton of your whereabouts to-night, or in a week, or in a month, as the case may be."

"Not to-night," I pleaded desperately. "Give me till to-morrow, just till to-morrow."

"I'll give you three days," was the reply, "on certain conditions. It never pays to give something for nothing, Miss Gillespie—as I have just learnt. If you want three days' liberty, you must pay the price. It's not a hard, not an excessive price—you've just got to pretend you're my niece, Lesbia Moran, for half an hour, that's all. To put it plainly, you've to accompany me to an insurance office where I shall take out a policy for you as Lesbia. The doctor will examine you, and, finding you healthy—you look very strong, Miss Gillespie—will pass you, as a suitable client. Lesbia, as you are aware, is dying, she will be dead before the month is out; at her death I shall claim £5,000, the amount of the policy taken out this afternoon."

"It's—it's fraudulent!" I gasped.

"Quite so, and you will be a party to the fraud."

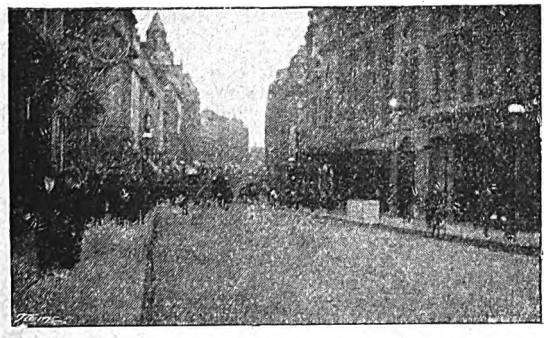
"I can't do it," I said desperately, "whatever happens."

"Very good. I'll ring up Templeton on the telephone and have a chat with him."

He strolled towards the instrument as he spoke, and leisurely proceeded to ring up. For a minute I did battle for conscience' sake. It was a fraud, and by consenting I became involved. And yet, could I refuse? For Noel's sake, my sweetheart, who was in danger, who, if I lost my liberty would be left friendless, and alone, without a soul to fight his battle.

Love before all things was my motto, for love's sake I would do even this.

"You need not ring up Mr. Templeton," I said slowly, "I will come with you to the office and pass as your niece."



The Insurance Offices, to which Sara was taken, were situated near New Street.

Cannon Hill Park, where it was arranged that Lesbia and her lover, Arthur Merridew, should be brought together.

"That's a sensible young woman," he said calmly; "I thought you'd come round in time. There's just one thing more to settle, and then we'll get off. You'd better understand that it's quite hopeless for you to attempt to escape. There's no spot in which you can hide in Birmingham unknown to me, nothing you can do I shall not find out. You must have realised that for yourself from what Templeton said. To-day, for instance," he smiled serenely, "you called and interviewed Mr. Arthur Merridew at his office in Cherry Street. Don't trouble to protest, Miss Gillespie, it's useless; I'll keep my part of the bargain, if you'll keep yours. To-day is Wednesday, on Saturday—three days from now—I hand you to Templeton, meantime, take my advice, and don't endeavour to escape, if you do, you will merely precipitate the event."

Against my will, his words convinced me; I realised there was no chance of escape for the next three days. Silently I got ready to accompany Mr. Moran, and listened to certain instructions as to the coming interview. I did not speak until we drew up at the Insurance Offices near New Street. Mr. Moran introduced me as his niece; he had evidently arranged the interview, for all preliminaries had already been settled. I was ushered into a room, where the Doctor, a kindly-looking man, proceeded to test my lungs and heart.

The examination was entirely satisfactory. He told me I was in good health, and likely to live to an advanced age. At the last moment my courage failed me; I felt I must confess I was not Lesbia. I turned towards him appealingly.

"I—I—am not——"

Mr. Moran's voice immediately outside the door checked the words. I must go through with the business—for Noel's sake.

"You did that very well, my dear," said my "uncle," as we left the office. "You've the makings of a first-class adventuress."

I looked at him quite steadily, and said:

"I've done what I undertook, Mr. Moran. You named the terms, I accepted them; now the positions are reversed. It is for me to dictate; for you to obey. You promised me three days of safety—to wait till Saturday before you gave me up. Listen to me, on the day you betray me to Templeton, the Insurance Company will be acquainted with the fraud that's just been practised. I have provided against every contingency; I wrote a note while I was with the Doctor, and posted it a moment ago in that box. The note was addressed to friends whom I can trust; I have instructed them that any morning they fail to get a telegram, assuring them of my safety, they are to post on the inclosure sent with the letter. That inclosure is addressed to the Secretary of the Insurance Company."

I smiled as I concluded, and gazed at him serenely.

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"I rather think I have the best of this bargain, Mr. Moran; and now, I'm going to look at the pictures in the Art Gallery. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to run away, I shall be back at Russell Road a little later."

"And pray what are you going to do, if you meet with Templeton?" he sneered.

"That's your look-out, not mine; any morning my friends don't hear from me, you know what will ensue."

He ground his teeth with rage, and yet unwilling admiration shone in his eyes.

"Little vixen!" he murmured, "you have done me this time. The next——" He smiled significantly, and turned aside.

It was considerably past five when I reached the Art Gallery; I feared Arthur Merridew had gone, but after a little search I found him. He was in the first room, seated in front of one of the greatest pictures of modern times, "The Last of England." He was gazing at the exquisite face of the woman, as with her blue eyes, glistening with tears, she looks her last on her native land. His own eyes were misty, and his lips moved, seeming to shape the name of "Lesbia."

He started when I spoke to him, and, pointing to the picture, asked if I did not see the likeness.

"Lesbia's hair is just that beautiful shade of chestnut; those are her very eyes, and the mouth is the same."

I gasped at the words, and thought of the poor distorted face that had looked out at me from the window.

"Lesbia is not like that now," I said "you must understand she is terribly altered, she declares she is being poisoned, and I am inclined to agree with her."

"We will go to the police," he declared excitedly, "and ask for Moran's arrest."

"Nothing of the sort," I answered impatiently; "no one would take any notice of you. The only thing to be done is to plan an escape. Lesbia must be got out of the house. I will manage to see her to-night and take her some food, which she can eat in safety, so that by Friday she will be a little stronger. This is my plan—Mr. and Mrs. Moran must be got out of the house on Friday evening about seven. At that hour, you must be waiting with a carriage a few doors from Truscot's, house. I will bring Lesbia to you—the rest is in your hands."

"It's impossible for me to meet you near the house; Moran always has someone on the watch when he's away, and that would spoil it all; you see, he's always suspected me of trying to communicate with Lesbia. He tried to compel me to leave Birmingham—I had great trouble to get any work after he discharged me; now I am only kept on sufferance at a miserable salary of a pound a week."

"What do you propose then?" I asked impatiently; I was sorry for him, but it was not fitting to sympathise.

"I'll wait for you in Cannon Hill Park; I'll be there at seven, and stay till you come."

"Very good; meanwhile you must do your share. Find out the favourite haunts of Mrs. Moran's son Dick. Then send a wire in his name urging her to meet him. Also you must wire to Moran. I will write you the message you must send to him, and post it on to you. Can you do this?"

"Of course; I am very grateful to you for suggesting it."

"I must warn you, Lesbia's very ill. She will not be able to stand much of a journey. Where are you going to take her on Friday?"

"I'll take her to my mother, she'll look after her and nurse her back to health. Also," he flushed and hesitated, "I shall persuade her to marry me almost at once. A man can protect his wife against everything."

He looked too absurdly young and insignificant to protect anybody; but he seemed truly fond of Lesbia, and was not without intelligence.

"How shall I know if you've carried out these arrangements?" I asked.

"Go down Corporation Street on Friday at five o'clock, past the Great Western Arcade; my mother will be standing at the entrance. She's an old lady and wears a black beaded cloak, and a bonnet with violets. Look at her carefully, but don't speak. If she nods to you, you will understand everything is satisfactory. If she makes no sign, Lesbia's escape must be delayed."

I agreed to the proposal and once more repeated my instructions, wished him "Good luck!" and departed, leaving him to feast again upon "The Last of England."

By this time my ankle was aching pretty badly; I managed, however, to get to the post office and inquire for telegrams.

No wire had as yet been received; I was not over anxious as to the delay—I had already matured a scheme, by means of which I hoped to extort Noel's whereabouts from Templeton, through the agency of Moran. Thinking it wiser to save my strength than my money, I took a cab and drove to a large grocer's in Corporation Street, where I purchased a bottle of brandy, some strong soup, and some eggs.

Brilliantly lit and busy with a pleasant, bustling throng, crowding to look into the shops, Corporation Street was at its best. I envied the women with their husbands, the girls with their sweethearts. When—ah! when should I be once more with Noel?

I stared dreamily at the stream of sight-seers, oblivious of the cab, forgetful of Lesbia—even of myself. I was recalled to things present by a touch on the arm.

"If you want to meet the senior partner, Miss Gillespie, he's just round the corner. He'll be here directly."

Truscot Moran's eyes flashed into mine.

There was no need for a second warning; forgetful of my ankle, I flew across the pavement, and bundled into the hansom.

The next minute we were dashing along, in the direction of Russell Road. The trams with their hideous clang and clatter, passed us at intervals, and as usual sent a thrill of apprehension through me. A sort of panic seized me at the approach of these monsters. They filled me with an unreasoning terror.

Nothing of note occurred that evening. Mrs. Moran, sat placid in a gown of ruby velvet, and lamented Truscot's late returning. I endured both the gown and the lamentations till ten o'clock, then I said "Good night," and went upstairs.

I passed Rachel on the way; she glanced at me suspiciously, and hardly returned my greeting. In my calculations as to Friday, I had left out the grim and silent woman.

When the house was silent and the hour late, I cautiously rapped on the fanlight. Lesbia looked a little less ghastly than on the previous occasion; she told me she had abstained from food during the day, and the result seemed beneficial. I passed her the eggs and brandy, with directions to beat them

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up together and swallow at intervals during the next twenty-four hours. I instructed her to get some outdoor clothing in readiness by Friday, when I hoped she would see her lover. I repeated Arthur's messages, and encouraged her to the best of my capacity.

The next day passed uneventfully. I worked at the office until six; then returned to Truscot's house, calling at the Post Office on my way. Maggie wired to say she had been to the police, but they seemed to regard her story with suspicion. If my plan succeeded, I was not likely to want their assistance, however. To-morrow—by to-morrow—success or failure would be assured. If I could get Lesbia away from Truscot's house to the safe keeping of Merridew, I should practically have the whip hand of Moran.

I determined to drive a bargain with him, hard and fast, I should threaten that unless he obtained for me Noel's whereabouts I would expose him out and out to the insurance office, I would produce the real Lesbia, and in face of such a piece of evidence, Moran would be lost.

Thursday evening I handed Lesbia a fresh supply of food, I repeated my instructions as to her conduct the next day. At six o'clock, when Rachel usually brought up her tea, she would complain of headache, and express a desire to go to bed. Having seen her safely tucked up, the woman would go downstairs, leaving the patient free to dress herself. By that time, if things went well, Mr. and Mrs. Moran would have gone out, and the coast would be clear. I had not yet thought out a way of removing Rachel, I left that over, hoping for an inspiration at the last.

The hours dragged terribly the next day. The suspense was almost intolerable. I had instructed Merridew as to the nature of the wire he was to send—it was a message of urgency, purporting to come from Templeton—and all day long I hoped and feared for its arrival. Not until Moran was leaving the office for the day, did the telegram arrive. He tore the wire open, read its purport, then, with a cunning glance at me, lounged out of the office.

Did he believe it, or had he scented forgery? I had no means of discovering whether or no he was already in communication with Templeton. If that were so, the game was already lost. There was still one chance, however, in my favour. Fortune is kind to the rash, and my plan was rash indeed.

From the office I made my way to Corporation Street. Anxiety kept a keen look-out for Merridew's old mother. I saw her waiting a short distance from the entrance to the Arcade, a pretty old lady, slight and fragile, with silver hair banded over her ears, neat black gown and beaded mantle, and a small bunch of violets in her bonnet.

She tightened her lips as she caught sight of me, and nodded her head with much insistence. I smiled, passed on, and, hailing the nearest cab, drove as quickly as possible to Russell Road.

I arrived at Truscot's house about a quarter to six; from that time events came quickly. Mrs. Moran had received a telegram from her son, Janet informed me, and would not be back till late.

"It's a fine night," I said encouragingly, "a run would do you good. If you like to go out I'll answer any rings at the bell, Rachel needn't know, and I don't suppose the cook will mind."

Janet dimpled with pleasure, and a few minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing her trim figure running down the garden path. My next difficulty was Rachel.

On going upstairs I found Lesbia looking through the fan-light. The poor thing had fastened a sailor-hat on her thin hair, excitement had brought a less livid colour to her cheeks. She was quite self-possessed, and ready to do all I told her.

"You've taken some soup, and eggs, and brandy?" I questioned.

She nodded.

"That's good! Do you feel very weak?"

"Horribly, but I shall be strong enough to get away from this house. I shall keep up till then——" her mouth worked, and large tears fell on her hand

"You mustn't cry now," I said peremptorily. "Pull yourself together like a good girl. Is your door locked?"

"Yes, and Rachel has the key."

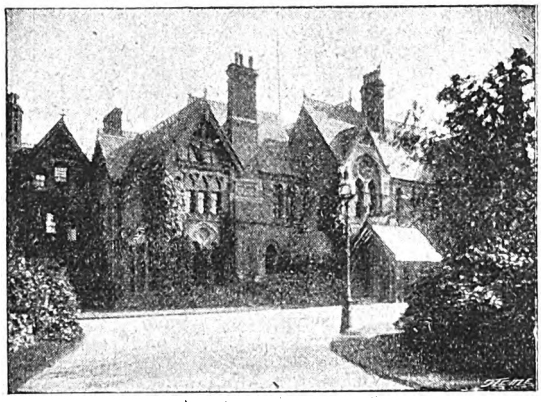
Now this was an eventuality I had not foreseen. For a moment I wondered if it would be possible for Lesbia to climb through the fan-light, and escape through my door. A moment's consideration convinced me of the impossibility of such a project.

"Lesbia," said I, "you must ring the bell violently, furiously, as if you were alarmed, or taken very ill. Rachel will hurry to answer it, when she's outside the door and you hear her turn the key, call out that she must come at once. In her hurry she will perhaps leave the key in the door; I shall be outside waiting to seize it.

Lesbia fell in with the project, and rang the bell imperiously and repeatedly, till Rachel, grumbling but alarmed, appeared.

"Quick, quick!" cried Lesbia, "Make haste, you'll be too late."

Muttering and angry, Rachel pushed the door open, she withdrew the key, but in her haste it slipped from her fingers. She stooped to pick it up, but I was too quick for her. Thrusting my hand over her shoulder, I grabbed it



Highbury, the residence of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, where Sara went to appeal for help.

from the floor. She clutched me round the waist, and tried to drag me down beside her, but, too lissom for her to hold, I wriggled myself free. Lesbia took advantage of this interlude with more courage and initiative than I thought she possessed. I don't quite know how it happened—things came so quickly—but in an incredibly short time I stood beside her on the landing, the key of the door in my pocket, and Rachel locked in the room.

She was not likely to stay there long, however, already her knocks and bangings, to say nothing of her shouts, seemed to fill the house.

But for Janet's timely absence, and the fact that the cook was both lazy and deaf, our manœuvre would have been futile. As it was, I had half carried, half dragged my charge down the stairs and out into the street, just as the cook arrived in the hall to investigate the disturbance. I whistled to the hired brougham waiting in readiness, and, lifting Lesbia in my arms—the poor thing was incredibly thin—carried her towards it.

The door banged, the carriage drove off up Russell Road to Cannon Hill Park; so far my plan had answered perfectly.

I had grave doubts, however, at one period, whether my charge would last until the journey's end. Her sudden spurt of courage had exhausted the last remnant of vitality. She lay back motionless, it seemed to me dead. I poured brandy down her throat, and abjured her in Arthur's name, to rally. She revived a little, but I felt very anxious, and it was with

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grave misgivings I left her, on arriving at the Park, to seek out Arthur.

He was not within sight at the gate, and as in desperation I hurried on, I yet could catch no glimpse of him. Mad with fear I ran at top speed calling his name.

I found him gazing at the water, murmuring Lesbia's name. I'm afraid I roused him from his reverie rather abruptly.

"Come at once," I said, giving him a little shake. "You'll find her gone if you're not careful."

He needed no further spur, and together we returned to Lesbia. I watched their meeting, and forgave the young man all his sentiment and affectation by reason of his tenderness towards her. Neither by word nor look did he betray the awful shock her alteration must have given him.

She had been a comely-looking girl when last he saw her—now—I sighed, and tears sprang to my eyes.

Gathering her in his arms, he murmured all his love and affection. My last glimpse showed me her head upon his shoulder, gazing into his eyes.

And to me they did not give a thought!

Now that Lesbia was safely off my mind, I turned my thoughts to my own affairs—and Noel's. Moran I calculated would return about eight. At that hour I decided to call at the house, inform him of my share in what had taken place, and threaten to expose him unless he obtained from Templeton particulars as to my lover's whereabouts. Busy with my thoughts I turned into "Reddings," watching the lights of the distant town shine through the trees.

I walked a short distance along the footpath, until I reached a hedgerow, thick and high.

The next minute I had stopped short, my senses on the alert. At the other side of the hedge Templeton and Moran were conversing.

"I won't come any farther, thank you," said the former. "I must get back to the hotel. You understand how matters lie?"

"Exactly," Moran answered, "I hand the girl over to you to-morrow, in return you give me the address of her friends at Northampton, so that I can stop their communicating with the insurance people!"

"That's so, I think we're in sight of home at last, Moran. It's been a tough fight, but at last she's in our power."

They shook hands and parted, leaving me overwhelmed with the discovery. The ground was cut from under my feet; I dare not denounce Moran, the denunciation would entail my own discovery.

What could I do, to whom could I appeal in my distress?

Like a flash the answer came. I would go to the idol of Birmingham, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain himself. Surely he would listen to my story, surely he would give me help. Buoyed up with hope I tramped the road that led from the "Reddings" to Highbury, but when, the large gates passed, I stood in full view of the great house, my courage failed me.

As I stood hesitating, the door opened, Chamberlain himself, accompanied by his son, walked down the steps. Before I had time to frame an appeal, they had stepped into the waiting carriage and had driven off. My last chance was gone!

Utterly exhausted, I made my way to a seat by the roadside, there I waited till a belated cab, journeying back to the city, offered to take me as a cheap fare. I decided to go to Mrs. Merridew's, where I could pass the night, and therefore agreed to his proposal. The cab deposited me in the middle of Corporation Street; Arthur's mother lived in a street off the Moseley Road. I turned in that direction; my way led me through Old Square, the terminus of those terrible steam trams. For a long time I stood at the corner of the Square, hesitating to cross, for fear I might stumble and fall a victim to one of the trams. As I stood waiting on the kerb, debating with myself when I should take the plunge, I became conscious that someone was staring at me from the other side of Corporation Street!

I looked up and recognised the senior partner. Panic-stricken I rushed across the Square, hoping to evade him in the traffic. Fearful of losing me he launched himself into the road at the same moment. A shout rose from the by-standers—my heart was in my throat, I glanced back. The shouts grew louder.

"Take care, take care!" the people cried. And then I realised what the warning meant. Within a few feet of me, steering straight for me, was a huge tram, belching forth clouds of smoke—another second it would be upon me—another second—I stood transfixed with horror, I could not move

(Another long instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

THE LOVE of MIRIAM NORTH.

How a Careless Youth Hurt a Woman's Feelings.

PEOPLE said that Miriam North never had a love affair in her life; but her world did not know what Miriam North knew as she stood one night before her mirror and curled a few loose locks of her reddish-brown hair that had fallen over her forehead.

When she had finished she stepped back a little and looked at herself with a sense of satisfaction. She looked very well, nobody could deny that. One would not think she was thirty years old, she said to herself with a slightly heightened colour that became her.

Miriam was a rather pretty woman. She had a pale, creamy complexion and a wealth of burnished reddish hair that Will admired so. Her face was a long oval; she had good brows and rather fine eyes of the same warm hue as her hair. Her nose and mouth were large. To-night her hat suited her, and the dull fawn of her jacket threw into relief her ruddy hair and eyes. She caught herself hoping that Will would notice it, and then threw back her head and called herself a fool.

"If anybody guessed, how they would laugh at me," she said, biting her lips sharply.

When she went down, Will and Kate and Bob were waiting impatiently for her at the front door. Kate was sure they would be late for the concert on account of Miriam's fussiness.

She was Miriam's sister, and Bob was her brother, but Will Harper was merely a distant cousin. A handsome, round-faced, boyish fellow of nineteen or twenty, he was listening to Kate's lively chatter with a rather bored expression. His eyes lightened up as Miriam came downstairs, and he stepped forward eagerly.

Kate and Bob snickered significantly as they started down the paths between the rows of red and yellow dahlias. Kate was eighteen, and, in common with the rest of Lynborough, looked on Miriam as a confirmed old maid. It seemed to her too funny for anything that Will should prefer Miriam's company to hers. At the gate Bob paused to call out:

"If you two stand mooning there all night, you'll be late for the concert."

Miriam winced a little. She was pinning a cluster of asters to Will's coat.

"You look stunning to-night, Mirry," he whispered admiringly.

She coloured again with a pleasure she was ashamed of.

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How foolish of her to be so pleased with a boy's admiration. They walked slowly down the long, elm-shaded street in the purple gloom of the dusk. When the concert was over they walked back again in the moonlight. Bob and Kate had gone in before them, but, as they turned in at the gate, Will drew Miriam aside into the shadow of the trees.

"Don't let's go in for a while, Mirry. It's just the thing out here. And I want to have a talk with you before I go, you know I'm off to college to-morrow, and won't be back till next Spring. I don't believe you are a bit sorry."

"Oh, Will!"

"Well, I don't. You know how much I think of you, Mirry. I've told you so often, and you've just put me off and off, and never would give me a decided answer. But you will now, Mirry, won't you, before I go. Promise you'll marry me as soon as I get through college, and I'll be the happiest fellow in the world."

He put his arm round her coaxingly, and bent forward to look up into her face.

Miriam laughed a little.

"You foolish boy! Why won't you stop talking such nonsense? I've told you often enough I'm too old for you to marry. It would never do. Why, you're just a boy, Will, and I—I am an old maid."

"You're nothing of the sort, Mirry," he said stoutly. "You're far prettier than Kate. I don't care if you are older than I—that will never make any difference. I've known you all my life—and we've been such chums—and you must marry me, Mirry. Promise me now, do, dear."

"You will change your mind in a year or two," she warned him.

"I won't. If you won't take me, I'll never look at any other girl. Oh, Mirry, why can't you say now at once that you'll marry me, and make a fellow happy, and not keep putting him off this way every time?"

Miriam sighed. Will had said the same thing a dozen times that summer. Nobody knew or guessed it but herself. Will Harper had always made a sort of second home at the North's. Miriam had been a grown-up young lady when he was a boy in knickerbockers, and he had always been a pet with her. It was only this summer that he had taken it into his head to be so—ridiculous.

Her own family looked upon her as very ancient, and thought Will's boyishly displayed devotion partook of a filial character. Hadn't Mirry always patronised him? Only Miriam knew the difference.

"Will," she said finally, "it seems a very silly thing for us to think of—very silly. You'll say so yourself some day. I can't give you any answer now. But if, when you come home next Spring, you feel just the same and—and—ask me again, I'll give you your answer then."

This did not suit Will at all, of course. He assured and protested that he would always feel the same, and that it was all nonsense, and positive cruelty besides, to drag him through a year of miserable suspense, when she might just as well settle the whole thing at once. But Miriam was firm, and Will had to accede grumblingly. Well, he would write her anyhow—every week, and she must write him—and he would work like a slave at college for her sake—and she wasn't to forget that she was as good as engaged to him.

They went in then for Will to say good-bye to them all. Kate noticed Miriam's crimson cheeks at once, and asked her if Will had been painting or kissing her out in the garden. Kate was the terror of poor Miriam's life.

Will said good-bye all round, and parted from Miriam with a whispered—

"Remember now, Mirry."

After he had gone, and while Mrs. North and Kate and Bob were saying how much they would miss him, and praising him up for a smart boy and likely to do well, Miriam went softly upstairs and sat down in the moonlight.

She was very happy—and a year would soon pass—and if Will was as fond of her as ever when he came back—she did not complete the last sentence, but buried her face softly in her hands, and blushed at her foolish dreams.

Will wrote regularly, as he had promised, and Miriam wrote back. In the Spring he came home. On the night she expected him Miriam was dressing painstakingly in her room, having first locked the door to keep Kate out. She tried on a dozen different dresses, and finally settled on a new white one. When she had finished dressing she surveyed herself contentedly. She looked well and hoped Will would like her appearance. Pure white suited her. She pinned a cluster of roses at her belt, and picked out a perfect bud for Will. She hoped that Kate would not notice anything unusual, or comment on it if she did.

She peered with some disquiet at the visible lines about her mouth and the crowsfeet at the corners of her eyes, and put up a finger to smooth them away. After all, she reflected, they were no plainer than they were a year ago, and Will had loved her then.

She pulled up the blind and sat down by the open window to watch the sunset through the trees. She was very, very happy. Will—her Will—would come in a few minutes—the dear boy. She had been cruel to make him wait so long for his answer. But the winter had gone, and he should have

Miriam sat down on the rustic seat, and Will stood beside her.

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it at last. How happy they would be, they two! It should make no difference, after all, that she was the older; at least she felt as young as he. He did not care. So she hugged herself in a little paroxysm of joy. To hurry the lagging moments she got out Will's letters to read over. Most of them were rather interesting, though not at all sentimental; but then she had forbidden him to write sentimentally. The last ones were rather short and dry—but of course it was all the fault of those "beastly examinations," Will himself said so. The last one of all was a mere scrawl—written a week before college closed. Miriam kissed the signature before she put the letter back in the bundle. Short or long, after all, what did letters matter? In a few minutes she would have Will himself.

When she heard his ring, she stood up, her heart fluttering nervously, her colour coming and going like a schoolgirl's. But she would not go down straight away—not until the first meetings were over and he had asked for her. Then she would slip down and in, and Will would spring to meet her and shake her hand with a little shy squeeze, as of old, and give her a significant look from his blue eyes. Then, after a while, when it grew dusk, she would slip out in the garden, and Will would follow her, and put his arm round her, and tell her he had come for his answer. She planned it all out, as she walked up and down the floor, listening to the sounds below. The minutes passed very slowly, but still nobody came. Half an hour went by before Kate came flying upstairs and into the room.

"Mirry, why on earth don't you come down? Don't you know Will is here? He's asking for you. You'll take Will's breath away completely, Mirry, if you swoop down upon him in all that splendour at once. Hadn't I better go down and prepare him?"

"Don't be idiotic, Kate," said Miriam, not so sharply as she might have. Kate stood aside in meek awe to let her pass. She went downstairs a little dizzily, and paused for an instant at the door with a sense of going through some carefully rehearsed performance.

Will was sitting on an ottoman, with his right foot hooked over his left knee, and his hat and cane on the chair beside him, vigorously discoursing to open-mouthed Bob on the events of his freshman year.

Becoming aware of Miriam's presence, he sprang up eagerly and gave her a hearty handshake, without any attempt at the old-time squeeze.

"Why, Mirry, is it you? I thought you weren't going to come down to see a fellow at all. You're looking well, though, isn't she, Bob? How are you, Mirry?"

"I'm—I'm very well," stammered Miriam faintly. It was the one solitary thing she could think of saying as she backed awkwardly to a seat in the corner. Will dropped back on his ottoman and resumed the interrupted thread of his speech to Bob. Miriam listened vaguely without understanding a word of it.

When Kate and Mrs. North came in again Will turned himself round to take in the circle. He had not changed much in appearance; there was a faint dark line on his upper lip, which he caressed with infinite care.

When it grew dusk Miriam rose and went noiselessly out. She had been pacing up and down the path for a long while before Will came. He was smoking a cigar, which he removed for an instant as he came up to her.

"Hope you don't object to a cigar, Mirry?"

"Oh, no, not at all," gasped Miriam.

"Glad of that," said Will carelessly. "It's a beastly bore when a fellow can't enjoy his cigar in peace. You were always a sensible sort, though, Mirry. Fine evening, isn't it? How have you been getting on?"

"Oh, very well," flatly.

"Any prospects of a lively time in Lynnborough this summer, or is it going to be as dull as it usually is?"

"I don't know," faltered poor Miriam confusedly; "there is some rumour of a few garden-parties or so."

"Beastly bores," said Will, with whom the expression seemed a pet one. "Well, of course, one doesn't expect much go in a place like this. Just as well, I suppose, one way you look at it. I've got some studying to do this summer."

"How did you get on in your examinations, Will?" said Miriam, plucking up a little courage at the prospect of a subject she could talk about.

"Well," said Will confidentially, "I don't mind telling you, Mirry, because I know you'll keep it close. You always were a brick like that. I didn't do much, and that's the fact. Didn't fail in any except those two, but it was just as much as ever I scraped up a bare pass in the rest. Don't tell the folks. I'm ashamed of it, I'll own. I really meant to work hard and distinguish myself and all that, but somehow—well, I don't know how it was exactly. There was always so much going on—parties and football and larks with the boys. And a fellow is never expected to do much his first year, except the plugs. But I mean to pull up next year, straight."

They had got round now to the rustic seat. Miriam sat down meekly and Will stood beside her.

"Look here, Mirry," he said awkwardly, getting very red in the face even in the dusk, "I know you're afraid I'm going to make a duffer of myself again this year, but you needn't be. That's what I came out to tell you. I knew you'd be glad."

"Oh!" said Miriam faintly.

"Yes, I was an awful fool last year; I see it now, just as you said I would. You were a regular brick, Mirry, to be so patient with me, and put up with my nonsense so long as you did. It would have served me right if you'd snubbed me as I deserved. What a verdant kid you must have thought me, though you never let on. But I've got a little more sense now, I hope. You needn't be scared of my relapsing into idiocy again. We can be good friends, as we always were, but I'll promise to behave myself."

"Of course," said Miriam, without any clear idea of what she was saying.

"I say, Mirry," went on Will confidentially. "I've got a picture here I want to show you, to see what you think of it. You're a pretty good judge of faces, I know. I'll strike a match so you can see. There!"

Miriam took the picture in her cold hand, and looked at it.

"She is very pretty. Who—who is it, Will?"

"Florrie Moore; pretty name, isn't it? She's the daughter of our professor of Greek. Not much wonder I got plucked in it, is it? She's just eighteen, and as sweet as a peach. All the fellows in our class were crazy over her. Not to boast a little bit, though, Mirry, there wasn't one of them in it when I was about."

Miriam handed the photograph back silently. Will went on undauntedly:

"I met her at an at-home just the week after I went there. I was clean gone from the start, and so were all the other boys. I tell you, it was lively going for awhile. But I won her. Might as well tell you the whole business, Mirry—I know you won't tell anyone—we're engaged, Florrie and I. Don't give it away to Kate or Bob, though, Mirry."

"Of course not," said Miriam, wearily. "I suppose—I ought to congratulate you, Will. You have my best wishes."

"Thanks awfully. When you see Florrie—I'm going to have mother ask her up next summer, of course—you'll agree with me that I am a lucky fellow. It will be such a comfort to have someone to talk to about her, Mirry."

Miriam got up. There were limits to any one's endurance, even that of an old maid on the wrong side of thirty.

"I must go in, I think," she said, in a lifeless voice. "It's very damp out here."

Will sprang up repentantly and tossed his cigar away.

"Of course it is. What a beast I am to be keeping you out here! You haven't anything on your head, either. Just like me! I'm so selfish when I get talking about my own affairs."

Miriam went in and upstairs. On the landing she gave a little bitter laugh. She locked herself in her room and fell on her knees beside the window, sobbing hysterically.

That was the end of Miriam North's love affair. The world will tell you that she never had one.

Lilian Montgomery.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

IV.—THE DOUBT OF MILDRED DALRYMPLE.

In the early summer of 1899, a girl sat at her writing-table in the old Manor House of Sunningdale.

It was a bright, pleasant room looking out on to the smooth green lawns and spreading cedars that were the feature of Sunningdale Manor, and the brilliant morning sunshine that streamed through the open window seemed to linger fondly on the dark head of the youthful mistress of that fair domain.

Mildred Dalrymple was not exactly a beauty, her features were too irregular, and her complexion too sallow, but she possessed a shapely figure, a graceful carriage, and a well-shaped head that was exquisitely poised on a charming neck.

Moreover her manner was most sweet and winning, and she had an instinctive talent for dressing herself to the best advantage, and the money wherewith to do it, so that many a man had before now taken her for a beauty, even with eyes all undazzled by her possessions.

With a tender smile on her sensitive mouth, and a glitter of unshed tears in her brown eyes, she was writing a few words on a thin slip of paper:

"*She comes to ask your pardon. Will you forgive her the hasty words?*"

This she carefully wrapped round a charming miniature of herself, exquisitely set with diamonds, and that bore the inscription on the back: "From Mildred Dalrymple to Rodney Brookes.—May, 1899." And then, putting it back into its leather case, addressed the little packet to "Rodney Brookes, Esq., Reithock, S. Africa."

"There!" she murmured to herself. "That is the *amende honorable*, and he can't do less than humble himself before me. After all, he was more angry than I, and said much worse things, and I suppose that is why it is so easy for me to ask his pardon first. And what is the good of all my money if he won't take a penny of it, but will go out to that horrid South Africa to make some for himself," and she ran out of the room to take the precious packet to the post herself, singing gaily as she did so.

A few months previously, Rodney and Mildred, affianced lovers, had parted with angry words because Rodney refused point blank to marry her "without a penny to his name," and insisted he should go abroad and get a respectable number of the said coins before settling in ease on his wife's estate.

She, hurt that any consideration should weigh with him against his possession of her, accused him of pride, and even of discontent and a desire to see the world. In short there was a pretty little quarrel, rather more serious than lovers' quarrels generally are, perhaps, yet not serious enough for any word to be spoken of terminating the engagement.

He had gone off with a sore feeling that she did not see how deep and true his love really was, and she was left with a fleeting impression that there are times when a woman must be content to stand aside and let a man's pride have free play.

After a few cool, friendly letters had passed between them, Mildred grew impatient of standing on her dignity, and chose this means of setting all right between them, reading between the lines of her lover's letters, that he, too, only needed the slightest excuse to return, with dignity, to their former footing.

So she sent forth her little packet freighted with love and longing, and waited for his speedy reply.

Months passed, and no word came from him. Mildred counted and recounted the days till there was no longer any doubt, that allowing for every possible and impossible accident he must have received her miniature three months ago, and yet there was no sign from him.

Paler and sadder grew Mildred as the silent days dragged by. Had the wound been deeper than she thought? Had her hasty words slain the love she prized so dearly and someone else become to him what she had once been? She tried to tell herself that she cared naught for love of so slight a nature, but she knew she must always love him, whatever happened.

Then, in October, war was declared, and a new anxiety beset her.

Eustace Elborough, the owner of Crowhurst Park, the adjoining estate, felt his faithful heart racked with pain when he saw how Mildred suffered. For many years he had loved her in a hopeless way, and, having so long put himself out of the question, he honestly wished only to see her happy.

One morning he rode over to see her and say "good-bye," for he was off with the I.Y. to fight the Boers.

"And so," she said sadly, "the last of my friends leaves me. Good-bye, Eustace, good luck and happiness attend you."

"Good-bye, Mildred," he said, holding her hand, and gazing earnestly into her sad face, "if my heart's blood could give you happiness, how gladly would I give it."

"Oh," cried she, her face lighting up with a momentary hope, "perhaps you will hear what has become of him out there. I fear something dreadful must have happened to him. Do, *do* find out for me and let me know."

"Of course I will!" he cried with fervour, quite forgetting for the moment that Africa was a large place, and that he was not going out as a private inquiry agent, but as a soldier.

From time to time he sent her short friendly notes with accounts of the fighting and many of his adventures, and she almost forgot her personal sorrow in sympathy for the general mourning of the country, and the perils of her brave countrymen.

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Then he wrote from Reithock, and the very name stirred her heart with pain.

"We have reached here at last, and the more sanguine say the war is over, but those who know the Boers say differently. I have made all possible inquiries, and have at last found out all there is to learn about poor Rodney. His servants deserted him when war was declared, and his place was one of the first to be destroyed.

"He was rescued and taken in by a family of Boers with whom he had been very friendly, but the household was soon broken up, the horses and men commandeered, and the women-folk scattered. After this I can find no further trace of him, nor of any of the women who might be able to give us some information. You may rest assured I shall continue to make every possible inquiry, but I fear there is no more to learn."

For a time Mildred was overcome by her grief. Surely her beloved Rodney had been killed. But hope which "springs eternal" whispered there were no proofs, and she began to entertain the idea that he was still alive. But why, then, had he not written? He must have received her miniature and pathetic cry for pardon some months before the trouble broke out with the Boers.

Could it be possible he had ceased to love her? Perhaps given his heart to some brave Boer maiden who had succoured him in his need, possibly saved his life? No, no, a thousand times no! Rather would she hear he had died, fighting against the enemy, true to his country and to her.

The war dragged on its weary length, but ended at last, and once more Eustace Elborough stood in the library of the old Manor, war-worn and bronzed, his rugged features, never handsome, had gained the dignity of the man who had looked death in the face, and was not afraid.

Mildred looked older and sadder than when the story began, but the depth sorrow had given to her eyes and the pensive droop to her mouth, in no way detracted from her nameless charm, for the man who was gazing at her with all his soul in his honest blue eyes.

"Indeed, Mildred," he was saying, "there can be no hope, it is nearly three years now since you heard from him, it cannot be that he is still in the land of the living."

"No," said Mildred slowly. "I am sure you are right, and yet—and yet——"

"Make up your mind to it bravely," he said with tender compassion. "Poor Mildred, it will be easier to bear than hugging this forlorn hope to your heart."

"Yes!" she said, "a life-long widowhood, yet never a wife." And she turned away with a sob.

"Oh, Mildred," he cried, seizing her hand, "be my wife. I have loved you for so many years—you are dearer to me than anything in the whole world. Indeed, indeed I would try to make you happy."

"I know you would," she said impulsively, holding out her hand to him, "but, Eustace I am not worth it; my heart is buried out yonder in South Africa."

"Not buried," said Eustace eagerly, holding her thin hand in his warm clasp, "it is only stunned, it will come to life again in the warmth of my love. Mildred"—with a pathetic break in his voice—"I have loved you so long, you do not know what the hope of possessing you means to me."

Mildred was deeply touched. For three years her heart had starved for "the gentle ministering of love," it was no wonder she wished to take this devotion so unreservedly poured out at her feet, and surely she owed something to this good man who had loved her so long and so well. If it would really give him happiness to take her broken life into his keeping, why should she deny it him?

After some minutes' silence, in which she weighed her life and shrank from the barrenness it offered, Mildred at last replied:

"If indeed you really want me, you shall have your wish, but I want you to understand I cannot pretend what I do not feel. You are my old friend and comrade, and I have a warm affection for you, but more—I cannot give—at present."

Poor Eustace paled at her words, but catching at the hope in her last phrase, cried eagerly:

"So you will have me, and let me love you. I ask for nothing more."

And so the engagement was made.

The day before her wedding Mildred received a small, stained packet.

"Another present, I suppose," she thought, as she took it into her hands.

But the sight of the foreign stamp and the postmark "Bloemfontein" caused her to tear it open with trembling fingers.

Behold, some dozen letters on thin paper, and her miniature, the frame wrenched and despoiled of its diamonds, but the poor face still smiling bravely as when she sent it forth to make her peace with her lover.

An official-looking letter headed "Bloemfontein Hospital" caught her eye, and she read as follows:

"To Miss Mildred Dalrymple.

"Madam,—*There has recently died in this hospital one Piet Maas, and before dying he handed me the inclosed packet.*

"*I gathered from what he said that he had been in the service of Mr. Rodney Brookes, an Englishman, and that he had intercepted the inclosed miniature for the sake of its diamonds.*

"*Then, for fear of discovery, he had kept back all the letters on both sides. Not knowing Mr. Brookes' address, I forward the packet to you.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant,*

"H. C. Burton, M.R.C.S."

The letters fell fluttering to the ground as Mildred sank into a chair, half-stunned by the overwhelming rush of thoughts that came over her at this simple explanation of Rodney's silence.

Her first coherent thought was one of joy that her love was exonerated from all blame. He had been true to her, and no doubt also he was still living.

Then eagerly she turned to examine the letters.

There were all her poor pitiful words, begging him to write and relieve her anxiety, and there were all his to her, the least of which would have filled her with joy and thankfulness.

For he also wrote wondering at her silence, and with all his wonted warmth of love that flooded her being with joy.

Then his last letter:

"*How is it there is never a word from you yet, it is three months since I heard. Is it that you cannot forgive me for the foolish words I spoke? Surely, my darling, you know me better than to doubt the real depth and warmth of my love. Still, I am beginning to fear the worst, if I do not get some word from you during the next month I shall go away to fight, and shall care nothing henceforth what becomes of me.*

"*If you no longer love me, I am worth nothing.—Your always loving and devoted,*

"Rodney."

Bitter tears fell and blistered the paper, till a hopeless rage dried them ere they fell.

"That infamous man!" she cried to herself. "How can God permit, that for the sake of a few paltry diamonds, two lives should be ruined? Oh, my love, my love, did you think I could ever cease to love you?

"Perhaps he still lives. His name has never been amongst the killed. I will seek him out, if I spend my last penny in the act—I will find him, and I will say——" And then her glance fell on her wedding-dress, spread out on her bed, in readiness for the morrow, and at the thought of the gallant gentleman whose heart was even now filled with a joyful awe at the thought that to-morrow she would be his, froze the words that had involuntarily burst from her lips.

"But, Eustace! I have pledged him my word, and he has waited with so much love and patience. Rodney may be dead after all. Have I the right to put him to the open shame of a marriage broken off at the eleventh hour, while I spend my youth and my strength in searching for one I may never find? And yet, oh, my love, Rodney, my love, my love!" And she sank sobbing on her bed.

What should she decide to do?

L. Hughes.

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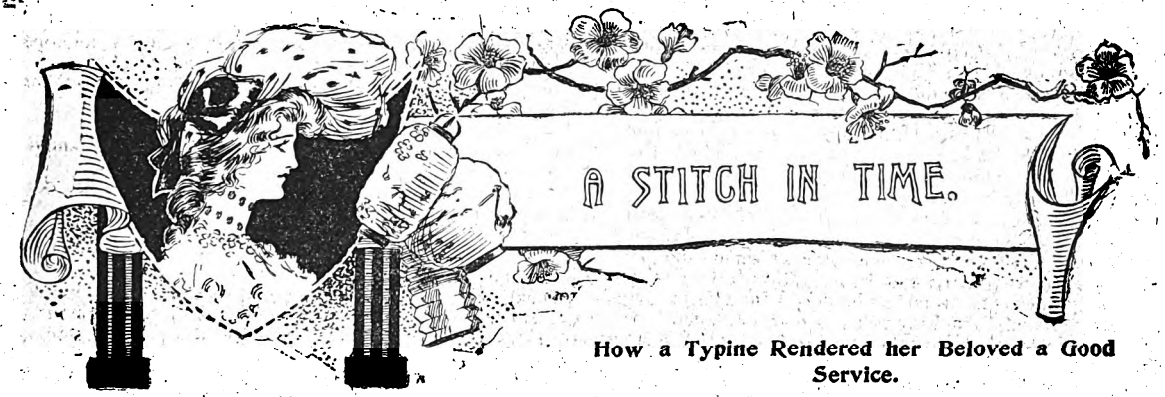

How a Typine Rendered her Beloved a Good Service.

JIMMY CARLESS, ad.-man to a great advertising firm in London, was looking decidedly grumpy. He sat in his room savagely gnawing a stub of pencil, and frowning at an open page of a magazine which lay on the desk before him.

"Read it!" he snapped, jerking the book over to his typine, who sat, notebook in hand, waiting his pleasure.

The girl, with the smile for once absent from her pretty face, took the open magazine, and held it before her. Could Jimmy have seen behind it he would have wondered at the strange expression in her eyes.

"'Puerile!' he called it. 'Tautological/ twaddle!' The idea of an old curmudgeon who couldn't write an ad. to save his life presuming to criticise my work! By crumbs, Ethel, I tell you, I was riled.

"'What's doubled the sale in the last twelve months?' I asked him.

"'I allow you your due, sir,' he snorted, 'you have done excellent work, but this sort of stuff isn't up to your usual, and what's more, it won't do for me. Take my advice, Carless, and pull yourself together for both our sakes.'

"Now, look here, Ethel," he went on resentfully. "There's my record-book. I ask you, isn't that page as good as anything I've ever turned out?"

The girl walked over to the side-table, and, opening the book, examined the specimen ads. pasted in its pages. An unusual flush was on her cheeks, and she was glad he could not see her face.

Every working day for the past year she had taken down at this man's dictation. As she bent over the book her memory went back to that first day, when, buoyant with optimism and enthusiasm, he had told her what he would do for his firm.

She remembered the verve and ease with which he had produced those early ads.—ingenious and telling every one of them, and crowned with a success that had more than justified all his optimism.

She endeavoured to place that first day when the success of it began to make her proud of working with him, and the close of the working-day only anxious for the next to commence so that she could be with him.

Mechanically she turned the pages. There was a memory attached to every one of those ads. she had pasted in this book so carefully. That one marked the day when he had first addressed her as Ethel, naturally and without any intention of familiarity. This one, the morning when with white face and dark-circled eyes, he had made a laughing reference to his seediness being due to the little card party of the night before with his "pals." She thought, with a pang at her heart, as she still lingered at the page, that this particular ad. marked the day of his degeneration.

For the past three months, as the nightly dissipation sapped his mental power, she had seen him gradually getting more and more incompetent. The fluency of his diction was gone. The snap and virility of his sentences were lacking. A growing indifference resultant on brain-weariness, and the increasing difficulty of proper concentration necessary to evolve novel arguments, had for some time made her fear this day. And now it was here, and he had asked her for her opinion.

"George! How my head spins!" he cried, lying back in his chair. "Would you mind giving me a glass of water? Everything's green!"

The girl gently closed the book and tendered him a glass freshly filled from the filter. He gulped the draught down, and pressed his hand to his aching brow.

"Thanks, Ethel," he said weakly. "You're a good little girl. Had rather a time with the boys last night, you know. Decidedly seedy—and the guv'nor upset me. Tell me, honestly, don't you think the talk's just as convincing, the whole ad. just as telling as anything in the book?"

She looked him straight in the face as he sat gripping the arms of the chair, and a great longing to save him from himself, borne of a deeper feeling than the inherent sympathy of her womanhood, forced the tears to her eyes.

He evaded her gaze, wondering why she did not answer.

"Tell me!" he cried querulously, and, lifting his eyes, he saw the strange look on her white face.

"The criticism was just," she said, firmly.

He started forward at the charge and glared at her incredulously. Had he heard aright? Was it Ethel—his typine—who had uttered the indictment?

"It is true," she said quietly, seating herself at the desk. "Your earlier work was good; there was nothing better. This is but a string of stereotyped platitudes—bald and unconvincing. If you like I will tell you why, but—is it necessary?"

His fingers went to his mouth, and he gazed at her stupidly. His head was swimming. He felt sick and dizzy. It appeared to him as he looked that this girl's accusing face grew and grew until it dominated his vision. Her eyes seemed to sear his brain.

Surely this could not be the same machine-like creature who had sat at his beck for months? It was absurd—an hallucination born of his disordered imagination.

"No; it is not necessary," she continued deliberately, and her voice seemed to come to him from a distance. "But it is very pitiful."

For a space there was no word spoken, and then, suddenly, his two hands went up to his head as the justness of the incrimination forced a groan from his twitching lips.

White-faced and trembling he staggered up and held open the door.

"Thank you, Ethel," he stammered. "Will you please leave me? I will ring for you when I want you."

The girl rose and faced him.

"That page for next month's insertion should go to the electrotyper's to-day," she said.

"Yes, I know," he said shakily. "Thank you."

He closed the door after her, and, stumbling to his chair, sat for quite a long spell gazing blankly before him.

The earnestness of her manner, the half-contemptuous,

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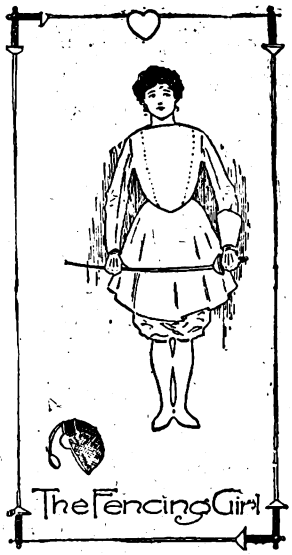

half-pitying look on her face was still with him. "Is it necessary?" A review of the past months passed through his mind; the gambling and drinking until the early hours, the lassitude and physical weariness of the mornings, the growing disinclination for application during the day; and he knew that the accusation was true, the reproach deserved.

He rose, and striding over to the glass, gazed at the reflection of his face. Leaden-eyed, hollow-cheeked and sallow—a pitiful counterfeit of what he had been before that infernal set had trammelled him—he stared dazedly incredulous, and then, as the consciousness of the change in his appearance smote him, he turned away and reviled himself for a fool.

He strode over to the book and feverishly turned the first pages. It was true! Barclay was just in his criticism; the girl was right! He was losing his grip! He was becoming worked out!

The door opened and Thomas Barclay himself intruded his head into the room.

"Carless," he said, shortly, "have you written that copy for next month?"

"Yes—no—I'm on it now," he stammered confusedly.

"Very well," said the chief, "I want to see it before it goes out. Don't forget!"

The significance of his enjoinder was plain, and the face of the ad.-man flushed.

Dropping into his chair he took up again the pencil and stabbed viciously at the paper. His brain was a chaos, absolutely incapable of coherent thought. The knowledge that he was on his trial was wormwood to him. The expression on the girl's white face kept recurring before his mental vision. For an hour he sat, and at the end of it the paper showed but a score of outlined faces—a woman's face that was something very like that of Ethel's.

"Confound everything and everyone!" he cried in his impotence, and he tore the paper into bits and strewed them on the floor. Striding about the office he racked his brain for the original thought that would not come. His incapability maddened him, and drove him to raging at his arbitrary treatment.

"The old idiot should know that the creative faculty can't be forced!" he stormed. "He thinks I'm a machine charged to turn out so much original matter per hour!"

The entrance of the secretary interrupted his railing.

"Hello, Jim; coming out to lunch?" came the cheery invitation.

He muttered a curt negative and flung himself into his seat. The intruder settled his hat on his head and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Go easy, Jimmy, my boy," he said smilingly. "You'll kill yourself. Your brain will never stand the strain. Give it a rest, my boy, and——"

"Get out!" snapped the ad.-man. "Hang you, can't you see you're bothering me?" The man went out whistling.

Another hour went by and the end of it found him still incapable.

He took up an American advertising journal, thinking perchance to catch an idea from the displayed ads. therein. He went through a whole volume, and, at last, stumbled on to a word or two that prompted a headline. Concentrating his mind on the idea it suggested he endeavoured to build up the fabric of an ad., to find, when it was roughed out, that it was but a plagiarism of the one in the book he had gleaned it from. Disgusted, he tore it into shreds. It was useless. His brain seemed paralysed. He would try no more!

Seizing his coat and hat he made for the street. The girl met him in the corridor and her gaze lingered on his white, strained face.

"Ethel," he said hoarsely, "I'm going out. If Barclay asks for that copy you tell him I said he was to write it himself. I've finished!"

Before she could remonstrate he had passed her and was hurrying down the steps. She stumbled to the landing, and involuntarily the faltering whisper slipped from her lips: "Jim—come back!"

He looked up. Over the banister her arms were outstretched to him. Startled at the knowledge that she—the girl who had accused him—wished him to return, for a second he stayed, and then, like a man demented, hurried quickly down into the street. Reckless of consequences he made straightway for the hotel where he knew some of his clique would be playing billiards. They greeted him effusively; a glass of spirits was thurst into his hand, and, presently, duty was forgotten.

After he had gone the girl roused herself and slowly passed into his room. Torn with emotion at the involuntary revelation of her feelings towards him and distraction at his mad action; she sat, her hand pressed to her breast, a prey to mental anguish. What would he think of her? Could she ever face him again?

The step of the chief in the passage roused her to a sense of her surroundings, and she hurriedly thrust a sheet of paper in the machine and commenced to tap out a letter from her notebook. He passed into his sanctum, and her fingers stayed fixed to the keys at the thought that presently he would come to pass the "copy" for that page. If she told him that it was not written, it would be ruin for the man she loved!

She crossed to the desk. The paper on it was blank. She noted the littered floor, and, hardly knowing what she did, she picked up a fragment and gazed at it unseeingly. It was true then. He had not been able to write it! She turned the torn fragment of paper in her fingers, and the scribbled words on it riveted her attention.

It was the headline of the ad. he had attempted to write, and immediately its peculiar aptness struck her. A rush of pertinent phrases suggested by it came into her mind, and she started at the sudden thought that perhaps she could weave a fabric on it that might pass censorship.

The nature of her occupation, the technical knowledge she had acquired of the art, had tempted her in her leisure hours to attempt the production of ads. for many of the specialities she saw advertised, and one or two of her efforts had been bought by the firms to whom she had submitted them. Perhaps she might be able to avert the threatened blow!

Taking a sheet of paper she jotted down the thoughts that crowded into her mind. The phrases came with pleasurable ease. The argument grew and shaped itself; a particularly happy sentence forced a passing smile. She went over it again, deleting, revising, and polishing until, satisfied that further improvement was impossible, she desisted. Only for a moment, however. A feeling of feverish eagerness was upon her to get it finished before the chief should ask for it. Crossing to the machine she quickly typed it.

It was scarcely completed ere the call came. Fighting to control herself, she took up the sheet and carried it to the chief.

"I want Carless and that copy!" he rapped out as she entered the room.

"This is the copy, sir," she said quietly.

He took it from her hand and, adjusting his glasses, went rapidly through it. A succession of expressive grunts came from his lips as he noted the concise and forceful phrasing. A prolonged "A-ah!" came as he appreciated the peculiarly happy touch. At the end of it his face was wrinkled with a queer smile.

"That's good!" he said, and taking his pencil he scribbled his initial in the corner and handed it back to her. "My compliments to Mr. Carless, young lady, and tell him it's approved."

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Somehow—she scarcely knew how—she managed to escape from the room.

"Straight talk's done the youngster good!" said the old man, banging down his rolltop desk. "That's a seller; the best thing he's done for us!"

* * * * *

When Jimmy Carless, miserable and mad at his folly—went down to toy with breakfast next morning, he found a letter by the side of his plate. Wonderingly he opened it, and a sheet of typed "copy" lay in his hand. Wide-eyed he stared at the headline—*his headline*. Eagerly he read it through, and, as he saw the initial in the corner and realised what it meant, the paper dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Pulling himself together with an effort he went out and hurried to the office. The girl was in her place, busy with her machine.

"Ethel," he faltered, striding to her and seizing her two unresisting hands, "you did this for me?"

She looked up at him half-ashamedly, and in her eyes showed a mist of tears. Her hands slipped from his grasp, and shame-facedly he walked over to his desk and dropped his head on his arms.

The folly of the wasted months flooded his being with remorse. In an agony of self-abasement he sat, tortured by the knowledge that this woman knew him for what he was. What a weak fool he must appear in her sight!

And yet, knowing this, she had saved him!

Very slowly he raised his haggard face. She was looking at him with a yearning expression in her eyes that revealed all the love in her heart. In that second he realised why she had done this for him, and his arms went out, involuntarily, towards her.

"Ethel!" he whispered—and could say no more.

"Jim!" she murmured, twining her arms about his neck and crying for very gladness. "You're not angry? I wanted so much to help you——"

"God bless you—Ethel," he faltered. "I am a despicable coward—but you have given me the will to become a man again—will you help me always?"

"Always," she murmured, the love-light shining in her eyes.

"Always, Jim, because I love you."

John J. Armstrong.

EVERY READER OF "SHORT STORIES"

Will do well at once to enrol himself as

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IT IS A LIBRARY AND PICTURE GALLERY COMBINED,

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NOW ON SALE, 1/-.

Your Editor Chats.

THE fourth Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 683, and I offer ONE GUINEA for what I consider to be the best solution of the difficulty.

"The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple" will be an excellent test problem. Surely a more difficult position for a girl to be in could scarcely be imagined, and yet how absolutely possible her position is. It is but another example showing how very careful lovers should be before deciding that their heart's desire has been false to them. Appearances are deceptive, and a girl should have conclusive proofs that her betrothed is not worthy of her love ere she says or does anything likely to hurt his feelings.

The question to be answered is, "What is the Best Course for Mildred Dalrymple to Take?" Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, and should not exceed one hundred words.

The guinea will go to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best solution. My decision will be final.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Fourth Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 4th of December. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret," must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 27th.

Next week I hope to announce the winner of the guinea offered for the best solution of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements."

COMING! Coming! It won't be long now! What is coming? Why, our splendid Christmas Number. In three weeks' time it will be published, and there is sure to be a big demand for it.

It will be in every way the best Christmas number of its kind ever produced, and regular readers will be well advised to order their copies early, so as to avoid the possibility of disappointment.

The main feature of the number will be its wealth of fine seasonable fiction, including a splendid story from Mr. W. Pett-Ridge, the author of "Mord Em'ly" and other well-known books.

I SHOULD like to draw my readers' attention to the notice on the third page of this week's cover announcing that the Editor of *The Boys' Leader* is offering a situation worth £100 a year to a boy and a situation worth £100 a year to a girl in the offices of *Pearson's Weekly*, *Short Stories*, *The Boys' Leader*, and other papers. Here is an excellent opportunity for a boy or girl to make a start in life, and if my readers have any juvenile friends it would be doing them a great kindness to call their attention to this magnificent offer.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton informs Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, his right-hand friend and confidant, of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the millionaire's yacht, the *Isola*, a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out. Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

Wilfrid Ellerton, one night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor. Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, of which Staunton is Lord and Master, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

Ellerton is treated in a most sumptuous manner, and is told that he has had a long illness, and that all his fancies about another world are only dreams.

He, however, realises that he has been the victim of some plot, with what object, of course, he does not know.

Meanwhile, every nation in the world above is staggered by a great financial mystery. Millions of base coins, excellently executed, are flooding the markets.

Stanislaus Smith, the great detective, who is also Herr de Ronski, the famous musician (though none know of his double identity except Arthur Dennison, a Treasury Solicitor) is endeavouring to solve the problem, and he has clues which make him set out for the Riviera, a day or two after the *Isola* drops anchor in the harbour of Monaco.

Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, is accompanied by his wife, his daughter Paula, and Dennison.

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SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

A Change of Scene.

"Look here, Staunton, doesn't it strike you that we have been playing this game just a trifle close? It seems to me that we are trying to go straight and crooked at the same time, and if you can show me that that can be done with safety, I guess I shall learn something."

"I quite see what you mean, Kesteven," replied Staunton, leaning back in the easy chair in which he had faced Dr. Billaud and Valdez the night after Wilfrid Ellerton's premature disappearance. "Yes, that's all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Of course I admit that if it had not been for that most unhappy occurrence, or, perhaps, I should rather say, friend Ramiero's undue haste in arranging the accident, a good deal of the trouble could have been saved.

"But then you see I put the thing to the test. Billaud performed the operation and the fellow's memory came back.

"You must see that when the experiment had succeeded—although I would have given a hundred thousand for it to have failed—still, when he *did* remember, what was there to be done except what I did—what I had to do? You don't suppose that I was going to give myself, and the work of a dozen years, and all that I have been hoping for into the hands of a mere boy, who could either put me back where I was on the Chinchas or have me hanged or garrotted? No, no, it is done now, and it has got to remain as it is. I am sorry, bitterly sorry, I confess, but there is no help for it as far as I can see."

"Yes, yes," said Kesteven, the millionaire's partner in his great schemes. "From the personal point of view perhaps you are right, but you see there are other things."

"Political and diplomatic? Yes, that's a sort of risk that we have been taking all along, and, as far as I can see, we have got to go on taking. Of course, if you have any workable alternative to propose, I shall be very glad to hear of it."

"I am afraid you have got me there, chiefly for the reason that you don't seem to have left any alternative possible. You see it looks as though this Ellerton affair is to have awkward consequences. His father took your version of the tragedy in good faith, but, to my idea, it was rather a difficult sort of thing to swallow, and I certainly think that Valdez might have arranged it a little more scientifically. That 'man overboard' idea was a bit thin, you know, in a smooth sea like that—and it doesn't seem to be quite believed."

"What!" exclaimed Staunton. "Who doesn't believe it?"

"Well," said Kesteven, "I had a chat with our mutual friend Morton up in the grounds of the Casino this morning, and he seemed to think that some of your guests on this boat were not quite convinced as to the accuracy of the tragedy."

"What! How can that possibly be?" said Staunton testily. "I still think that if ever a disappearance was properly arranged that was, although, of course, I admit that Valdez did complicate matters terribly by hurrying things as he did. You know I have only too good reason to say that."

"Now look here, Staunton," Kesteven said, "you are just trying to talk round the facts instead of getting at them. We won't say anything about what happened on this yacht a few days ago. That is a matter personal to yourself, but I must remind you that there are other things and pretty big ones too hanging to this business."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Staunton impatiently, "that, of course, is understood. What I want to know now is what you mean by the suspicions you are connecting with Morton and which seem to be troubling you so much. What are they? For my own part, I cannot see how there could have been any suspicions, I mean, in the way of what, between ourselves, we might perhaps call foul play."

"Well, for one thing, young Morton seems to have got pretty confidential with my daughter Cora. He has been doing very well lately, thanks to us, and I have an idea that he would not have much objection about marrying into the family. So naturally Cora, who's about smart enough to buy him at one end of this yacht and take him to the other and sell him and make dollars on him, wasn't long in finding out that he had been hearing something."

"And that?"

"Well, you know that two of your guests on this boat at that unfortunate time were Lady Maud Hyam and Captain Percy Iddison. Now Iddison happens to have a younger brother who is second-in-command of a British Destroyer called the *Scorcher*. I need hardly tell you that of all the intelligence agencies in the world the British Navy is about the most complete.

"These men don't talk much, but they put in a lot of time thinking. When you landed your guests at Leith one of the first things Captain Iddison did was to communicate with his brother and the result was that within forty-eight hours of the accident, there was not a man on the British North Sea Squadron, which his boat was attached to, who believed it could have happened without the body being found. Every set of the tides and currents all round the compass were known to them. They kept the wires from Calais to Trondjhem hot. Steamers were sent out to the fishing fleet on the Dogger Bank, and revenue cutters and all sorts of craft got wandering about trying to pick up information about this lost son of a millionaire.

"You see you cannot get away with the son of one of the best known men in England without having a considerable amount of trouble made out of it, and the result seems to be that——"

"That this story is not quite believed? Is that what you mean?" exclaimed Staunton angrily. "But even if it is not believed, how is anything else going to be proved? If Morton gives that sort of gossip away to your daughter, as I suppose he did in a way that those young idiots will do when they think they have fallen in love with a girl——"

"You seem to forget that we have both got daughters, and that——" said Kesteven sharply.

"Yes, yes, I beg your pardon—and your daughter's too," replied Staunton, leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair and putting his hand to his forehead. "You must forgive me, Kesteven. This extraordinary development has quite upset me."

"Well," said Kesteven, rising and looking at his watch, as though he too had had enough of the subject for the present, "I don't know that you're to be blamed for that. It has been a most unfortunate business—one of those miserable little businesses which the Fates sometimes seem to start out with to smash up the biggest enterprises. Still we must just keep our eyes skinned, and take our luck in this as we have done in other things. And now what's the matter with dressing for dinner? It will do us good to forget all about the old Underworld for a bit, and just remember that we're in a lot wickeder and pleasanter place. Besides, we're going to hear de Ronski to-night, and I reckon that ought to help a bit."

"Yes, you're right there," said Staunton, whose one passion, outside his ambitions and love of power, was music—"we haven't too much time and if there's any magic that can charm evil thought away it is de Ronski's. And that daughter of his is going to make a sort of *début* to-night at the Salle des Concerts. I am told that she is very beautiful and sings like an angel."

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"Cora's just wild about her," replied Kesteven, "she heard her at a private sing-song, in Dresden, I think it was, about six months ago, and she avows there'll be nothing like her in Europe in a year or two."

* * * * *

It was the famous musician's first recital of the season.

Staunton, with his party, which considered of Mercedes, Cora and her father, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud, with the Honourable Reginald in almost constant attendance, occupied a box to the right in the grand tier. In the box immediately opposite to them they were rather surprised to see Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, and Lady Maud Hyam, who had accepted her ladyship's chaperonage as a very easily earned social license for a trip to the Riviera with her Captain of Engineers, who was sitting beside her. There was another man in the box, obviously an Englishman.

It was not, after all, a very strange coincidence under the circumstances. The abrupt conclusion of the trip in the *Isola* had left the little party without any plans, and, as Lady Maud's father and mother had meanwhile gone to Homburg for the cure, and Lady Maud happened to cordially detest the place and the cure alike, it was only natural that they should seek a relieving contrast from the melancholy circumstances of their last pleasure-trip in another to the autumn Holiday Land of Europe.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mercedes, when she had settled herself in her seat and taken a preliminary look through her lorgnette over the audience, "look, there is Lady Maud, and, of course, Captain Iddison. Yes, and Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, too, but who is the other gentleman? Do you know him, papa?"

Her father put his glasses up and looked across the house.

"No, I can't say that I do," he replied, "at least, I don't locate him, though his face does seem familiar to me. Still, one does meet such a lot of people. Morton, do you know him?"

It was, of course, the Honourable Reginald's duty, part of the work he was paid for, in fact, to know more or less intimately, everybody who was worth knowing, so he replied immediately:

"Oh, yes, that's Arthur Dennison, nephew of *the* Sir William Dennison, you know, or, as he is a good deal better known, Lord Justice Dennison, the great criminal judge. Dennison's father was, as it happened, one of the first criminal lawyers, perhaps *the* first until he died about four years ago, I think, Arthur, the man over there, has followed in his father's footsteps, and is now recognised as about one of the smartest men they have in the Solicitor's Department at the Treasury."

"Thanks," said Staunton. "I think I must have met him somewhere. Do you know him personally? Is he a decent sort of fellow?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I've known him for some years. We're fellow bachelors, and he's as good a fellow as one would wish to know. By the way, he is one of a good many people in Europe who are deeply interested in the great Silver Problem. Of course, I don't mean bi-metallism, but the other much more interesting question which, I suppose, some of the monarchs of finance would also be very glad to solve."

"The great Silver Problem?" said Cora Kesteven, looking round at him with a glance which had already become for him almost irresistible. "The great Silver Problem—why, what's that? Do tell me. We come from out West, you know."

"I reckon that'll have to keep, Cora," interrupted her father, "there's the overture beginning."

"And, after all," murmured Morton, bending slightly over Cora's chair, "it is really only a question that troubles financiers and other people in the City."

"Quite so," said Staunton, with a meaning which only one person in the box understood, "and now let us listen to the music, which, I expect, will be much more interesting."

As regards the concert, it will be enough to say here that there was not one of the numbers that did not completely fulfil the party's expectations, and more than satisfied the demands of what happened to be, just at that time, one of the most critical audiences in Europe. During the fifteen minutes' interval, visits were exchanged between the two boxes, and when the concert was over the two parties met in the vestibule, Staunton took the opportunity of saying to Lady Medcalf-Mears, with an expression which sounded to her perfectly genuine:

"I trust that the very painful circumstances under which we were compelled to part at Leith will not make it impossible for you and your party to give Mercedes and myself the pleasure of receiving you on board the *Isola* during our stay here? I am going to be daring enough to attempt to persuade M. de Ronski and his wife and daughter to be our guests on one of these moonlight nights that are coming, and, if so, we will run out to sea a little way, and have a moonlit marine concert all to ourselves."

"Of course," replied Lady Medcalf-Mears, who had not the slightest intention of ruffling her latest lion, or taking undue sorrow to herself because a deplorable accident had happened to a mutual acquaintance. "We shall be delighted to come. What happened was very terrible indeed, but, after all, it was the purest mischance, and, well, naturally, there is the end of it. Your idea as to the concert is quite delicious if you can only carry it out, master of millions and all as you are. You know, de Ronski is a most peculiar man even for a genius. But stop, what am I thinking about? My friend, in fact, my connection, Mr. Dennison, has the honour of knowing him personally, and he is going to introduce us all. Of course, that would be the easiest way to manage it!"

"Once again you have made me your debtor, Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Staunton. "Then if you will all come to lunch to-morrow on board, where I think we can treat you a little better than these wretched hotels and restaurants do, and bring Mr. Dennison as one of the party, perhaps we might be able to arrange matters. I am a thousand times obliged to you."

It was a lovely night, and when the two parties had taken leave of each other to walk back to their quarters,

"Well, Maud, and what do you think of the fair Mercedes?" asked Iddison, when they had got clear away from the crowd. "She seems to have got over the shock wonderfully, considering how severe it must have been."

"As regards her general health, she undoubtedly has," replied Lady Maud in a somewhat subdued voice, "but in one way it has certainly affected her very seriously."

"Oh, I am very sorry to hear that! What is it?"

"Why," continued Lady Maud, "would you believe that, when I was talking to her about her illness, I was amazed to find that she is utterly ignorant of what had caused it, and Miss Kesteven said to me afterwards that everything connected with poor Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is, for the present at least, utterly wiped out of her memory."

"Just as well, perhaps," replied Iddison, with a gentle pressure on her arm, the meaning of which she fully understood.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Tangling Threads.

EARLY the next morning, in fact, as they were going for their dip in the sea, Dennison said to Iddison:

"I think I ought to tell you that, quite involuntarily, I overheard what Lady Maud said to you about Miss Staunton's illness as we were coming away from the concert. I mean about that curious obliteration of memory with regard to poor Wilfrid Ellerton's disappearance. You were on board at the time, and if you can tell me anything more of the circumstances, and feel at liberty to do so, I shall be glad."

"I don't know that I can tell you very much," replied

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Iddison, not very cordially, "because, as you see, after all it was a private party, and I don't——."

"No, I know you don't, my dear fellow," interrupted he of the quicker intellect, "and that just tells me that you do, I mean that you do know something that I should like you to tell me. But you know there is honour even in the Solicitors Department of the Treasury. As a matter of fact, we are the most honourable set of officials in the world. Even our lawful prey sometimes admit that. Therefore I will be quite candid with you. I and one or two others of a similar mental turn, don't quite see how that accident could, well, what shall I say——"

"You have said quite enough, Dennison," interrupted the other, looking round at him, "Now you must tell me whether you asked me that question officially or just as a friend?"

"As both," replied Dennison, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I see what you mean," said the soldier, "and I don't see why you shouldn't know anything that I know; wherefore, I don't mind admitting that I thought that in some respects it was a very extraordinary sort of occurrence. It was this way, you see—"

And then he gave him an account of what had happened on the *Isola*, so far as he knew the facts, and he ended with confidence—

"And now I am going to answer your first question; but this, of course, is quite between ourselves, because it was really Maud who found it out."

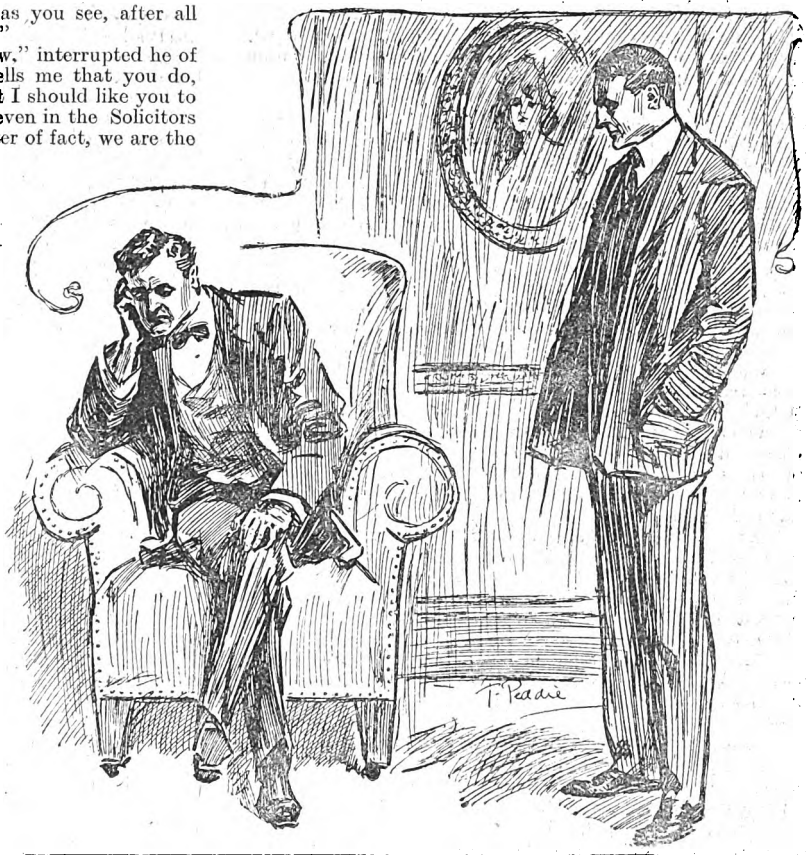
"Then I will promise not to use it without your consent and Lady Maud's. Will that do?"

"Of course," replied Iddison, well knowing that only one of those consents would be necessary. "The reason for Miss Staunton's unhappy lapse of memory which you heard Maud speak of last night is really this. She and Ellerton had met under rather tragic circumstances when they were boy and girl in Peru. Mr. Staunton was out there a good bit, I believe. It was at a seaside place called Chirillos, during the war between Chili and Peru, and the Chilians were bombarding the place. He saved her from a shell by jumping into the sea with her before it burst, and taking her ashore when the damage had finished.

"It was a rather early introduction, but it, or love at first sight, or both, seemed to have done all that was wanted. As soon as Maud found out the real state of affairs, she, being an engaged girl, naturally entered into a conspiracy with me to get another girl engaged. I suppose, just as married women seem to want to get other women married, and the result was that they came to a complete understanding.

"There can't be any doubt whatever about poor Miss Staunton's love, for the moment she heard next morning of Ellerton's falling overboard, she fell on to the deck at her father's feet, sobbing out something in Spanish which no one could catch. Perhaps her father understood the words, and perhaps they told her story. That, of course, no one knows, but it is a fact that she has forgotten everything that happened between her and Ellerton up to that moment. She remembers him as a guest on the yacht, and she has been told since that he was lost overboard. That, at least, was what Mr. Staunton told Lady Medcalf-Mears, who, as you know, was on board the yacht with us at the time."

"Quite so. Thanks very much, Iddison. Poor girl! What a pity! Beauty—millions—found the man she loved and wanted—and lost him inside forty-eight hours! A tragedy in more senses than one. Well, here we are. Let us enjoy ourselves while we may."



"Well," said Kesteven, the partner of Staunton in his great schemes, "It has been a most unfortunate business."

Arthur Dennison put in a good deal of thinking while he was somewhat lazily enjoying himself in the warm, clear water of the Bay. True, the conversation would not have appeared very important to a third party not personally interested in the subject, but to him it meant a good deal, so much so that he there and then determined on a step which he would not have thought of taking twenty-four hours before.

He declined an invitation to breakfast with Lady Medcalf-Mears' party on the ground of a prior engagement, dressed quickly, but with all his usual care, and drove out to Cimiez. Arrived at the Grand Hotel, he sent his card up to M. de Ronski's rooms, and was presently invited to give himself the trouble of ascending.

"Welcome, if unexpected—indeed, the more so on that account," de Ronski said as they shook hands. "Of course, you will stay to breakfast—an early one, nine o'clock—for, between ourselves, a mutual friend of ours, a Mr. Smith, has a good deal of business to do before I shall be ready to obey the command of His Highness the Prince to play to-night at the Palace at Monaco. But I am delighted that you have come. If not I think I must have sent for you. Sit down and light a cigarette. The ladies will put in an appearance very soon. Meanwhile excuse me for a moment."

He was back in a few moments with a little portfolio in his hand. He sat down and opened it with a key attached to his watch chain, and took out a photograph, which he handed to Dennison, saying, in Mr. Smith's usual voice:

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"Do you recognise that face—I mean, do you think that you have seen it lately?"

Dennison, as is necessary for anyone who succeeds in his profession, had an involuntary and practically infallible memory for faces. They instantly associated themselves in his mind with places and circumstances, though not always with names. He looked at the somewhat faded and old-fashioned photograph for about half a minute, and then he gave it back, and said:

"It has all the features and expression of a man I was introduced to last night in Mr. Staunton's box. Younger, I should say, by about ten years. Beard and moustache fuller and darker; hair ditto and thicker, but probably the same man. But what is the matter? If I am right, what is he doing in this photographic gallery of yours—for I suppose that comes out of the unique collection of our mutual friend?"

"If you are right, as I think and most sincerely hope you are," replied Mr. Smith's voice, "there will shortly be something very serious the matter.

"That is a photograph, taken unawares, of one Pedro Ramicrez, who was so strongly suspected of complicity in that mysterious silver swindle in the West Indies which worried us so much about ten years ago that he was arrested and even committed for trial. Nothing, however, could be positively proved, though the moral assumptions were very strong, and in the end the jury stopped the case somewhat abruptly, and of course he was discharged. I may add that some members of that jury seemed to make money with singular rapidity during the next few months.

"Bribery and corruption, I believe, are no more impossible there than they are any nearer home, if scientifically administered. Of course I remember that swindle, though I was only just beginning then. It was practically identical with the present one, only on a microscopic scale. The natural deduction would be that there is some connection between them.

"And I have some hopes that this may prove to be a link in the chain. This, I believe, to be also the photograph of Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, whom you met in Mr. Staunton's box last night. He is very closely associated with him in business affairs, and, socially, they are almost inseparable."

"Curiously enough also," Mr. Smith continued, taking a bank-note out of the portfolio, "this thousand-franc note, which has been passed under the microscope during the night and found *not* to contain the new mark, though it is only dated two months back, was changed by the said Don Ramiero to pay for Mr. Staunton's box. In fact, all the money taken at the office has been submitted to a most rigid examination. That, I may say in confidence, is one of the reasons why our friend de Ronski began his season here."

"Well, I'm—all admiration!" exclaimed Dennison, who might perhaps have said something more forcible had not the door opened just at that moment.

"Good morning, Madame de Ronski; good morning, Miss Paula," he continued, getting up and shaking hands. "Allow me to offer my unspeakable thanks for what you gave us last night. That is a little illogical, but you see what I mean."

"Of course," said Paula with a laugh, which even now he could not help thinking more musical than her singing. "That is very kind of you, and I am glad you were pleased. But, ah, here is something more interesting than compliments, she went on, going to the table and taking up the photograph, "and so you and papa have been having a professional talk?"

"Yes," replied Dennison. "I came up to see M. de Ronski."

"Otherwise Smith," murmured the owner of both names, "and I have been rude enough to ignore the possible purpose of his visit. That, I must confess, is both socially and professionally, very bad etiquette. Dennison, I owe you an apology. You didn't come here for nothing at this time in the morning. What was it? Speak as plainly as you like. We are quite by ourselves—and, to some extent, as we said before, conspirators together."

"Please, Mr. Dennison!" said Madame de Ronski, as she and Paula sat down and looked expectant.

"It isn't much," he replied, "but I thought that it may mean something later on if not now—and from what I have just heard, it will be rather now than later. Unhappily, I cannot give the particulars even to you just now, but I know that you will trust me for those.

"I came to ask M. de Ronski," he went on, laying a stress on the name, "whether he would allow me to introduce Captain Percy Iddison, of the Engineers, an old friend and schoolfellow of mine, to his confidential acquaintance; and, secondly, whether Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle de Ronski would be willing to accept an invitation to dine and spend an hour or two in a moonlight cruise on board Mr. Isolo Staunton's yacht?"

"And you say that that isn't much!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, with his own voice and manner, and an unwonted amount of emotion in his tone. "Why, my dear Dennison, it may be very much; it may, indeed, be a considerable part of everything. Yes, I think we will—well—make it our business in both senses to accept the invitation. As regards your friend, there can be no question whatever about that, except this; which of my two selves do you wish him to know?"

"Both, if you have no objection," replied Dennison seriously. "I have reasons for asking this. He is a soldier and a gentleman, which means, of course, that he would die any kind of death rather than betray a confidence."

"I fully understand you. Let us make his acquaintance, and, if possible, let us become friends as soon as you wish."

"Why not lunch, say, two o'clock?" interrupted Madame de Ronski, by way of adroit acquiescence. "That will give Mr. Dennison time to have a little breakfast with us—it must be quite ready now, and to go back and bring his friend here comfortably."

"Very sorry, Madame, but we're both engaged for lunch on the yacht to-day. To-morrow, of course, we shall be delighted."

And so it was arranged, entirely to Dennison's satisfaction. During breakfast all reserve was thrown aside, and they talked quite freely as "conspirators" on the subjects which interested them most for the moment, and when he went away he left behind him an intelligently sincere desire to know more of Captain Percy Iddison.

It so happened that when he got back into town the first Englishman he met was Iddison himself. But he was walking along the sea-front with a tall, and, as it seemed to him at the first glance—which is mostly correct—handsome, almost beautiful, woman in the costume of a nurse. He raised his Panama, and was going on his way, when Iddison exclaimed:

"Ah, there you are, Dennison. The very man we were talking about. Let me introduce you to Miss Janet Yuill. We have just found each other again. She was at the front with Ours in the war. Right through it almost. We used to call her "Sister Janet" then, for she was a sister to the whole lot of us, and some of her brothers were rather hard bargains I can tell you. And now, as the Fates will have it, she turns out to be one of the nurses that Mr. Staunton engaged at Leith to nurse his daughter. That's why she's here, of course. She has been telling me a story—which I already have her permission to tell you—that I would hardly have believed from anyone else."

"And that?" asked Dennison, as he shook hands somewhat informally with "Sister Janet." "Please let me have it. You can hardly have too much of a good thing, and it seems to me as though I were going to have quite an interesting day—as I will explain later on. I am just in the humour to listen to wonders."

"I hardly know whether you will consider this a wonder or not, Mr. Dennison," said the nurse, with a quiet yet meaning smile; "but I have just been telling Captain Iddison in all good faith that fifteen nights ago I saw the snow-cap of Mount Hekla in Iceland from the deck of Mr. Staunton's yacht."

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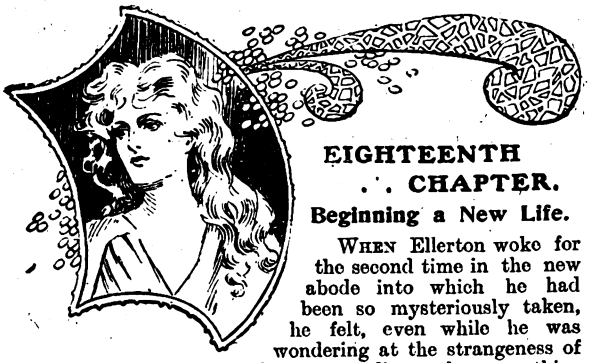
There was no doubting the truth of the eyes which looked into his as she said this, but for all this he could not help exclaiming:

"Mount Hekla, fifteen nights ago! And here you are in the Mediterranean! Well, since it is true, it must be a miracle of some sort, and therefore——"

"Exactly," added Iddison, "there is a very considerable 'therefore' connected with the story as far as I can see."



EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Beginning a New Life.

When Ellerton woke for the second time in the new abode into which he had been so mysteriously taken, he felt, even while he was wondering at the strangeness of his surroundings, that something had happened to him in the mental as well as in the physical sense.

How this amazing change had come about was for the present quite beyond his comprehension. So far as he could see, he had been suddenly translated from one world into another.

But, apart from this mystery, there was something else which he recognised as a change within himself. Somehow his brain seemed a little different in its working. His intellect was clearer and stronger than he seemed to remember it before this strange transition had taken place. His memory, too, seemed to have been curiously lengthened, for he not only distinctly remembered certain episodes in his life, notably the tragedy of the whale-boat, but his recollection of everything seemed very much clearer than it had been before.

So much, at least, he owed, albeit unconsciously, to the last scruples of the man who had banished him from the upper world, and to the surgical skill of Dr. Billaud.

He looked from one to the other of the three girls, wondering how on earth he could have got into such strange company. They were totally unlike the women of the world which he had left. They were beautiful, but with a beauty which seemed so unreal that he regarded them rather as the phantoms of a dream than as creatures of human flesh and blood.

And where was Mercedes? How far had this evil miracle which had befallen him, removed him from her, just as he had begun to taste the sweetest delight that the Fates can give to man?

His crowding thoughts were agonising enough to have driven a weaker man towards the verge of insanity, but Wilfrid Ellerton had too many generations of hard-headed ancestors behind him for that.

Herarra had purposely placed him in the most magnificent surroundings that his submarine domain could afford. It was his design to intoxicate his senses so completely that he would, as weaker men might have done, accept the conditions of his new existence, if not without question at least with easy-going content.

Instead of that, his strong common-sense, reinforced as it was by the all-absorbing love which had for the first time come into his life, caused him to take an entirely different view of his new surroundings, and as he lay there on the couch gazing half-dreamily about him, he came quickly to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it would be best for him to consider himself as having been translated by some unknown means into a totally strange state of existence.

He would be an explorer in a hitherto unknown country, which might perhaps contain many marvels for him, and as such ready to make the best of it. He was not of the sort that gives up hope easily, and, wherever he might be, the last thing that he intended to despair of was solving the mystery which surrounded his present condition, and, by some means or other, returning to the world in which Mercedes was waiting for him.

As his intellect cleared and became active again his physical strength returned. He stretched his limbs out on the divan and then he sat up and, as it were, looked at himself.

He was dressed exactly as he had been on that memorable night on board the yacht. It struck him as almost comically odd that he should be sitting there in this strangely splendid apartment in exactly the same dinner-suit in which he had sat down to dine, and in which he had taken that moonlight walk on deck afterwards with Mercedes.

And then these girls, who were they? Why should they be standing by the side of the couch fanning him and bathing his forehead with scent, as though he were some Oriental potentate?

"May I ask who you young ladies are, and why you should be taking all this trouble about me?" he said rather abruptly, as he rose to his feet.

He looked at Brenda as he said this, and added:

"But I beg your pardon, but perhaps you don't speak English in this place, wherever it is."

Considerably to his surprise, and also not a little to his embarrassment, they all three crossed their hands before them, and bowed as slaves might have done before their master, then Brenda replied, in her quaint English, like a child repeating a newly-learnt lesson:

"Lord, it was the will of the Master that we should attend upon you. We are his servants and therefore we do his bidding, and we are commanded to do yours."

There was a touch of abject submission in her tone and bearing which irritated him, and he replied almost roughly:

"Well, then, if that is so, will you be good enough to go and find this master, whoever he is, and tell him that I should like to have a talk with him. Is he the man who was sitting here before I went to sleep again?"

"Yes, Lord," replied Brenda, looking up at him with vague astonishment in her big blue eyes. "Your bidding shall be done." She moved away to walk towards the curtained entrance, and he turned to the other two, and said:—

"I needn't keep you young ladies any longer either. I am quite well now, and I want to be alone until this Master, as you call him, comes."

They bowed again, and followed Brenda in silence, and he put his hands in his pockets, and began to walk up and down the room, saying to himself:

"Well this is a confoundledly curious business, however it has all come about. Certainly there is some infernal mystery about it. Whatever happened to me on board the yacht, and it must have been something pretty serious, I should fancy, it made me insensible for some time, goodness knows how long. Then I wake up and find myself here—which isn't saying very much, seeing that I haven't the remotest notion where I am. Now it's quite obvious that this cannot possibly have happened, first without some object in getting me out of the way; and, secondly, without the knowledge and consent of Mr. Isolo Staunton.

"Isolo, Isolo, surely I have heard that name before, and now I come to think of it, his face, that reddish-brown, Scottish hair, and those big, deep Spanish eyes of his.

"Good Lord, of course, he was one of the men in that boat which I had forgotten all about and remembered again so curiously after I had been ill on board the yacht!

"Well, that clears up a good deal of the mystery, I suppose, if it really is so. If that's so he must have wanted to get rid of me, and Valdez and the doctor helped him to do it—and they did it the very night that Mercedes had given me the greatest happiness that I could have wished for! What a ghastly complication! Well, there must be some way out of it, and as that way also leads to Mercedes, I am going to find it."

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At this moment his speculations were interrupted by the entrance of Herarra and a tall, well-dressed, handsome, but somewhat masculine woman.

"Ah, my dear Señor," said Herarra, with a gesture of pleasure "I am delighted to see that you have so far recovered. Permit me to present, or perhaps I should re-present, you to my wife—that is, of course, unless you have also recovered from the strange lapse of memory which so unhappily caused you to forget us."

"I am afraid, Señor, that I cannot yet lay claim to the pleasure of remembering you nor yet the Señora," replied Ellerton, returning the lady's bow somewhat stiffly, but speaking in a tone of perfect good humour. "However, since that is so, we shall have to make the best of it. Therefore, perhaps it will be as well if I consider myself a stranger in this somewhat strange land, and you and the Señora, as my host and hostess, at any rate, for the time being."

"Under the circumstances, my dear Señor Ellerton, that will undoubtedly be the course most pleasant to all of us," replied Herarra, even more cordially than before. His involuntary guest was not a little astonished to find that he knew his name, but he had made up his mind to take everything, no matter how extraordinary, just as it came, and so he replied:

"Very well, then, as I am a complete stranger and your guest, I suppose I shall not be trespassing too far on your kindness and hospitality, tell me where I am, and afterwards enable me to explore this new abode, which now seems quite unknown to me."

"Since you seem to have so completely forgotten it, Señor," said the lady, who was not only Herarra's wife, but, at one time, his most daring and successful accomplice, "I think we can promise you some very interesting discoveries—in short, nothing less than the discovery of a new world."

"Yes," added Herarra, going towards the table on which the wine and the glasses stood, "and as we are agreed to look upon your return to health in that way, let us welcome our guest in a glass of wine."

He opened the bottle and poured out three glasses, and handed one to his wife and one to Ellerton. Ellerton recognised clearly that, since he was obviously in the power of these people he could only do himself harm by any appearance of unfriendliness, and so he drank to his own welcome and thanked his host and hostess—or gaolers, as the case might be—and probably was—with a cordiality which was excellently well assumed.

Herarra had been given clearly to understand that his guest was to be looked upon as a prisoner for life and, as no escape from the Underworld was considered possible, both he and his wife were prepared to take a certain amount of pleasure in revealing some of its secrets to him with perfect candour. Thus, when Ellerton turned to the Señora and complimented her on the strange beauty of her handmaids, thanking her for giving him such charming attendants in his illness, she replied, with a look at her husband:

"Ah, Señor, that thing alone shows how completely you have forgotten, for surely such beauty as Brenda's would be the last thing that a man of your age would forget. Besides, it is not long since you were such very good friends that we all thought you were going to become something more."

"Whoever this lady is," was Ellerton's indignant mental comment, "she is certainly a most excellent liar."

But he said aloud:

"As you say, I really must have forgotten completely if I have forgotten that. She is very beautiful. You mean, I presume, the eldest of the three. The other two are scarcely less so. But at present I must confess that their beauty hardly interests me. But now, who are they?"

"That," she replied, dropping into a broad low armchair, "is a question to answer which we should have to tell a whole history—one which you used to know——"

"Another lie," thought Ellerton, "a more elaborate one this time, I suppose. Still, I may as well hear it."

Then he went on aloud as he accepted a cigar from Herarra:

"Perhaps at the same time it will be none the less interesting to me now, and so if there is time I can promise you an attentive listener."

"There will be plenty of time before dinner, Mirella," said her husband. "It is nearly an hour yet, and so if you wish to tell the story I know you can do it better than I could."

"Very well," she said, "then I will tell it."

And she began to tell him the strange and well-nigh incredible story of the coming of the remnants of the Viking expedition from the Far West into the Underworld.

She told how they were driven, starving, on to the coast of Iceland many generations ago, and how the inhabitants, not having too much food for themselves and wanting no new settlers with hungry mouths to feed, tried to drive them away.

This the sea-rovers resisted and took what they wanted by force of arms until the Icelanders came upon them in such numbers that they were defeated in a battle and those that were left of the men, women, and children were forced to take refuge in a great cavern or crevice leading down into the heart of a mountain. The Icelanders were afraid to attack them here and so built fires across the entrance and kept a strict guard over it.

The invaders were almost driven to the point of surrender when there came a convulsion of the earth and the inner end of the great cavern was burst open and they were able to retreat still further. They lit the torches and lamps which they had brought with them and they made their way into a succession of still vaster caverns, and while they were doing this there came another shudder of the earthquake and closed the rocks again behind them, thus inclosing them for ever within the bowels of the earth.

"By what miracle some of them survived under such terrible circumstances," said the Señora when she had reached this stage of the story, "can never be known, for their descendants have almost forgotten even the first traditions, but some must have done so and accustomed themselves to these almost impossible conditions.

"They no doubt found subterranean rivers with fish in them for they and the fish are here now, and vegetables of some sort, for there were also animals which fed upon them. They must also have discovered or invented a source of light, for it would seem that the more completely they, as it were, conquered their new realm, the more their sight, which had been almost lost during a few generations of darkness, came back, and so their children's children are able to see again. Thus they continually improved their condition, in what they truly called in their old speech, the Underworld.

"That, Señor, is the legend or the history of the ancestors of the original people of the region which once you knew so well and have now apparently forgotten. The rest, I think, I had better leave to my husband to tell you. I must go now."

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

. . A Recognition. . .

THE departure of the Señora was a distinct relief to Ellerton, who was one of those perhaps excessively chivalrous men who find it impossible to be anything like rude, or even to speak quite plainly in the presence of any woman, friend or enemy, which latter he now felt pretty certain his hostess must be.

He took a sip at his glass and a pull at his cigar with a deliberation which was not quite pleasing to his host, and then he turned on him quickly and said in a tone which he liked still less:

"I have been deeply interested in all that I have heard so far, Señor—pardon me, you know my name—may I ask for 'the favour of yours' and at the same time some indication

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of the position which fortune has given to you in this world to which I have returned from my forgetfulness? Miss Brenda referred to you, in what I can only honestly call a somewhat servile manner, as the Master."

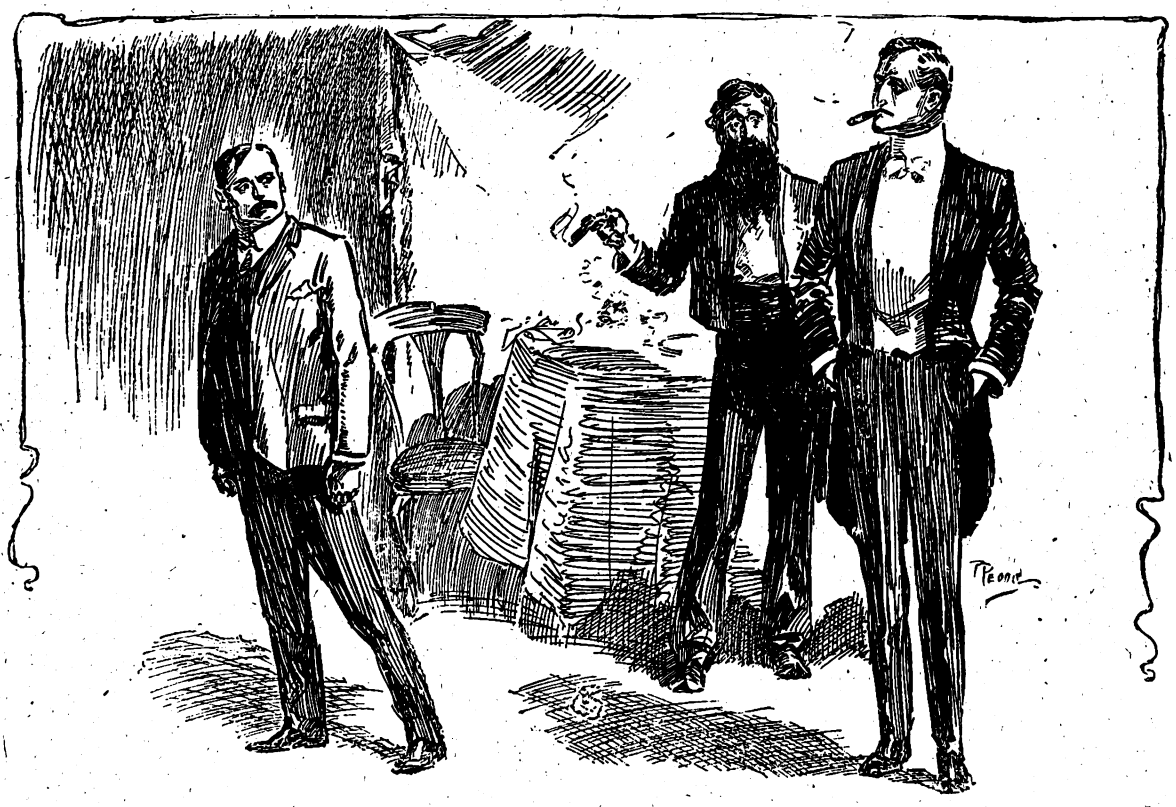
"I can, under the circumstances, be nothing else than quite frank with you," replied the other, between the puffs of his cigar, what time Ellerton waited, as he thought, for the next lie. "My name is Leon Herarra" ("May I be kicked hard, if I didn't think it was. The man Dad just missed catching over the forging of those Bilbao Iron share certificates," was Ellerton's mental comment) "and I have the honour to be the ruler of these regions to which, as you have justly put it, you now return."

There was a distinct menace in the tone, rather than in the words, which it was impossible for Ellerton to mistake, but he

you have forgotten everything save perhaps your own identity. Of course, you are perfectly right in what you say and equally, of course, it is true that we came where we are by another road. But it would be idle to repeat all that old story now about the party of mining explorers who got themselves lost.

"That is merely commonplace, and I should be only wasting time by trying to describe what you have completely forgotten. Some day when you have got a little more at home again we will take an opportunity of re-discovering it together." ("That's not a bad sort of lie under the circumstances," thought Ellerton while Herarra was speaking, "but it won't go down, my friend. I don't know how you and I came down; but I'm perfectly certain we didn't come that way.")

"Quite so," he replied aloud, looking at the end of his cigar, "that will be a most interesting excursion when we make it,



As Battley left the room Ellerton gave him a glance which meant a great deal.

took no visible notice of it and said without a trace of emotion in his voice:

"Thank you. And now may I ask by what means the Señora and yourself and myself, who are evidently not of the same race as the descendants of those old Vikings of whose advent the Señora spoke so eloquently, got into this Underworld, as I believe they called it. We can hardly have come by the same way that they did?"

Herarra had been in a good many tight places during his criminal career, but this question would have put him into one of the tightest, had it not been that, save in the matter of life and death, the man who asked it was absolutely at his mercy. There was, therefore, not the slightest necessity to tell anything like the truth, and so he lied with a logical fluency which excited Ellerton's involuntary, but none the less sincere, admiration.

"Ah, now," he said, "you have finally convinced me that

but I suppose there is no particular hurry. I had better renew my acquaintance with your Underworld first. And now, to change the subject for a moment," he went on, looking round the walls and up towards the ceiling at the lamps, or rather discs of light, which illuminated the chamber, "what light is that and where do you get it from. It doesn't look like either gas or electricity and it can hardly be oil."

"It is none of them," replied Herarra, thinking that he was answering a perfectly harmless question, "it is, as I will show you when you renew your acquaintance with our Underworld, one of the reasons which apparently enabled the descendants of the first discoverer of this region—a discovery which must, of course, have been purely accidental—to illuminate it and so by degrees recover their power of vision. We have very greatly improved the appliances of it but even we do not know exactly what it is. We have learnt to use it, as men first learned the use of electricity, without knowing what it was.

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But that must wait now, I am afraid, for here is Brenda to tell us that dinner is ready."

As he spoke the curtains over the entrance parted and Brenda came between them. She looked at them for a moment with her big, shyly-shrinking eyes and said; as she crossed her hands and bowed her head:

"Master, our lady bids me tell you that the table is spread and waits your pleasure."

"Very good, we will come!" said Herarra in English and in a rough tone which inspired Ellerton with a desire to kick him. Then he continued in the same language, and with a perceptible Spanish accent: "Come, sir, dinner is ready. I hope that you will not find the hospitality of our Underworld, to which you have become such a stranger, deficient."

Ellerton got up and followed him through the curtains, one of which Brenda held aside for them to pass, and as he went by her, she raised her head and their eyes met for an instant.

There was a dim, half-expressed appeal in hers, which could not possibly have been translated into words, but which inspired him with a desire to strangle Herarra, which was a good deal stronger than his previous desire to kick him.

Still, there was no use in worrying about that sort of thing just then, and so he came to the wise conclusion that he had better think out these strange happenings a little longer.

Herarra led him to the left along the spacious corridors illuminated by the lamps, whose source of light was still puzzling to him, and turned to the right into another chamber something like the reception-room, smaller, but even more splendidly furnished and decorated.

It was an oval chamber hung with tapestries, which concealed the rough-hewn rock walls. The ceiling was draped with sky-blue silken hangings, which depended from the centre of the ceiling, and met the tapestries at what seemed to be the top of the walls in such fashion that the room presented the appearance of a great tent. From the centre of the roof depended a large ground glass globe, which lighted the whole with the same soft, diffused, mysterious radiance.

The table in the centre of the dining-room was oval, and, in common parlance, there were four covers laid. A fourth place was vacant, and Ellerton, remembering the manners of the Overworld, stood by the chair, which his hostess had asked him to take by a motion of her hand, looking at the vacant place and waiting for the fourth guest to make his appearance.

"We shall not keep you very long, I hope, Señor," said his hostess with a note of apology in her tone. "Mr. Battley is a little late, but perhaps that is because his duties have kept him beyond the time. Ah, yes, very little," she went on, still in Spanish, "here he is."

As Mr. Battley, a short, sturdy, dark-haired, blue-eyed, square-jawed Yorkshireman, came in through the curtains apologising in English for being a few moments late, Ellerton had thoughts running through his mind, which so forcibly summed up the situation, that they could hardly be reproduced in cold print.

The man looked at him for a moment, then his eyelids dropped, and with another bow to the Señora, he went to his seat. It took all Ellerton's self-control, and he had a good deal of it, not to show that he recognised in this man one of his father's best engineers who had stolen the specifications of an apparatus upon which he himself had been working hard for some months before this crisis, which had begun on board the *Isola*, and was being continued in this new existence of his.

He bowed as Herarra made the introduction, and said to him in Spanish:

"The Señor's name is English. May I ask whether he understands the language which we have spoken so far? I only ask the question, because it may be that the Señora does not understand our English speech—I mean mine and his. Of course I need not remind you that it is usual to use a language at the dinner-table that everyone understands."

"It is unfortunate," replied Herarra, "but our friend understands only English. I speak it with some little difficulty, and the Señora not at all, except just a few words, and so I suppose we shall have to make the best of it."

The Señora bowed her acquiescence, and Ellerton, looking straight at Battley, as though he were a perfect stranger, said:

"Very well, as I happen to speak both languages, perhaps we shall be able to get on."

"No doubt of that, I think," said the Señora. "May I ask, Señor, where you learnt your Spanish before you joined us so many years ago in this Underworld of ours?"

He saw an absolutely savage expression come over Herarra's face as she said this, but it vanished in a moment when he replied:

"You see, Señora, that I have been suffering from a serious lapse of memory, and therefore I am not quite able to answer that question exactly, but somehow it seems to me that a long time ago now I did learn to speak Spanish."

And while he was saying this he looked at Battley, saying in his soul:

"I am not sorry I met you, and if you don't help me out of this place, that I've tumbled into somehow, I'll wring your neck, whatever else happens."

The meal was such as might have been served in the Carlton or the Waldorf-Astoria, and the wine was certainly not made from grapes grown beyond the reach of the sun. These were facts which Ellerton laid by for possible future use. The conversation was somewhat restrained and difficult in consequence, not only of Mr. Battley's lack of Spanish, but also to a considerable extent on another account which he would have found it difficult to explain to the man at the head of the table, who already held his liberty in his hands, and, as he very well knew, could and would, if necessary, arrange for his disappearance from the ledge into the boiling lake, by just giving his orders.

When the dinner was over—and Ellerton was very glad when it was finished, chiefly because of his disgust at the slavish manner in which Brenda and Thyrza and Myra waited upon them, as though they were not even servants but slaves, Herarra said to him in Spanish, as the Señora rose:

"And now, Señor, shall we go back to your own apartment and smoke our cigars, or would you prefer to renew your old and forgotten memories of the world to which you have returned?"

"If we can smoke our cigars while I am renewing my memories I think I should prefer that," replied Ellerton, as he bowed his adieu to the Señora, "and our friend here, I presume he will accompany us? From our conversation I take it that he is your second-in-command," he continued, looking uncomfortably hard at the Yorkshireman.

"The Señor is the head of our engineering department," was the reply. "As he does not enjoy tobacco, and as he has some matters to attend to before the sleeping hour comes—you see we make our own night and day here—we will, if you please, take a sip of coffee and cognac, and join him later in his department."

Mr. Battley took his dismissal for the time thankfully. As he left the room Ellerton gave him a look which meant a great deal.

While they sipped their coffee almost in silence save for a few casual remarks, for, truth to tell, both were somewhat busy thinking, Ellerton took every opportunity that offered to look keenly at every feature and gesture of his host, what time the two words "Leon Herarra"—"Leon Herarra"—kept chasing each other through his mind. He knew the name well enough as that of the man who had forged the bonds; but the man himself, the man he had half-recognised when he woke for the first time—where had he *seen* him before?

Presently, as Herarra set down his empty cup, rose and said politely:

"Well, Señor, if you have finished, shall we go?" the flash of recollection came.

"Good God, I thought so! He was the other man in the boat, and I saved his life by getting this chop over the head from our mutual friend Staunton. What the dickens will happen if he recognises me?"

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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He Couldn't Afford it.

ESTELLE: "And are you going to leave me so soon, Augustus?" Augustus: "My love, I would willingly give ten years of my life if I could stay longer. But if I don't go, I shall be fined sixpence for being late at our debating society."

Then He Revoked.

"MY wife," he said proudly, "has been known as the queen of hearts." "No doubt," they answered; "it was because she took the knave."

An Ambiguous Farewell.

HE (about to start on a journey): "Can I still trust you to love me so when I am far away?" She (trustfully): "Yes dearest, yes. The farther you are away the better I shall love you!"

She Still Wonders.

"How long does the train stop here?" the old lady asked the guard. "Stop here?" answered the functionary. "Four minutes. From two to two to two-two." "I wonder," mused the old lady, "if that man thinks he is the whistle?"

That was No Encouragement.

HE: "If you did not love me, why did you encourage me?" She: "I haven't encouraged you." He: "For two seasons you have accepted every one of my invitations to the theatre." She: "That was not because I loved you; it was because I loved the theatre."

The Natural Reason.

"ETHEL," said a clergyman to one of his daughters, whom he saw with her hair in curling-pins, "if Nature had assigned your hair to curl, it would have curled it for you." "It did, dad, when I was a child," was the reply; "but I suppose it thinks now that I am old enough to do it myself."

It Came as a Shock.

SOPHY (who has accepted Mr. Charles Fleetwood the night before): "Does Mr. Fleetwood strike you as being a sensitive man, Pauline?" Pauline (who doesn't know of the engagement): "Gracious, no! A man who has been rejected by fourteen girls within six months, and gets fat on it, cannot be sensitive. Why, Sophy! what's the matter?" She had fainted.

Feminine Figures.

"No," said the beauteous maiden, "I cannot marry you; the disparity in our ages is an insurmountable barrier." "But," answered the man who would a hubby be, "you admit to having celebrated twenty-two birthday anniversaries, and I am only ten years your senior." "True," said the fair one, "but think of the difference twenty years hence; you will be fifty-two and I will be twenty-seven." And, being a wise man, he said never a word, but let it go at that.

She Asked for it and She Got it.

HE: "A funny thing happened up at the Blimbers the other night. May Blimber, you know, is quite a whistler, and she walked up to the piano, and sat down, and was just going to whistle her best piece——" She: "Yes; go on." He: "Charlie Linseed was there, and he didn't know about her whistling talent. And so when she looked up at him with her mouth all puckered he thought it was an invitation and kissed her." She: "Did he? Was—was it puckered like this?"

A Profound Secret.

SOPHIE: "Julie and Joe are engaged, but they have decided to keep their engagement a secret; Julie told me so." Tom: "Yes; I know it; Joe told me."

What He Did and where She was.

LAWYER: "Where did he kiss you?" Pretty Plaintiff: "On the mouth, sir." Lawyer: "No, no! you don't understand. I mean where were you?" Plaintiff (blushing): "In his arms, sir."

Two Points of View.

HE: "Your eyes remind me of a bottle of champagne." She: "And why, pray?" He: "Because they sparkle so." She: "Well, you remind me of the empty bottle." He: "How so?" She: "You don't pop."

All the Difference.

MAUDE: "Oh, mamma, I wish you'd introduce me to that tall gentleman yonder. He has such a noble carriage!" Mamma: "Don't be foolish, dear; he's a nobody. But the little gentleman with him has a noble carriage and pair!"

A Romance Ended.

WATTS: "There are two broken-hearted chappies in two office buildings down my way." Potts: "And why?" Watts: "They have been flirting with each other across the street for a week from their window. Each thought the other was a girl."

Bridegrooms as Bargains.

"WAS she willing to pay so much for such an insignificant husband?" asked the thoughtless girl. "Oh, dear no," replied the well-posted girl, "she was buying a position in Society when she took the duke, and not a husband. He was simply done up in the package."

The Mistake They Made.

"WHEN I was courting my wife," said the sad-faced man, "we were two souls with but a single thought." "How about you at present?" asked the inquisitive youth. "We still have a single thought," replied the proprietor of the sad visage. "We both think we made idiots of ourselves."

He who Hesitates is Lost.

"Is it true, Miss Gertie," he said, "that there are just two things a woman will jump at—a conclusion and a mouse?" "No," she answered, "there is a third, Mr. Philip." After thinking the matter over for a few minutes he tremblingly made her an offer, but she didn't jump at it. He was not the right man.

It Had the Desired Effect.

HE was one of those bashful young men, and sat six yards away from the girl of his choice. "Don't you think you'd better see a surgeon, Freddy?" she inquired with feigned alarm. "See a surgeon, D—Dolly!" he echoed, in astonishment. "Why, what for?" "Really, didn't you know your arm was out of place?" Then those six yawning yards were diminished.

A Very Remote Ancestor.

MRS. NEWRICHE (patronisingly): "Were any of your ancestors men of note, Mr. Cynic?" Mr. Cynic: "Yes, madam, I should say so. One of them was the most famous admiral of his day, and commanded the allied forces of the world." Mrs. Newriche (with altered tone of deep respect): "Is it possible, Mr. Cynic? And what was his name?" Mr. Cynic: "Noah, madam."

She was a Clever Girl.

THE critical minute had come. He knelt on the carpet. "Darling," he whispered, "will you be my wife?" Just then a deep voice from a corner answered, "Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" a dozen times. "What does that mean?" gasped the astonished suitor. "It means," replied the fair girl, "that papa forbade me answering in the affirmative when you proposed. However, this did not deter me from employing a phonograph to take my place."

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Mrs. McLaren's Boarder.

Relating the Mistake a Girl Made.

Not that she had only one; no, she had many. I was one, my Uncle Dick was another; but the lodger whom I have in my mind's eye in connection with the title of my tale was a gentleman, young and handsome, whose advent created a stir in my serenity.

One afternoon, while I was gazing out of my window, I beheld a large van pulling up before the door, laden with seven large trunks, a capacious clothes-basket with a cover, a bundle of swords and canes, and several hat-boxes.

These articles were all safely deposited within the house. Surely, I thought, not all the property of the one masculine whom I knew our worthy landlady was expecting to occupy the room next my own (third storey front); but I was much mistaken; the entire collection of miscellaneous luggage was before long imported to the neighbouring apartment, much—very much—to my astonishment; but I, of course, forbore either to make remarks or ask questions.

At dinner I beheld the proprietor of all this array, good-looking, as I remarked above, tall, his finely-developed figure displayed to admirable advantage in a grey tweed suit; dark-brown eyes, and beautiful white teeth, showing, now and then, under his thick moustache.

Immediately my interest and curiosity were aroused in the newcomer. I had no chance to view him other than in the brief dinner hour, for, immediately thereafter, donning a shining top hat, and toying with an ivory-handled cane, Mr. Duane lit a cigar and sauntered forth.

Late at night I heard him return and enter his room. His customs were strange, I thought, at first; he appeared very late in the mornings for breakfast, walked forth at about half-past ten or eleven, usually armed not only with cane and cigar, but also a light roll, either manuscript or pamphlets, I could not determine which. He always came home about three, but regularly passed his evenings out. Now and then a mysterious boy appeared, and bore off the clothes-basket, apparently bursting and running over with parti-coloured wearing apparel, and occasionally the point of a rapier gave zest to the arrangement. The basket was, however, always returned by the same boy, sometimes full, sometimes empty.

The occupations of Mr. Duane, while at home, I could vouch for as being studious. He seemed to devote his entire muscle and lung to elocutionary exercise; and the nature of his selections roamed anywhere from Shakespeare down to nameless authors of the nineteenth century.

I finally concluded, after an argument with Uncle Dick, that he was a young lawyer, or rather that he hoped and aspired to fame in the practice of the law.

After expressing this belief to Mrs. McLaren, she coincided with me entirely, adding that he "was of a very fine old family in Lancashire—very fine; and, oh, yes, of course, a-studying for the Bar!"

The mystery was solved — at least the mystery of elocutionary exercise at any and every hour of the day and night; but the boy, the seven trunks, the parti-coloured garments, and the collection of fire and side-arms!"

Wait and hope! I should yet find out. Certainly, he was marvellously fine-looking, and I could readily comprehend his being a scion of an aristocratic house, for he had a very thoroughbred air.

Once Mr. Duane was lured into the drawing-room. It was on a Sunday evening, which was, in point of fact, the only night that he ever spent in the house, no matter what the elements or the attractions within doors.

He was invited to sing by a maiden of certain years, and replied somewhat strangely, I thought, that "he'd never learnt; that sort of thing never came in his line at all, and——" At which point Mrs. McLaren hastily called the young aspirant for legal honours to her side to look at photographs of departed McLarens.

What it all denoted I was at a loss to conjecture, but upon one subject I was positive, and that was an unconquerable curiosity in my neighbour.

Daily, as I watched him go forth with his little porfolio, a bundle of yellowish-brown pamphlets, I yearned to know more of him; it was irresistible; fight as I would against it, I took a frightful interest in this new boarder, who, beyond a steady habit he had of looking at me fixedly, now and then, and blushing like a girl whenever I caught the turn of his eyes, evidently took no interest in me; we never talked to each other, scarcely spoke, only a polite profound bow, whenever I chanced to meet him, as I occasionally did in the street, swinging along in his lazy fashion.

But, notwithstanding his lack of interest in me, mine grew wilfully and wonderfully strong in him, and refused to be crushed, either by other society or those rules of propriety for the guidance of a young maiden's heart and thoughts which my dear old uncle, aided and abetted by my worthy and spinster aunt, Matilda, had instilled into my breast since earliest childhood.

I *would* think of young lawyers, and brown eyes, and seven trunks, and an adherence to one grey tweed suit, whether it was proper, or whether it was not.

One day, in about the middle of the eighth week of this object of interest's residence in the boarding-house, I was lying prone upon my sofa, afflicted with the most frightful headache.

The door was standing partially open, in such a way that I could see out, but no person passing see in, for the heat from the hot water pipes with which the room was heated almost suffocated me, and I feared an incursion of neuralgia from without should I open the window.

There came a ring at the bell—no unusual sound, but I noticed it, because every small sound almost drove me distracted.

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The ring was repeated with violence several times, and presently I discerned a clear, correct feminine voice inquire, "Is Mr. Duane at home?"

Upon receiving an affirmative reply, and the attendant question, "What name?" this woman's clear voice replied: "Miss Delaplaine; but, never mind; what room?—third floor front, I believe, isn't it?" she asked briskly. "I'll go straight up; you needn't trouble," with which comforting assurance to Bridget's weary limbs, Miss Delaplaine, with a sprightly step, bounded up the stairs and presently brushed past my door on her way.

She was a tall, dark, pretty girl, with a great many curls floating down her back, a little pink hat sat jauntily on her head, a perfectly irreproachable grey silk dress, an ungloved dress, with a variety of rings and a roll of something in it.

Upon reaching my neighbour's door, she tapped lightly, and receiving an invitation from the other side to "come in," turned the knob, and sang out:

"Hello, Mr. Duane! how are you? I got so fidgety over this hateful thing, I thought I must go over it once again with you before to-night, so——"

Here Miss Delaplaine's speech was cut short by her host's voice, which I could hear distinctly enough through the thin partition dividing the apartments.

"Don't bawl so, Lillie, for Heaven's sake! Shut the door, can't you?"

The portal banged, whether urged thereto by host or guest I could not say, but it might as well have been open so far as I was concerned. Firstly, I heard Mr. Duane's voice in a very slow, drawling sort of tone:

"I haven't looked at the thing yet. I've been so busy about other matters."

"Not looked at it!" responded Miss Delaplaine, in accents of surprise. "Why, you'll be sure to break down, and if you do I'll never forgive you, or get over it, either. You know the whole business is new to me, anyway, and I don't see how you can act so meanly, Harold!"

Miss Delaplaine spoke in a key that was piteous to hear. Her host replied languidly:

"Oh, I'm an awfully quick study. Don't worry, please. Just sit down there and amuse yourself for a few minutes while I get ready; that's a darling," added Mr. Duane, in a soft manner.

This brief dialogue was succeeded by a silence of a quarter of an hour or so.

"What could it mean?" I asked myself again and again. "Engaged? But even so, how strange to come and visit her betrothed in so social and peculiar a style? Cousins? I never visited my cousins of the opposite gender in their boarding-houses, nor did any of my acquaintances. Simpy a friend? Well, no; further off than ever. "'That's a darling!'" rang in my ears like a sort of knell. "Engaged," I repeated to myself, "of course; but how very odd! I should not think Mr. Harold Duane the sort of man who would fancy such a fiery, free-and-easy young lady to convert into his wife; but there's no telling," I argued. "She certainly is a trifle fast, but then she is very pretty, and probably very worthy and lovely."

My explanatory soliloquy with reference to Miss Lillie Delaplaine was here interrupted by that young lady's soprano voice carolling melodiously a couplet of some song relating to "my love" and "stars," and "wars."

This display of her quantity of lung power was hastily put a stop to by him whom I now forced myself to consider the vocalist's intended husband, in these terms:

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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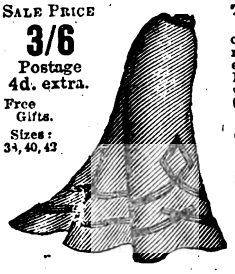

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"Oh, stop that squalling! You'll rouse the house. There!" and I heard a bang upon the table. "That's fine, my dear."

"Get up," replied Miss Lillie irrelevantly.

"What, 'biz' and all?" inquired her host, in somewhat of a languid tone. "I am very tired."

"Of course; that was principally what I got in the fidgets over. Come. Oh, Colonel, is that you?"

Mr. Duane's affianced spoke in tones of accentuated and silvery surprise, and I waited eagerly for the response of some individual who, I thought, must have entered the next room through the medium of the window, or else rendered himself invisible while passing my door. But no third voice made itself heard. Mr. Duane's own organ answered in tones of delicious gallantry:

"'Tis I, Mademoiselle Estelle; and how beautiful, how charming, you look! Why do you wander in this wild and unfrequented region, where you are exposed to——"

A scream from Miss Lillie Estelle (I presume the latter to be a middle name), smothered by some means by Mr. Duane interrupted this speech. A terrific bang against the wall, either one of the two falling upon the floor with a resounding crash—Miss Lillie Estelle, I surmise, from what succeeds—Mr., or rather, Colonel, Duane's voice betokening a terrible anguish of spirit as he spoke.

"My beloved! Look up and speak to me, Estelle; he is dead! You now have not an enemy upon the earth, nor I a rival or an opponent. Look upon me, beloved, with those beautiful eyes, and say that you will live for me!"

Decidedly this was growing peculiar. Ought I to have heard! Ought I not get up and make a racket, or leave my room altogether? No, I could not; my head throbbed wildly, and I could not help hearing; if Mr. Duane chose to go through such scenes with his *fiancée*, he might; I should not move.

This train of thought was interrupted by a low moan from the young lady; and, fed by reflection and a vigorous fancy, I rapidly concluded that the "colonel," although a mute, was probably Miss Delaplaine's guardian, and had eluded my observation in gaining the next room, and in attempting to coerce his ward into a final separation from her lover, had met with an untimely end at the hands of her disapproved suitor.

But how account for the strange language they had used in conversing—the peculiar allusions to "wild and unfrequented regions?"

Alas! I was fearfully bewildered, and almost feared I had suddenly gone insane. However, whether insane or not, the sense of hearing, or its perverted semblance, was still mine. The low moan over, Mr. Duane exclaimed, in tones of horror:

"Behold him dead, and by this hand—for thee!"

Again a moan and a brief silence, which I occupied in picturing the body, which I was now sure was lying stiff and stark in the next room, and of the accuracy of my instinctive abhorrence for the collection of arms I had noted in the strange boarder's luggage.

Murder! I thought my brain fairly reeling. Murder! It must have been with a poinard, or a dirk. I had heard no report, and the "colonel" had never spoken a word. Of course I ought—I must get up and alarm the house; but my limbs refused to support me. A dim and terrible fear possessed my soul, and I lay still upon the lounge, petrified with horror.

Presently I again distinguished sounds issuing from the fatal apartment, indistinct at first, but finally clearer. Quite clearly Miss Lillie Estelle Delaplaine's voice sounded out lively and cheerful.

"I say, Harold, think I'll look well in a wedding-dress?"

"Suppose so," said the other laconically. "Don't daub your face up with too much paint, though; and, look here, Lil, don't lean too heavily on me, because I haven't got over that brilliant tumble of mine from the flies yet. It hurts like the dickens every day."

"All right," sang out the lively Lillie. "Come on; now for the next. That's light; you might as well sit down, if you like. You do look tired, Harold. I do declare, you look as though you were in love with somebody. Who is it? Quite romantic. You aren't nearly as lively as when you first came down from Lancashire."

My heavens! I saw it all. They were going to be married that night. In the very presence of the body of the murdered colonel, this girl had the coolness to ask him how he thought "she'd look in her wedding-dress?"

And he! What must he be? A man certainly could not *love* the girl whom, about to marry, he advised in a careless voice not to "paint her face too much," and not to "lean upon his arm too heavily."

What should I do?

There were more low murmurings, probably, I judged, relative to the disposition of the body of the murdered man, and then Miss Lillie Estelle's voice, quivering with a passionate tenderness, ejaculated:

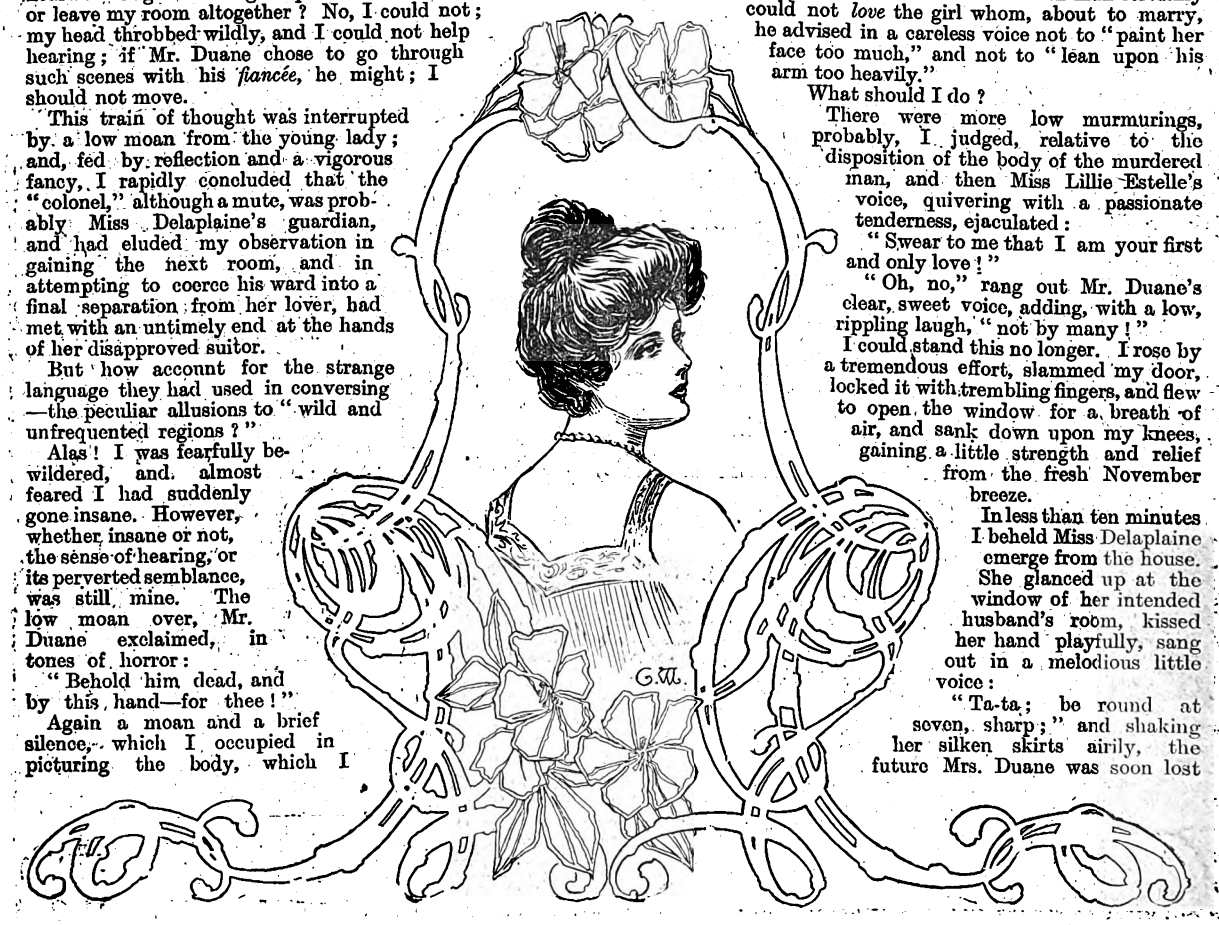
"Swear to me that I am your first and only love!"

"Oh, no," rang out Mr. Duane's clear, sweet voice, adding, with a low, rippling laugh, "not by many!"

I could stand this no longer. I rose by a tremendous effort, slammed my door, locked it with trembling fingers, and flew to open the window for a breath of air, and sank down upon my knees, gaining a little strength and relief from the fresh November breeze.

In less than ten minutes I beheld Miss Delaplaine emerge from the house. She glanced up at the window of her intended husband's room, kissed her hand playfully, sang out in a melodious little voice:

"Ta-ta; be round at seven, sharp;" and shaking her silken skirts airily, the future Mrs. Duane was soon lost



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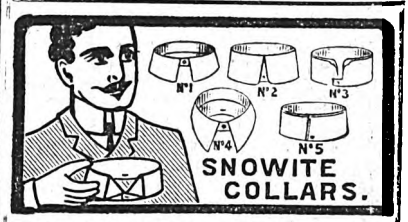

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to view round the corner of Clarence Street, presently succeeded by Mr. Duane, who, however, meandered in the opposite direction.

Revived by the cool air, I rose and hastily unbolted the door, preparatory to going below to announce the tragedy to Mrs. McLaren, and to declare to her at one and the same time that no human power would induce me to sleep another night in the third storey of her house. My uncle, of course, had not as yet returned from his business, so I could not rush to him first.

Opening the door, I peeped cautiously out. Horrors! Mr. Duane's door stood wide open, and almost unconsciously I gazed in, expecting to behold, with frozen eyes, the "colonel's" body laid out upon a blood-stained carpet.

Nothing of the sort. No "colonel," no body, no blood; nothing at all different from the usual aspect my neighbour's apartment presented to my daily vision as I passed in and out.

What had they done with it? Had they put it up the chimney? There was none. In the cupboard? No; the door of that receptacle stood open, and within it, as sole occupants, were a light overcoat, a Panama hat, and three or four pairs of boots.

I stood there speechless, glaring, in a white wrapper and long, dishevelled hair, when I heard a footstep, and in another instant the murderer stood before me.

In rather a gasping voice I ejaculated, somewhat unnecessarily:

"I thought—you were out, Mr. Duane!" and then bitterly regretted having spoken at all.

What business had I thinking anything about him, in or out, the wretched criminal?

"I did step out to get a cigar," he replied, smiling. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he replied civilly. "You look alarmed."

"I am, for I—I thought you'd been killing somebody!"

It was a wild thing to say to a man with whom one had never exchanged a hundred words, and who, in all murderous probability, would thank you harshly for your information; but he received it obligingly enough, as he laughed, and answered:

"Oh, I'm sorry we disturbed you. Miss Delaplaine, our leading lady, is rather lively, even over her rehearsals. I did my best to keep her quiet, for I was afraid all the while that we were annoying you. Please forgive me?" he asked, bending two repentant brown eyes upon me. "I—she sha'n't come here again for any new piece."

"Oh, certainly," I responded, in a maze of bewilderment, and with the best grace I could command. "Please forgive me my rudeness and my frightful suspicions. I really thought you had been murdering a colonel or somebody!"

He laughed heartily, and with a hundred assurances of future good behaviour, and the brightest, sweetest smile in the world under his golden moustache, disappeared within the recesses of the apartment for which he paid the worthy Mrs. McLaren thirty shillings per week.

I flew to my landlady, not with a tale of crime, but for information.

"An actor," she said.

Ah, now I saw it all! but why had she never divulged the nature of her new boarder's calling, but rather induced the belief in another calling. He, as I remembered now, had never evinced any disposition to make a secret of his belonging to the "profession."

Well, Mrs. McLaren explained, now that she had to, that when the supposed law-student engaged the room, she knew not his occupation. A few days later she became acquainted with it, and yet feared to let her other boarders into the secret, knowing full well that their virtuous and well-regulated souls would recoil from the idea of a play-actor beneath the same roof with themselves. All of them were people who would as soon think of entering a theatre as undertaking a trip to America in a paper boat. Mr. Duane's thirty shillings a week were dear to the heart of the widow McLaren, and, besides, he was "such a gentleman! such a fine family! such exceptional references, that she hadn't the heart to tell him she required the room."

An actor! This, then, explained days at home and nights abroad; collections of fire and side-arms, wigs, and last—by no means least—Miss Lillie (without the Estelle this time) Delaplaine's call.

The seven trunks, of course, contained his wardrobe—theatrical, not civilian. The visits of the mysterious boy were simply occasions for carrying forth those costumes required by Mr. Duane in the play then running, and to return those not in use. The morning promenades, armed with pamphlets (alas! containing "parts," not "briefs"), simply eleven o'clock calls to rehearsal. Strange that no one ever saw his name in the papers, or his face behind the footlights. But, dear me, he was, of course, no star, and then the name.

Well, the new boarder, Mr. Harold Duane, was a law-student, and any other Mr. Harold Duane announced as fulfilling the *role* of hero in drama, comedy, or farce, could certainly not be connected with him.

Again, none of the virtuous dwellers beneath the roof of Mrs. McLaren ever darkened the door of a temple of the drama with their presence.

Of course, now that the secret was out, all attempts at legal dissimulation on the part of the worthy widow were at an end.

That evening, when the subject of their discussion was probably repeating his love-making of the morning to "Mademoiselle Estelle," the anti-histrionic corps of his fellow-boarders were holding solemn conclave over the horrors of the situation in the parlour.

Though present, I was not of their inclination. I had always adored in secret that profession of which the sometime law-student was a member; but the result of this court of investigation was that, either Mr. Duane must leave, or they, the judges, would; one of the two—whichever seemed better to the mind of Mrs. McLaren.

As may readily be imagined, the arithmetical problem of a weekly deficit in the receipts of thirty shillings, or ten or twelve times that sum, was quickly solved in the brain of the widow.

The next morning the dramatic and hitherto mysterious boarder was duly informed of the perils and necessities of the situation.

Poor fellow! he had fully believed all along that everyone was perfectly aware of his business, and seemed to be rather confounded at the whole proceeding.

However, he appeared quite regardless of the tribulations of moving, and watched (I did, too, from the vantage-ground of my casement) the loading of the seven trunks with a becoming calm.

But, if the virtuous dozen were in danger while Mr. Duane, whilom lawyer, present actor, slept beneath the same roof with them, they were not very much better off when he dreamt his dreams out, six streets away.

Mr. Duane got a trick of coming round frightfully often, and, after a while, nearly every day; and finally—we've laughed a great many times together over his "engagement," engendered in my fertile imagination, with Miss Lillie Delaplaine, who, it seems, is married.

"No intention in the world of running away with Lillie," said Harold to me, the other day; "but I hope I shall tell you very soon, Muriel, my little darling, how you look in a wedding-dress."

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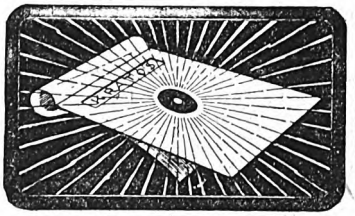

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Suspicion.

"I AM anxious about my lover," writes "AMY." "He has recently changed his lodgings, and his landlady's daughter is a very pretty girl, who will see a lot of him. I am living some distance away, and fear he may be stolen from me."

* * * * * * *

I should trust him, "AMY." Surely he is not so fickle as to be led away so easily? And if you let the young lady know that he is your sweetheart, I feel sure she will not be so mean as to attempt to steal him from you. After all, a pretty girl is not so hard up for suitors that she must poach on other people's preserves to find one.

Should He Propose?

"ADOLPHUS" writes, "I wish to become engaged to a certain girl, but not until my means allow. I expect shortly to inherit a sum of money, which would enable me to offer her marriage, but there is just a doubt. Would you advise me to postpone proposal until I know definitely, or until I come into the money, or what should I do?"

* * * * * * *

It would be better to be candid with the girl, and tell her your prospects. I do not suppose she herself will wish to become engaged unless you have good means or assured prospects, and would probably take as sensible a view of your not proposing as you could wish. It is certainly wise not to pledge yourself and the girl until you know you are in a position to make her happy.

Unconscious Offence.

"I AM afraid," writes "B. T.," "that I have offended a young lady to whom I wished to pay attentions, but only know of it through private sources. The other night I made some trivial remark, which I meant as a joke, but I thought she took it seriously. She did not appear offended at the time, but later on I met a great friend of hers, who said, 'Miss B—— is offended with you for saying what you did, but don't let her know I told you so, as I only heard it in strict confidence.' What am I to do? I cannot apologise, as I am not supposed to know she is offended."

* * * * * * *

If you really said something you should not, it would be better in any case to apologise, and explain your meaning. You need not reveal that you heard it from the friend. Write saying you regretted afterwards what you had said, and hoped it would be overlooked. It may take some time to right it, as you must know that slight offences are less soon forgiven than heavy ones.

A Too Long Engagement.

"ENGAGED" writes: "When I proposed to my young lady she was twenty-five years old, and quite attractive in looks and manner. Three years have now elapsed, and though I'm still fond of her, she has gone off a great deal, and is a trifle peevish at times. I doubt whether, after all, we should really be happy now, as she seems so different. What would you advise?"

* * * * * * *

I advise you to marry her at the earliest possible moment. A man who lets an engagement hang on indefinitely—if, of course, he is able to marry—can scarcely be surprised if his sweetheart shows some signs of advancing years. I doubt not that the girl is chafing at the length of the engagement, and wishes to get married. At twenty-eight, though still young, a girl feels she should not still be single, and no doubt her dear friends remind her of the fact. These things combine to sour her manner, and wear her looks, and it is her *fiancé's* duty to hasten on the wedding.

Fear of a Mother-in-Law.

"I AM not happy," writes "EDWARD." "I am very fond of the girl to whom I am engaged, but cannot endure her mother. I fear we should not at all agree after married life. Do you think it would be wise to go further with the affair, seeing how unhappy the mother-in-law may make us."

* * * * * * *

One would think, "EDWARD," that you were going to marry the mother-in-law yourself from your anxiety. I have never heard of an engagement being broken off for such a reason, and do not think you can be very fond of the girl if you ever contemplate a breach on those grounds. Besides, there is no need for you to entertain your mother-in-law after marriage. It is quite a delusion and very old-fashioned to make out that this lady is sure to interfere in her son-in-law's household. Most of the mothers-in-law of my acquaintance, though ever so fond of their sons and daughters, leave them severely alone in their private affairs. It is only a very foolish and vulgar type of person who interferes in this way, and I think she lives chiefly in the imagination.

Advice for a Mother.

HERE is another mother question, and a rather more serious one. "MATER'S" daughter is a very sensitive, innocent girl, who is receiving attentions from a man much older than herself, who has not a very good character. Still, he has much influence over the girl. "MATER" wants to stop the affair altogether, but fears it would make her daughter unhappy. What is the best thing to do?

* * * * * * *

If the man has no serious intentions, and is not a fit person for your daughter to marry, you ought to stop any communication. It may go against the grain, perhaps, to be too strict, but it is your duty as a mother to do it. Be careful not to do it in a tyrannical way, which might lead to an elopement or secret marriage between the couple. It would be better if you could take the girl away for a long stay, or send her somewhere where she would not be in touch with the man. You should also privately talk to him, to see what he intends, and if you still think the affair is unsatisfactory, ask him to cease meeting your daughter. She might be unhappy for a while, but I feel sure she will soon get over it when she sees that you have acted for the best.

Cynthia

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For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win.)

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For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win.)

Offered by THE BOYS' LEADER, "The Paper a Boy can take Home."
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The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year to a girl.

100 CONSOLATION GIFTS WILL ALSO BE AWARDED.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN "THE BOYS' LEADER."

THIS IS THE FIRST SET.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

FURTHER SET OF QUESTIONS APPEARS IN "THE BOYS' LEADER" NOW ON SALE.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.
Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.
This competition will be a valuable education for a boy or girl, even if they do not wish to enter for the prizes.
The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.
Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.
At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by **Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt** (President of the United States), **Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton,** the late **Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.**

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SHORT STORIES

No. 779.] Week ending December 5th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Shackell rushed up the steps waving a telegraph form in his hand. Sara was standing by the door at the top. "Too late! too late!" she cried.

(A Thrilling Episode from this week's "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE

The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
COUGHS, COLDS, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA, CATARRH, WEAK LUNGS, and CHILDREN'S COUGHS.

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Veno's Lightning Cough Cure
Produces its most brilliant effect in Chronic Bronchitis and Asthma. It effects astonishing cures in the worst and most persistent cases.

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Mrs. ADA S. BALLIN, 5, Agar Street, London, Editor "Womanhood," and a great authority upon children's diseases, writes:—"Veno's Lightning Cough Cure is an exceedingly successful remedy; it is very pleasant to take and the relief it gives is very rapid. The preparation is perfectly safe for children."

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LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES **9½d.** Regular Sizes, 1/1½ and 2/9.

Ask for VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE at Chemists and Drug Stores, or post free from the VENO DRUG CO., Hulme, Manchester, England.

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CONTENTS OF PARCEL:

6 Table Knives	6 Dessert Spoons	2 Salt Spoons
6 Table Forks	6 Tea Spoons	2 Mustard Spoons
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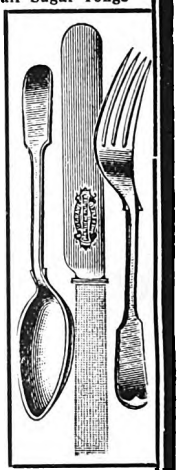
6 Dessert Forks	2 Table Spoons	1 pair Sugar Tongs

and 1 Pickle Fork.



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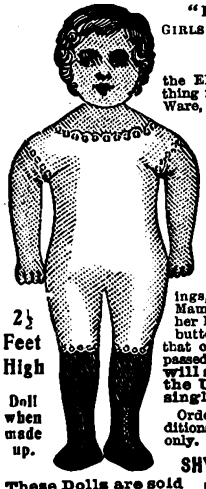

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These Dolls are sold all the year round. **75 Queen Victoria St., London, E.C.**

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Short Stories

No. 779.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending December 5th, 1903.

"TIDDLES."

A Very Pretty Story telling how a Little Girl Managed to Make Four Persons Happy.

"But I have no time for that sort of thing."

The speaker, a man with a strong, resolute, somewhat weary face moved restlessly in his chair as if to escape from the clear, direct gaze the girl he addressed turned upon him. She had a way of looking at him, this girl, which was rather disconcerting—a way which demanded the exact truth, and, as he confessed to himself—perhaps reluctantly—got it. It was almost impossible, looking into her face with its many changeable expressions—at one moment brimming over with fun and mischief, the next, sad with the ready sympathy accorded by all true womanly natures—to prevaricate. She took life rather seriously this little girl, in spite of the fun and mischief, which would bubble over at times, and there was a certain look in her deep violet eyes which told of a nature which might prove worth sounding. That thought passed through the man's mind as she gazed at him, as if trying to reckon up the exact meaning of his last words. They had been speaking of love, those two, and with a certain impatience with which a man of the world who has passed his first youth will treat the subject he repeated:

"No—I have no time for that sort of thing."

"Why?" she asked in the simple, direct way he had grown accustomed to during the last few days.

"Because my work must come first with me," he answered.

"Then you are ambitious," said the girl.

"Yes"—with a hardening of the lines on his face which told of a fight hardly won, which also showed the indomitable spirit of the man—a look which might spell "bend" if necessary, but not "break." Then, with a sudden change in his voice which appealed to the girl at once, he said:

"My mother died worn out soon after she was thirty because my father possessed no ambition."

"Yes," she said softly, "I understand."

Looking at the small earnest face turned almost pityingly towards him, the man felt that she did understand, and a sense of comradeship not often experienced crept over him, making him wonder if she might not be right when she said:

"But do you not think it is a pity to miss all the best things of life, to be always alone, to have no one to care whether your work goes well or ill?"

As she spoke another face rose in the man's mind, a face beautiful enough, indeed far surpassing that of the girl by his side, but without its indefinable charm—cold, proud, self-possessed—fitted in every way, so people said, to be the wife of the rising barrister, Ralph Carrington. No! he should not always be "alone," but apart from the position he could give her, would Beatrice Cangham care "whether his work went well or ill?"

He checked the impatient sigh which rose to his lips and also the half-formed thought that he would tell his "little friend," as he called Nina Beaumont—of his bride who was to be—of the marriage which was to take place in the summer—a marriage which was "so suitable," so his friends said, "which would be such a help to him in his profession," in which, as he told himself half in pride, half in contempt, *love* had no part. No! he was leaving Parkfield Manor in a few days; why spoil those days by speaking or thinking of a future which had never been too attractive and which now, somehow, seemed less so than ever. He turned to the girl who was still gazing at him with grave, earnest eyes:

"So you think I am missing the best things in life, little one, do you?"

"I think so," she said simply; then, with that quick change of mood which was one of her chief charms, she said merrily:

"But come, 'My lord,' listen to that waltz; do you know you asked me for it a quarter of an hour ago? It is not worth much, if it is not worth the taking, eh?"

Rising with alacrity as he thought of several waltzes with this same small person which had a way of recurring to him, as delightful experiences, they left the conservatory and were soon floating down the room to the strains of the "Valse Bleue."

* * * * *

Ralph Carrington sat in the smoke room at Parkfield Manor, and as he puffed the smoke-rings above his head, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, his thoughts travelled

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back over the last fortnight, to the day when, turning out of his London chambers, he had bumped into his old college chum, Arthur Maitland, a man whom he had not met for the last four years, but of whose friendship he felt as sure as if they had seen each other daily. As Arthur would have said—they had been great "pals" at college—"what the dickens have you been doing to yourself?" had been that gentleman's greeting after a grip of his friend's hand, the intensity of which would have brought tears to the eyes of any ordinary person. "You look as if you had taken a ticket for Kingdom Come!"

"Shouldn't mind much if I had," he remembered saying—for he had reached that stage when nothing seems to matter and a doctor would have said he was suffering from a severe attack of "nerves" consequent on overwork and want of change.

"Look here, old chap," said Maitland, "you're overdoing it; throw musty law books and 'cases' to the winds, or otherwise get someone to look after them for you, and come down to Parkfield. The wife would be glad to see you, I'm sure, and we have all sorts of gaieties on the go for Christmas; you've never been introduced to 'Tiddles,' have you? That would do you good in itself—wake you up, you know."

Wondering who or what "Tiddles" might be, Ralph Carrington had promised to "look them up" and "stay until he felt better." He had been looking forward to a lonely Christmas, for Beatrice Cangham was abroad with her aunt, who objected to spending the winter in London with all its smuts and fogs. They were in Egypt, and only intended coming home in time for preparations for the wedding which was to take place the latter part of June.

From time to time Carrington received long descriptive letters filled with accounts of their gaieties—their stay at Cairo, of the dance at "Shephead's," which had been such a huge success, the ride to the Pyramids with Sir Roland North in attendance. The good time they had on board the *Rameses* going up the Nile, the moonlight expedition to Thebes—how wonderful the ruins were—everything, it seemed to him, but interest in himself and his doings. He had never seemed to notice how wrapped up in herself the girl was, until, worn-out and overdone, on the brink of illness, he had felt the want of a woman's sympathy. "Nina will do him good," thought little "Mrs. Arthur," as she preferred being called—when he turned up at Parkfield as he had promised on Christmas Eve, and Nina *had* "done him good." Little by little he found himself confiding in the girl, telling her all his plans and prospects, and very much to his own amusement at times, wondering whether she would approve of this or that.

How well he remembered turning round in response to Mrs. Arthur's "let me introduce you to my sister, Mr. Carrington," to see a small fair girl with wonderful violet eyes heavily fringed with lashes several shades darker than her hair—eyes which would have redeemed many a plainer face without the aid of the sunny locks, which rippled back from that face, in such luxurious profusion. A dainty little maiden, simply gowned in white, with a knot of her favourite violets at her waistband. She was a refreshing change to the usual run of girls Ralph Carrington met on those rare occasions when he could be induced to accept one of the many invitations which poured upon him. Girls, whose one aim seemed to be that of drawing a wealthy prize in the matrimonial market, and whose efforts in that direction were so palpable as to very often defeat their own object. He thought of the merry skating parties when he and Nina had skimmed through the frosty air together, for after a day or two of what Mrs. Arthur called her "petting," he began to feel himself again and, with the incentive which Nina's society provided, a keener enjoyment of life than he had felt for years took possession of him.

He felt to have gone back ten years, to have lost that feeling of "oldness" which had oppressed him so much, making him feel like a man of fifty-nine, instead of thirty-nine. Then there were the carpet dances, when two or three of the younger members of the neighbouring families had dropped in, sure of a welcome at Parkfield. One or two quiet evenings—and Carrington thought he had enjoyed those best of all—when he and Arthur had sat listening to the "girls" singing, for in spite of "Tiddles," who turned out to be "Miss Maitland"—a lovely, precocious little piece of humanity aged ten—Arthur Maitland always spoke and thought of his wife as a girl. They had all driven over to the Hunt Ball the night before, and Ralph wondered that he had enjoyed it so much—no! after all, did he wonder? Was it not all summed up in a few words? Three or four waltzes with a slender figure, which seemed to float through the air, in his arms. Desultory chats in the conservatory—what was it she had said, that he was "missing the best things of life," so he was—and with a deep sigh, which was almost a groan, Ralph Carrington realised that to him the best thing in life meant Nina Beaumont.

Downstairs in the drawing-room below Mr. and Mrs. Arthur were holding what at first was a very one-sided discussion on the Hunt Ball. "What a lovely gown Lady Gower had on," began Mrs. Arthur, addressing the furniture presumably—for to all intents and purposes Arthur appeared to be asleep in the armchair, "trying to get up to himself," he called it, after last night's dissipation. Something which sounded like a grunt came from the depths of the chair.

"It must have cost a little fortune," went on Mrs. Arthur, nothing abashed by the unresponsiveness of her lord and master—another grunt. "I wonder if Mr. Wardroper and Phyllis Carstairs intend making a match of it?" went on the little lady, trying another tack. "He seemed to pay her very marked attention" (no answer to this). "She is a lovely girl, but I thought there were some very pretty girls there taking them all round, didn't you, Arthur?"

"Nina looked as decent as anybody," came in a sleepy sort of growl, which said as plainly as possible, "do be quiet."

"Oh, yes, of course," briskly. "Nina always does look lovely."

There was silence after this for a few minutes, for Mrs. Arthur's thoughts were busy with an idea which had come into her head the night before, as she caught sight of Ralph and Nina dancing together. There was a look on the man's face which to the wise little woman could only mean one thing. He had lost his heart to that pretty little sister of hers, she felt sure, and she was simply "aching" to tell Arthur all about it. Like all happily married women, she was a real match-maker at heart; but, as she knew by experience, Arthur always pooh-poohed anything of the sort, and was apt to meet her little confidences with advice as to "minding her own business" and so on. Like a wise general, then, she skirted round the subject warily.

"I think Mr. Carrington enjoyed the dance last night, don't you, Arthur?"

"Should think so," still more than half asleep.

"He looks heaps better for coming," persisted she.

"Yes! he is better; talks about going back to London soon"—with a yawn, but signs of gradually returning to a fit state for rational conversation.

"I don't think he will though," said Mrs. Arthur in a tone which invited the question which followed.

"Why, dearie?"

"Well"—with a knowing look—"I think he is beginning to think he has been a bachelor long enough, and quite right too—he is far too nice not to have a dear little wife of his own!"

"What makes you say that, Nettie?"

"Because"—launching her bombshell now that she saw he was interested—"I think he is in love with Nina!"

"Ye gods!" give me a woman for making a romance out of nothing," laughed Arthur; "in love, with Nina indeed; he's engaged to a Miss Cangley, or Cangham, or something of that sort. I remember him writing to tell me about it, oh, twelve months ago—no, little woman" (kissing his wife's disappointed face), "you're wrong this time. Of course he likes her——"

"Yes, he does, papa," broke in a childish voice from the deep-seated window where, unnoticed by her parents, and half concealed by the curtains, "Tiddles" had been busily dressing her doll.

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"I know he likes Auntie Nina, because I saw him kissing her photograph in the breakfast room just now." After which calm delivery of *her* bombshell, "Tiddles" went quietly on with her business.

"Oh, 'Tiddles,'" said her mother after an uncontrollable glance of triumph at Arthur. "You should not say such naughty things; Mr. Carrington would be looking at Aunt Nina's photograph, not kissing it."

"Yes, he did look at it, mamma, for ever so long and then he said 'my darling,' quite low down, and then he kissed it three times, because I counted," persisted "Tiddles" who was nothing if not accurate.

Mrs. Arthur bit her lips in an almost hopeless endeavour not to laugh as the child looked up into her face with great solemn blue eyes, and said:

"I *know* he likes Auntie Nina," cried Tiddles, "because I saw him kissing her photograph."

"'Tiddles,' "if ever you say anything like that again about Mr. Carrington I shall be obliged to make you stay in the nursery; little girls should not talk in that way—it is very rude; go to nurse at once."

"Tiddles" gathered up her precious doll in her arms and with an expression of injured dignity on her face walked towards the door, turning round, however, before she reached it to say, "He did, mamma, really he did!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Arthur did not belong to that disagreeable order of women who take a delight in saying, "I told you so," which is invariably so annoying to the person "told," and in addition is like adding insult to injury, but on this occasion that was the remark which fell from her lips, adding to it:

"You'll perhaps think I'm right now."

Arthur simply did not know what to think and plainly showed the state of his feelings by giving vent to a long expressive whistle under his breath. "Great Scott!" came next, and whatever may be the meaning of that ejaculation, it seemed to relieve his mind and also put his tongue into working order, for he said:

"I say, Nettie, it's about time he went back to London, for if he is in love with Nina, and I begin to think there may be something in your idea after all, he'll be in a beastly hole. Poor old Ralph, he was never much of a hand at love making, and if he gets properly into Cupid's clutches he'll take it very seriously like everything else he does."

"Yes, not like a dear old boy I know, who imagined every girl he met was his fate," put in Mrs. Arthur with a peck which was meant to be a kiss, somewhere near the top of her husband's head.

"Well, he was right once, wasn't he, old girl"—pulling her on to his knee where she nestled very contentedly, for Arthur Maitland and his wife were lovers still in spite of several years of married life, or, perhaps, because of it.

After a moment's silence Mrs. Arthur reopened the subject by saying:

"But what about that engagement? I can't make it out."

"Nor can I," said her husband. "He has never mentioned it; I answered his letter, telling me of it, of course, and he has not thought it necessary to speak of the fact since he came here. You see, we men have no back hair to brush out in each other's rooms, and don't get so confidential on those subjects"—stroking his wife's curly head as he spoke.

"I wonder what Nina thinks about him?" went on Mrs. Arthur.

"Oh, that he's a decent sort," said Arthur carelessly—then with a sudden thought: "Look here, little woman, don't you be putting ideas into the child's head. She's all right now and it's as well to let sleeping dogs lie. Ralph will go back in a day or two, and as far as he is concerned, he is old enough to look after himself, but I don't want Nina made unhappy." In common with most people Arthur had a very warm corner in his heart for his little sister-in-law, and truth to tell, would have thought Ralph Carrington a very lucky man to have won her. He was about to say as much to his wife when the welcome clatter of cups and saucers was heard, and the footman appeared with the tea-tray followed in a few moments by Nina and Carrington themselves.

The girl looked very lovely in her dark furs with a closely fitting toque of velvet—the colour of which exactly matched her eyes and was rivalled again by the violets she had tucked into her muff. The keen frosty air had brought a faint colour into her cheeks, and loosened the sunny curls which clustered in bewitching tendrils round her face and ears. Ralph had seen her coming up the drive from the breakfast room window, and, knowing that she would go to the drawing-room for her usual cup of tea, had hastened to meet her there. He had come to the conclusion that, as a man of honour, it was impossible to stay much longer at Parkfield, for to see more of Nina and not betray his feelings, he knew would tax him to the uttermost. He must make some excuse and leave—he would say Saturday. To-day was Tuesday, just four more days for a glimpse of happiness "that might have been," she would be none the worse, and he—well, he was not the only man who has found that the gate leading to earth's fairest garden must be passed if he would keep pure that Heavenly flower which is given to all, but is so often blighted before it blossoms to fullest perfection—honour.

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"Wherever have you been, Nina?" said Mrs. Arthur with a glance of fond admiration at the girl, as she cast aside her hat and coat, and sank into a low chair. "You make me absolutely tired by displaying such energy after dancing until the small hours of the morning; we have all been so lazy, haven't we, Arthur?"

"Well, I have, I admit," he answered, "and if you call talking nineteen to the dozen laziness, you'll come out a very fair second—as for Ralph, ask him to give an account of himself."

Ralph smiled as he handed the girl a cup of tea and said: "No, Miss Beaumont must give an account of herself first."

"Come," said Mrs. Arthur; "obey orders, Nina."

"Oh, I have only been to the top of the hill just to get the cobwebs blown away, Nettie," said the girl, with a happy smile playing about her lips. Life seemed all sunshine just now, and she did not realise how much Ralph Carrington had to do with the fact, or how quickly the clouds may gather and burst.

"Cobwebs indeed," said Mrs. Arthur, "then if you have got rid of yours, you shall sing ours away, when I have given you another cup of tea."

Nina smiled and sat quietly listening to the two men who were discussing a celebrated law case at that time filling the papers. They had different opinions on it, and as Nina noticed how rapidly and quietly Ralph demolished all his friend's arguments, she thought, no wonder people spoke of him as "clever."

"I should not care to be your opposing counsel, Mr. Carrington," she said. "You have not much mercy for the other side."

"Possibly if you were I might be more lenient," said he with a look in his eyes which made her heart beat more quickly, she scarcely knew why—"but did I not hear something about your singing just now?"

Nina rose, and, going to the piano, picked up the first song she came to, which was Guy D'Hardelot's setting of Victor Hugo's beautiful lines "Sans Toi."

"Oh, do sing that, Nina, it's just lovely," said Mrs. Arthur.

As the girl's full rich contralto voice rang through the room, the song appealed to Ralph as music had never done before, passionately fond of it though he was, and with the last lines "What are tears without thine eyes, or my lips without thy kiss?" the determination to leave Parkfield at once took possession of him. Would it not be better to face the truth, admit that he was, after all events—in this thing weak-minded, not sure of himself, that bound in honour to one woman, he, Ralph Carrington, who had always prided himself on his self-control, was afraid of betraying himself to the woman whom too late he found was the one real love of his life.

That night, as the two men sat in the smoking room, Ralph in an odd, abrupt sort of way told Arthur of his intention to leave before breakfast the next morning.

"Make my apologies, and say 'Good-bye' to the ladies, old man—I will write to Mrs. Arthur and thank her personally for all her kindness."

"Look here, Carrington," broke in Arthur, "what's all this rubbish about? There's nothing happened that you need rush off like this, I'm sure!"

Half in despair that he should be unable to get away if he did not explain to his blundering, kindhearted friend—and half in relief, Ralph told Arthur everything, in a few simple well-chosen words, which made that gentleman wring his friend's hand with a curious "lumpy" feeling in his throat which he relieved by muttering something to the effect that "some people did make awful fools of themselves!" However, he drove Ralph to the station himself the next morning, entering the breakfast room just as Nina appeared with "Tiddles" in attendance for their usual half-past nine breakfast.

"Where is Mr. Carrington?" said Mrs. Arthur. "You and he have been early birds this morning, Arthur."

"Yes," said her husband, instinctively averting his eyes from Nina's face. "He has had to get back to London, and I've been to the station with him to catch the eight-thirty train."

"Gone back to London," echoed Mrs. Arthur, "why he——he——"

"Yes," broke in Arthur, "he left all sorts of nice messages for you girls, and he's going to write to you, Nettie, and say pretty things about how much he enjoyed himself, and so on."

"I do think he might have told me last night," began Mrs. Arthur, and then something in Arthur's expression stopped her and she glanced at Nina—the girl's face was white and strained and she sat perfectly still with a look almost of bewilderment on her face. For some minutes she said nothing and then in a tremulous voice, which she tried in vain to keep calm and steady, she simply remarked:

"I am glad Mr. Carrington enjoyed his visit."

As soon as Arthur could escape from the room he did so, and Nettie, crossing over to her sister, said:

"What is it, darling? Oh, *don't* look like that!"

The girl's lips quivered piteously for a moment and then, utterly unnerved by the sympathy expressed in every line of Nettie's face, she cried:

"Oh, Nettie, Nettie, I know I ought not to say it, for Ralph has never spoken to me, but I love him—I love him, and I thought—Oh, how ashamed I am"—breaking off and hiding her burning face in her hands.

"Nina," said Nettie, laying a caressing hand on her sister's shoulder. "Don't say that, dear, there is no need to be ashamed, for I, too, thought—nay, I am sure that Ralph does love you, and I think that is why he left so hurriedly this morning."

"But why should he?" began Nina, lifting a tear-stained face.

"My darling," said Nettie, "Arthur told me only yesterday, he is engaged to a Miss Cangham, and they are to be married in the summer."

Nina buried her face in her hands and for some time there was no sound in the room but her sobs. Mrs. Arthur let her cry on, thinking perhaps it was the best relief she could have, and after a while the girl pushed her hair from her face and with a brave attempt at a smile, which brought tears to Nettie's eyes said, "Forgive me this once, Nettie, I shall be all right now." But Nettie thought as she left the room that it would be many a day before she saw the old light-hearted Nina again. Unconsciously she spoke out the thought:

"Oh, if he had only been free; how happy they might have been."

"Tiddles" had all this time been an unthought of spectator of the little scene, and with wide open eyes and ears, was trying to put two and two together in her own little mind. She electrified her mother by saying:

"I think Auntie Nina is very silly to cry because Mr. Carrington has gone away, mamma, and because she loves him."

"Well, you see, darling, he has somebody else to love him, and he must go and talk to her"—lightly, in a vain endeavour to stop the child's chatter.

"Yes, but why doesn't he tell his Miss Cangham he wants to talk to Auntie Nina, mamma, and then he could come back again, couldn't he?"

"Hush, hush, my pet, you know nothing about it." But "Tiddles" thought she did and perhaps she was wiser in her own generation than we think.

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When Ralph Carrington arrived at his chambers in town he found waiting for him a letter from Beatrice Cangham, saying that her aunt, Lady Leslie, in her accustomed erratic way, had suddenly made up her mind that she was tired of roaming about, and with that want of consideration for other people's plans which usually characterised her actions, announced her intentions of returning by the next boat. "We shall spend a short time in Paris to do some necessary shopping," wrote Beatrice, "but in any case shall be in London in February. We intend to take rooms at the Hyde Park Hotel for a while, for auntie is going to have the house in Upper Belgrave Street done up before we go into it. I think she might have stayed another fortnight; there is so much going on here and everything will be so abominably flat in London."

Not a word to say she would be pleased to see him, or any suggestion of their making arrangements together for their future home. He wondered if she ever gave it a thought of any sort, and as was so often the case with him now, had resolutely to put aside the picture of Nina in that home. Oh, the irony of it all. Could it be right to put pure happiness on one side in this way? For though no coxcomb, Ralph had a feeling deep down in his heart that, had he been free to do so, he could have won Nina's love.

It was in a far from enviable frame of mind then, that he found his way to the Hyde Park Hotel one bright frosty morning towards the end of February. He had received a telegram telling him of the travellers' arrival there, and made up his mind that he would see Beatrice at once and ask her to hurry on the preparations for their wedding, for he thought once married he might be able to get rid of this miserable feeling of unrest.

He found Beatrice and her aunt in a whirl of excitement booked knee-deep for "this" and "that," for, as Beatrice explained, Sir Roland North had travelled home with them and was "so kind." "His mother had sent them an invitation to Wetherby Grange and she thought they might go—anything would be better than London in February, didn't Ralph think so?" and so on.

Ralph wearily assented and was wondering how he could best broach the subject uppermost in his mind, when a childish voice full of excitement fell on his ear, reminding him irresistibly of Parkfield. "Oh, mamma, are we really going to see the *Babes in the Wood*?—how lovely!" the voice said, and when it was answered by one he recognised as Mrs. Maitland's, he astonished Beatrice by exclaiming, "Why, that's 'Tiddles'—excuse me"—and, springing to the door he re-entered a few moments later with that small maiden and her mother in attendance.

When the mutual introductions were exchanged, Mrs. Arthur explained that Arthur had important business with his solicitors, and they were staying for a couple of days. As his time would be taken up so much during the day, she had brought "Tiddles" as a companion, for Nina was anything but well, and could not come up as she had intended, to search for new "chiffons."

"What is the matter with Miss Beaumont? Nothing serious, I hope?" said Ralph in a low tone.

"No, I thinks she wants a change—has got run down," said Mrs. Arthur; "we are going to the Riviera next week; I think it will do her good." All this time Lady Leslie was talking to "Tiddles," highly amused and attracted by the child's chatter and sweet winsome face.

"Mrs. Maitland," said she, "'Tiddles' says she will come and have tea with me if you will allow her to do so, and tell me all about the *Babes in the Wood*. You will join us, I hope?"

But Mrs. Maitland could not do so, "she had promised to meet Arthur in Regent Street before returning for dinner, "but I will bring 'Tiddles' in if you like, Lady Leslie, and she may stay with you until we get back, then it will be bed time for all little girls who have been busy, eh, 'Tiddles'?" So it was arranged and "Tiddles" went on her way rejoicing.

"Is that Mr. Carrington's Miss Cangham?" she asked her mother as soon as they got outside, for 'Tiddles' had never forgotten the day when Auntie Nina had cried so much, and had firmly made up her mind that Miss Cangham ought to know all about it. When her mother said "Yes, 'Tiddles,' that lady and Mr. Carrington are going to be married some day," a thoughtful look settled down on her little face, and she had not so much to say about the doings of the "Babes" as was her wont on such occasions.

The three left behind parted company soon afterwards, for Ralph felt utterly out of one with the gay chatter going on, and finding it impossible to speak to Beatrice alone, left them, promising to look them up early the next day and spend a long day with them. Soon after he had gone, and Lady Leslie was taking her usual afternoon siesta, letters were handed in, amongst them one for Beatrice from Sir Roland North. A straightforward, manly letter, telling her of his love for her, "hoping that she was not quite indifferent to him, and that she would one day become his wife, would she send him word at once that he might come to London and receive his answer personally."

The girl sat with his letter in her hand, a troubled look on her usually impassive face. In addition to his title, which she did not attempt to disguise was attractive to her, she felt more at ease with him than with Ralph, realised that he did not see through her little weaknesses and ambitions so easily, in fact, that what little heart she possessed was given to him;

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the letter was not altogether unexpected; indeed, during the pleasant journey home, it had troubled her more than once as to what her answer would have to be when the inevitable question was asked, for needless to say, Sir Roland knew nothing of her engagement to Ralph.

It was this mixture of feelings which caused her to be so much more talkative than usual during Ralph's visit, which had made her so resolutely avoid a *tête-à-tête* with him, and now—what should she do? Could she make up her mind to tell him the whole truth? If it had been love, and love alone, which prompted her inclinations, she felt she might have done so, but Beatrice Cangham owned the truth even to herself, and she knew that the prospect of being mistress of Weatherby Grange—able to take her position as Lady North—meant more to her than that she should win a noble-hearted English gentleman to be her companion through life.

She dreaded Ralph's keen insight—the scorn which would come into his face, for although they had never professed any great affection for each other, she thought he cared for her, as much as he ever would for any woman, as indeed he had, until he met Nina. She took the letter to her room, altogether undecided how to act, forgetting all about the fact that her aunt had asked "Tiddles" to come back to tea. Mrs. Maitland had rushed in from the matinée, as usual at the very last minute, and being afraid she would miss her appointment with Arthur, instructed her maid to make "Tiddles" tidy, and take her to room No. 14, where she was to take tea with Lady Leslie.

When "Tiddles" arrived, therefore, in all the glory of freshly-tied hair, and pretty frock, it was to find an empty room and no hostess; the child, in quaint imitation of her mother, said:

"You may go, Jenkins, I will wait here for Lady Leslie."

The maid, a simple country girl, scarcely knew what to do, but thinking her charge could not come to much harm, left her, after many warnings "to be good and not touch anything till the lady came."

For fully one minute the little one sat perfectly still, and then, as was only natural, became restless, and started a tour round the room which might have been disastrous in many ways if her attention had not been arrested by a tiny table in the window, upon which were pen, paper, and ink, which plainly told "Tiddles" to write something."

"I'll write and tell Miss Cangham all about it," she thought.

To think with "Tiddles" was to act. Drawing up a chair she wrote:

Dere Miss Cangham—*Auntie Nina says she loves Mister Carinton and he likes her, becaws I saw him kiss her fotograph in the brekfast room, so I think you had better let him come back and live with us.*

Yours obedintly,

Tiddles Maitland.

Folding this, she put it into an envelope, and in a larger round hand than ever addressed it to "Miss Cangham." She was wondering what to do next, when Jenkins, who had been uneasy, knocked at the door to ask if Miss "Tiddles" was all right, and finding she was still alone, bore her off, much to her disgust, to their own apartments.

Thus it was that when Beatrice came down for a cup of tea, she found this note, which was to alter the course of four lives. She picked it up idly, and, noticing the superscription, wondered how it got there and what it could mean. With her thoughts full of her own affairs, it was not until she had read it several times, that it bore any meaning for her. "Auntie Nina, Mr. Carrington, Tiddles Maitland," she repeated to herself, trying in vain to read the puzzle. All at once the truth flashed upon her and she remembered that Ralph had been staying with the Maitlands while she was abroad. Who Auntie Nina was, she neither knew or cared, but evidently the child "Tiddles," whom she now remembered was to have taken tea with them, had been in the room during her absence, and for some reason or other had written this note. Ah, if it could but be true; no, it *must* be true; here was a way out of her difficulties. Once again she read the quaint epistle, laughing out loud at the phrase "I saw him kiss her fotograph." Fancy dear, staid old Ralph (she felt quite fond of him again now), kissing anyone's photograph. But to business. Taking a sheet of notepaper she simply wrote "Come and see me.—Yours, Beatrice." and addressed the envelope "Sir Roland North, Wetherby Grange, Wetherby." Then after thinking awhile she also wrote:

Dear Ralph—*If the inclosed note means anything you will be able to wish me joy in my engagement to Sir Roland North, with all sincerity; if not, will you still do so for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne," knowing that I think it will be best for us to live our lives apart and that I am only waiting to hear from you to say that I will become his wife. I have no hesitation in writing this for something tells me that "Auntie Nina" has found a way to your heart which I could never have done. Hoping this is so for your sake, believe me, your erring and repentant friend,*

Beatrice Cangham.

Inclosing the note "Tiddles" had written with such laborious care, she sent a messenger with it to Ralph's club, telling him to wait for an answer. Ralph, however, was not there, and she had to "possess her soul in patience" as best she might. On Lady Leslie's appearance, which was only just before dinner was served, she was shocked to find she had forgotten all about her "little friend," and sent round to Mrs. Maitland's rooms to ask if it was too late for her to pay her promised visit. But "Tiddles" was preparing for the land of dreams, and her mother thought she had better leave it until to-morrow. They had dined and were just preparing to go to "His Majesty's" where Tree was playing in *Resurrection*, when Ralph rushed in. The girl looked miserably confused when she saw him, but one glance at his radiant face reassured her, and she said: "Oh, Ralph, I am so glad. Why did you not tell me about 'Auntie' before?"

After a few hurried words of explanation from both, and a hand-shake on Ralph's part which told Beatrice what a heavy load had been taken from his mind, Ralph took up his hat and coat—if he caught the next train he could be at Parkfield by half-past nine and he felt he could not rest until he had seen Nina. When he arrived there he brushed past the astonished footman in the hall, saying:

"You need not announce me, Barnes, I will go to Miss Beaumont in the drawing-room, she is alone you say?"

Ah! she was singing—what was that? "What are tears without thine eyes or my lips without thy kiss?"

The voice died away in a vain tremulous attempt to keep it steady, and it was almost more than Ralph could bear, when, putting her head on her arms, she leant forward on the piano with a sob and a low "Ah, Ralph, Ralph——"

"My darling, my darling, come to me," he said, moving slightly out of the shadowy corner, where, overcome with the passion of feeling which surged through him, he had waited for the conclusion of the song. She turned, and seeing him there with arms outstretched, and a face full of passionate love and tenderness, took one step forward, to be folded once and for always, to that true strong heart, which, finding her, had found its own true mate.

Biddy Lamb.

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The Missing Brides.

The Story of a Strange Adventure.

At last Belding Hall was to be occupied. Once more it was to become the abode of men and women, instead of a home for owls and bats.

For thirty years its gloomy chambers had been closed, and the light of the sun excluded from its halls. Grass had grown over the walks, and weeds and bushes hedged the building in on every side; while the trees spread their sheltering arms about its upper stories, shielding the chimneys, cornices, and roof from the blasts of winter, and the scorching heat of summer.

Some of the window-shutters had fallen from their hinges, and the doors had shrunk from the door frames, as if fearing contact with them. Ruin had set its mark on everything, increasing its hold from year to year, until it now reigned supreme.

But all this was to be changed. Robert Belding, the heir to the estate, contemplated marriage, and was going to bring his blushing bride to the home which had been bequeathed to him by his uncle, Maxwell Belding.

The house had been in the possession of the family for over a hundred years, having been built by Robert's great-grandfather. Maxwell Belding had intended to make it his residence, and thirty years before our story opens, the friends of the family had assembled at the hall to celebrate his marriage to Grace Atherton, the belle of the county.

But Fate had decreed that he should not partake of the cup of wedded bliss; for, at the last moment, when all were breathlessly awaiting the entrance of the bride and bridegroom, a commotion was heard among the bridesmaids, and soon it was whispered from lip to lip that Grace had disappeared.

She had left the chamber above, a few minutes before, for the purpose of going to the library, or study, where hung Grandma Belding's portrait, taken when she was first married, seventy years before. Grandma had been noted for her many virtues and accomplishments, as well as for her devotion to her husband. It had been a custom of the family for many years, when a wedding occurred, for the bride to kiss Grandma's portrait; the old servants stoutly affirming that she who did so would be blessed with a constant and adoring husband, and her married life would be one of peace and happiness.

In deference to the family tradition, Maxwell had laughingly escorted Grace to the door of the library, and then left her; as, to insure the blessing of the departed dame, it was said that the aspiring bride must be alone when she sought the coveted favour.

Several moments passed, and then Maxwell went to the door, and entered the room. It was empty. He gazed about in bewilderment. Grace was nowhere visible.

The light shone dimly from the chandelier. He lighted more candles, and hurriedly examined every part of the room. The window stood open, and he stepped out on the balcony. Grace was not there. Not a sound was to be heard, save the distant voices of the guests in the hall below. Where had she gone? What could it mean? He spoke her name gently, then louder. There was no reply.

Five minutes passed, then ten, but not until fifteen minutes had elapsed did Maxwell collect his thoughts sufficiently to give the alarm. In a moment everything was in confusion. Frightened bridesmaids ran from room to room, calling Grace's name; but the only answers they received were the echoes of their own voices.

The grounds were carefully searched, but not a trace of the missing Grace was found. Quickly it was whispered among the guests that she had fled with a lover, whose existence Maxwell had never suspected. Whether this was the true solution of the mystery, no one knew; for Maxwell never saw her face again after kissing her good-bye at the library door.

Silently the bridal party dispersed. The luxurious dwelling prepared for the reception of Maxwell Belding's bride was closed, the doors and windows nailed up, and he went abroad—no one knew whither.

For ten years he travelled, trying in vain to forget his lost bride. Then he returned to England and took up his abode in London, where the remaining twenty years of his life were devoted to the practice of his profession—the law. He died, apparently a man of eighty, although scarcely sixty years of age, bequeathing his property to his nephew, Robert Belding, with the provision that he was to marry before he attained the age of thirty. and that the ceremony should be celebrated at the old mansion, where the happy couple were to reside permanently.

This brings us back to the beginning of our story.

Robert Belding had just passed with high honours at Oxford, and inheriting, as he did, the immense wealth of Maxwell Belding, he was an object of considerable interest to the people in the village. Nothing was talked of but the coming wedding and the opening of the old Hall, which had so long been an eyesore to the community.

One day Robert Belding arrived, accompanied by an army of carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and paper-hangers, and at once began a vigorous assault on the infirmities of Belding Hall. In a few months a wonderful change took place in the building and surrounding grounds. Every sign of neglect and decay was effaced, and the house stood forth in all its ancient splendour. Once more lights flashed from its windows, the sound of laughter was heard in its rooms, and again wedding guests assembled beneath its roof.

Robert Belding had carried out every wish of his deceased uncle with the utmost fidelity. The old library presented almost the same appearance it had done twenty years before. Grandma Belding's picture hung in precisely the same place; in fact, it could not well be otherwise, as its frame was a part of the oaken wall. It had not been removed, but simply dusted and left where it had hung so many years.

As the happy couple stood at the head of the stairs, about

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to descend to the drawing-room, where the invited guests were awaiting their coming, Robert laughingly asked the blushing Laura whether she wished to pay homage to Grandma Belding's portrait, and invoke the blessing of the deceased lady on the step she was about to take.

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed. "Do you wish to lose me, as Uncle Maxwell did his beloved Grace?"

"No fear of that!" answered Robert gaily. "There is no lover concealed in the shrubbery to spirit my fair one away. Are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what should I be afraid?"

"Nothing at all, my darling. Perhaps it would be well to respect the family traditions and customs, and if you wish to solicit the goodwill of the lady whose household virtues have been the admiration of the female members of our family for the last hundred years, signify your desire, and I am ready to conduct you to the shrine where you may offer up your petitions."

Laura laughingly took his arm; and, amid the raillery of the bridesmaids, and sundry cautions not to lose his bride, Robert led her gently to the library.

They entered together. A fire burnt brightly in the grate, and the lamps in the chandelier cast a brilliant light over the room. They glanced at the portrait, and the lovely face seemed to beam kindly upon them, as though in approbation of their union.

"I hope your life will be as happy and serene as was hers," said Robert tenderly, as he stooped to kiss her. "We must lose no time, as they are waiting for us. I will wait outside the door."

Then he left her.

Alone, Laura approached the portrait. It stood considerably higher than her head; and, in order to reach it, she was obliged to step upon a low shelf, or projection, about a foot from the floor. The shelf was only about three feet in length, by two feet in width, and was used as a receptacle for magazines and newspapers.

Pushing aside a pile of magazines, she stepped upon the shelf, her hands clasping the sides of the frame; and, rising on tiptoe, she reverently touched her lips to the canvas, devoutly breathing a prayer for the future happiness of herself and husband.

As the words died on her lips she felt a slight jar, a creaking and grinding noise sounded in her ears, the wall seemed to yawn before her, and a breath of damp, musty air to sweep over her; then the room appeared to float around her, and she became confused.

Shriek after shriek burst from her terrified lips. In a few moments she heard Robert's voice calling.

"Laura! Laura! Where are you? What has happened? Answer me!"

The words sounded muffled and distant, and the room was in total darkness. The sound of his voice restored her as she was on the point of swooning, and she replied, faintly:

"Oh, Robert! I am standing on the shelf before Grandma Belding's picture; but the light is out, and I am so cold! And what makes your voice sound so far away?"

"The light is not out, Laura; it is burning as brightly as ever; but I cannot see you at all. The shelf in front of the picture is quite empty; your voice seems to come from it, although it sounds distant and indistinct."

A moment later he spoke quickly:

"Laura, do not be alarmed; I see through the whole mystery now. Don't stir a step. The picture has simply turned round, and you are on the other side of it. A portion of the wall appears to be on pivots. A magazine has been caught in the joint, which keeps the panel from fitting closely. Be patient, and don't feel at all frightened. I will call help, and soon release you."

A few moments passed; then she heard a confused murmur of voices, some calling to her to keep up her courage and be a brave girl, and others giving commands and making suggestions, and intreating others to do things which they never seemed to think of doing themselves. At last someone called for a crowbar; and presently a stream of light flashed in her eyes as the heavy crowbar was forced into the opening, and the panel swung slowly back.

But long before it had regained its place she was snatched from her unpleasant position by Robert's strong arms, and transferred to those of the excited bridesmaids, who covered her with kisses, and wept over her as if she had just been rescued from the grave.

And so she had. For had not the magazine been caught in the closing panel, leaving an opening through which her voice reached Robert's listening ear, she would have been buried as effectually as though laid away in the family vault.

In a short time order was restored, and the festivities proceeded, although the bride was very pale, and the bridegroom a little more quiet and subdued than he had been an hour before. But they were very happy, and thankful for the kind Providence which had interposed between Laura and the dreadful fate that had overtaken Grace.

The next morning workmen again came to Belding Hall, and a certain picture was, after much manœuvring, induced to swing upon its concealed hinges, revealing a dark opening in the wall, from which a very steep flight of stairs led to a chamber below. At the bottom of the staircase they found something which caused their faces to blanch and their hearts to swell with emotion.

A skeleton lay there, attired in bridal robes—all that remained of Grace Atherton, Maxwell Belding's lost bride; snatched from his arms almost at the altar, her heart filled with the exquisite joy that belongs only to the fond woman who bestows her heart and hand upon the husband of her choice, and freely intrusts her happiness to his keeping.

It was found upon investigation that the panel was worked by a system of concealed weights and levers, which were set in motion by anyone who stood upon the shelf in the library, and pulled steadily upon the frame of the picture. Both sides of the panel were fitted with a portrait of Grandma Belding, executed by the same artist. The arrangement had evidently been devised by the designer and builder of Belding Hall, who had perhaps used the underground chamber during the Civil Wars as an asylum for refugees from the Puritan soldiers; or, in which to hold meetings for plotting and planning against the enemy. In it were found a number of old flint-lock muskets, swords, and other arms, rusty and tarnished, together with uniforms of cavalier officers and soldiers.

Tenderly Grace Atherton's ashes were laid away in the family vault beside those of Maxwell Belding; and on a beautiful marble tablet appears an inscription, recording the fate of the unhappy bride.

Charles Malcolm.

PONSONBY: "Sir, I have come to request the honour of your daughter's hand in marriage." Stern Parent: "Impossible! Never will I give my consent." Ponsonby (anxiously): "Is your decision fixed—irrevocable?" Stern Parent (firmly): "It is." Ponsonby (much relieved): "Thanks, awfully. Nellie has been pestering me to ask you, and I did it just to oblige her."

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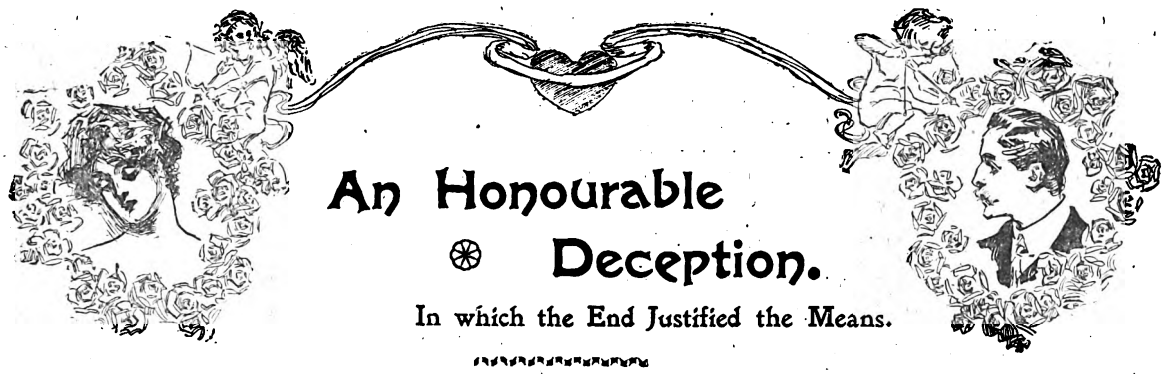

An Honourable Deception.

In which the End Justified the Means.

BERTIE LORRISTON sat before a blazing fire in a little spare sitting-room of his father's house which he and his brother Jack had for years used as a smoking-room and general place of retirement. He threw down the magazine he had been reading and tossed the stump of his cigar into the fire. An impatient sigh escaped his lips as he rose to his feet and looked towards the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece.

"I suppose I ought to go," he said in evident vexation. "I wish to goodness I hadn't made such a fool of myself! But it's done now, and, without a reasonable excuse for breaking it off, I can't see any way out of the diffieulty. It's hard on Beryl, but I can't help it."

He paused for a moment to light a fresh cigar, and then added:

"If it had only been little Doris Cavill now!"

He glanced uneasily about the room as if fearing to be overheard. But he was alone, and could give his thoughts utterance.

"By all that's human," he went on savagely, "I can't—I won't do it! I know I ought never to have let Beryl's bewitching little face carry me off my feet. But it did, and now I'm in for it. Of course, the merest hint from me would suffice to break off the engagement, for Beryl has some spirit, but that would probably injure my chances with Doris. And I must shake off the one without losing my hold on the other. No, I must seek some other way."

He began to pace the room to and fro, turning over in his mind various plans which might lead to the attainment of this end. He was a handsome fellow, not more than seven-and-twenty, with clear skin and soft curly hair. But there was an air of irresolution about the handsome face that seemed to indicate a lack of ballast in his constitution. Gay, *debonair*, fascinating to a degree, it was small wonder that Bertie Lorriston was a particular favourite with the fair sex, or that he had captivated the heart of sweet Beryl Carrington.

His nature, too, was romantic, and, lacking that stability which might otherwise have saved him as well as others from later grief and humiliation, he allowed this unhappy predilection to lead him whithersoever it would.

And so it came to pass that, one night not three months before, he had "let himself drift," as he himself expressed it, and proposed to Beryl Carrington. How ardently he wished now that she had refused him! But the shy, sweet girl had long loved him in her secret heart, and she had run to him with a glad cry that could not be mistaken. It was but a passing infatuation, repented of almost before the morrow, and he would have given worlds to have undone the bonds which he himself had bound about his own neck. But his policy of "drift" was even here apparent, for he kept to the engagement, living in a temporary paradise that was, he well knew, anything but eternal.

And then he had met Doris Cavill, and, so far as he was capable of love in the truest sense of the word, he had given it to her without reserve. But he dared not tell her so, for she knew of his engagement to Beryl. And yet he felt sure that, were he free, Doris Cavill would favour his suit and smile upon his addresses.

He was not altogether bad—this Bertie Lorriston. He wanted to be straight, but he was weak and vacillating, and allowed the impulse of a moment to carry him away. And he loved Doris Cavill with all the ardour and passion that were characteristic of him, till that love made him callous of the pain and humiliation he gave to others.

A quick step sounded outside, and Jack Lorriston came into the room. He was two years younger than his brother Bert, but there was a striking likeness between them. Nor did the similarity end with their personal appearance, for, when Jack spoke, his voice would have caused a stranger to start, so great was the resemblance. Anyone could have told them apart who looked at them, but no one could have distinguished them by the pitch and intonation of their voices.

Jack was a shade less tall than his handsome brother, while his features were not so regular. But there was a frank, honest light in his clear blue eyes that marked him as a man to be trusted. He had always been called Jack, though that was his second name. His brother had been christened Herbert, and, from very infancy, he had been called Bertie. And when Mrs. Lorriston gave birth to a second son, he was christened Bertram John, after an uncle of his father's. But, as two Berties in one family would have led to much confusion, Mr. Lorriston had dubbed him Jack from the outset, and Jack had stuck to him ever since. He was not such a ladies' man as his brother Bertie, for he had strong views on the subject of "making a fool of a woman," stimulated, perhaps, by his brother's weakness in that direction. And he knew—ah, how bitterly!—the power and passion of a vigorous love.

To-night he was unusually agitated. Excitement—though partially suppressed—characterised his step and manner. Bertie looked up in some surprise as he entered. But Jack offered no explanation. Throwing a letter upon the table before his brother, he sat down in a chair facing Bertie and scanned his face as he opened and read the missive. Slowly the elder man read it through to the end, and then glanced across at his brother.

"Are you acquainted with the—er—contents of this note?" he asked in a strangely quiet voice. "I mean—do you know what it conveys?"

"Yes," said Jack shortly. "I met Miss Jocelyn this evening, and she told me the news."

There was a silence for a full minute, during which Jack scanned the face of his brother with growing resentment.

"What are you going to do?" he asked at last, and his tone was almost peremptory.

Bertie raised his eyebrows and looked across at his brother.

"Really," he said, "there is only one thing a fellow can do."

But he did not explain, and Jack waited in vain for him to proceed. There was plenty to read in Bertie's handsome face. Sympathy, sorrow, relief, hope, shame, triumph—all had their place for a brief moment on that dark countenance, and Jack, looking on, felt his resentment grow to anger.

"Well," he said at last, "and what may that be?"

Bertie looked at him in affected surprise

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"My dear fellow," he said, "you would not have me marry a—a blind woman! The position has become impossible, and, much as I regret and deplore the sad news this letter has conveyed to me, there is but one course open to me. I must put aside all further thought of making Miss Beryl Carrington my wife."

With a fierce cry of uncontrollable anger, Jack Lorriston sprang to his feet. Indignation was ablaze in his honest blue eyes and he flashed a look of ineffable contempt at his astonished brother.

"You—you cad!" he said in a fierce subdued whisper. "Are you dead to all nobility of feeling and impulse? Is your vaunted love so fleeting that it vanishes at the touch of sorrow? Love—true love—should leap into greater and more vigorous life when its object lies writhing under so terrible a blow as this! But yours—puny, selfish, empty—the love of a self-accused hypocrite—shrivels into rottenness at the first breath of dark affliction and lies stark and cold in the whited sepulchre to which you callously consign it!

"Why did you ever meddle with her heart? If you hold love so lightly, why exercise your power till you fill a woman's true heart with lifelong bitterness? And she has written to you—written out of the great, deep love she feels for you—for I know but too well of what this noble girl is capable—and now she waits for your coming—with her poor blind eyes turned beseechingly, wistfully, trustingly, towards the door by which you will never enter. And I—I have to call you brother!"

Bertie Lorriston's eyebrows were lifted even a little higher as he regarded his indignant brother. He did not appear in the least offended, though a flush of momentary shame, which he instantly smothered, had crossed his handsome face.

"My good fellow," he said, "you really ought to have been an actor. Really, you are simply splendid. Why, don't you go in for amateur theatricals? But, seriously, my dear boy, one would almost think you—er—were in love with the lady yourself."

A great wave of colour swept over Jack Lorriston's face and he trembled visibly as he heard the implied taunt.

"That is my affair," he said haughtily. And, without another word, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

For two or three minutes Bertie gazed at the door by which he had gone out.

"Lucky I kept my temper," he said at last. "But, by Jove, I never suspected *that!* It's horrible for Beryl, but—but it means freedom for me—freedom and—Doris!"

He took up the letter once more and re-read it. It was a tearful little note, and any man's heart but Bertie Lorriston's would have been touched to the depths.

Beryl Carrington had buried her mother two months before—soon after her engagement to Bertie Lorriston—and the loss had left her almost broken-hearted. Grief plays terrible havoc with that marvellous and intricate piece of mechanism we call the body, and no consequence is perhaps half so awful as the sudden shattering of the delicate network of nerves that form the eye and the great impenetrable darkness that drops for ever upon the grief-stricken sufferer.

And this is what had befallen Beryl Carrington. Almost in an hour, the light had faded from her eyes and the pall of blindness had settled upon her young life. The letter intimated that she intended travelling to London, there to reside with an aunt, whom she knew would take care of her in her darkness.

And she wanted to see Bertie before she went.

"Can't do it," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm awfully sorry for the poor little thing, but the scene would be much too harrowing. I'd better write her a note."

He drew his chair to the table, and, taking a sheet of paper from a portfolio, wrote to the woman he had professed to love.

There were many expressions of sympathy and regret at the terrible affliction that had fallen upon her, but he said he could not, much as he desired to do so, call upon her that evening. And, as she left by the early morning train, he must give up all hope of seeing her before she went. He did not say it in so many words, but the letter was couched in terms which left an impression that the engagement would now have to be broken off.

This letter he dispatched to the sorrow-stricken girl, even leaving the reading of it to an outsider, since she would be unable to do so for herself, and thus adding to the humiliation it brought her.

The next day was Sunday, and among the congregation in the little country church were Bertie and Jack Lorriston. Jack marvelled how his brother could have come into that holy place. Poor little Beryl had gone away to London by the early morning train, and Jack's heart ached for her. Thank God he had spared her one bitter humiliation, but of this his brother did not as yet know. The service began, but Jack's thoughts were elsewhere, and, try as he might, he could not keep his attention from wandering. Suddenly, however, he grew interested. His head bent forward and a look of keen attention came into his face. It was during the reading of the first lesson, and the story was of Isaac, stricken in his old age with blindness, blessing his son Jacob instead of Esau his firstborn. "Thy voice is the voice of Jacob!" were the words that reached him, and Jack felt his breath come quick as a new and wonderful idea flashed into his mind. From that time forward he was wholly dead to the service in the little church. The theme of that first lesson whirled through his brain, and he began mechanically, though with inward excitement, to revolve the situation in his mind. The pronouncing of the benediction roused him from his meditations, and he went rapidly home.

As soon as he reached it, he went to the little private sitting-room and awaited his brother.

Five minutes later he came in and sat himself down in his favourite easy-chair.

Jack looked at him. Then he went to the door, closed it, and returned to his brother.

"Bertie," he said, with a note of constraint in his voice, "I am going to make a confession. But I want one from you first. After that, I shall make a suggestion. Tell me, honestly and straightforwardly, am I right in suspecting that you welcome this termination of your engagement because of your—er—love for another woman?" He could hardly use the term. It seemed like sacrilege to apply so holy a word to his callous-hearted brother. But it behoved him to bridle his tongue.

Bertie hesitated.

"Well," he said at last, "since you ask, my dear fellow, I am free to confess that you are right."

"Thanks," responded Jack, relieved to find that his suspicions had not been unfounded. "Now I will answer the question you put to me last night. I do love Beryl Carrington. I have loved her for more than a year, and was just on the eve of proposing to her when you stepped in between us and ruined my chances."

Bertie looked up quickly.

"Awfully sorry, old chap!" he said languidly. But there was a look of sympathy in his eyes which counteracted the tone.

Jack, however, appeared to notice neither. His face was pregnant with purpose, and Bertie looked at him, fascinated.

"Now for my suggestion," went on Jack rapidly. "Did the reading of the first lesson this morning appear to you in any way significant? Did you observe any parallel between that old-time story and the present position in which we—you and I, Bertie Lorriston—find ourselves placed?"

A look of bewilderment came into Bertie's handsome face.

"Don't see your drift," he said slowly. "Something about old Isaac blessing the wrong son, wasn't it?"

Jack nodded.

"Look here," he said, drawing nearer his brother, "I can see a way out of this difficulty which will make no earthly difference to you, and will give me what I have so long desired. Indeed, it may even help you, too."

Bertie shook his head.

"Still in the dark," he said. "For Heaven's sake, old fellow, be more explicit!"

Jack drew his seat to the table and faced his brother.

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"I will," he said. "Now listen to my suggestion. You want nothing further to do with Beryl Carrington. I do. Suppose, then, I travel up to London, see her, and call myself, not Jack, but Bertie Lorriston. No one can tell us apart by the sound of our voices—not even she. And—and she cannot see our faces. The aunt to whom she has gone has never set eyes on either of us, and I feel sure Beryl will not discover the—the deception. And you—you will be free to follow your own inclinations."

For some minutes there was silence in the little room.

Bertie Lorriston's face was a study to look upon. He chafed at the thought of his brother making love to the woman whose kisses had been wholly his—and in his name too. But the possibility of greater freedom was not without its attraction. Besides, the plan would relieve his conscience. His conscience didn't matter very much, but it was just as well to humour it when he lost nothing by doing so. But he foresaw one or two obstacles to the plan, and communicated them to his brother.

"What about the wedding-day?" he asked drily.

Jack smiled.

"You forget," he replied quickly. "Miss Carrington knows you, as does everyone else, by the name of Bertie Lorriston, and she knows me as Jack. I should, however, be married in my rightful name of Bertram, and she would naturally identify Bertram with the Bertie she had always known."

Bertie smiled.

"By Jove!" he said, "you're right, old fellow! I never thought of that. Fate seems to be helping you at last."

Jack's face flushed, but he made no reply.

"But do you think you could deceive Beryl?" Bertie went on. He did not relish the thought that he could be so easily superseded.

"I think so," Jack answered coldly. "The regard I have for her would help me more than you think."

Again Bertie was silent. Presently he said:

"There's one other obstacle which I must let you know. Last night I wrote her a letter. I did not say so outright, but I hinted that the engagement would now have to be broken off. I'm afraid your reception won't be a pleasant one."

Jack smiled, and, drawing a still unopened letter from his pocket, tossed it on the table.

"Fortunately," he said, "my indignation of last night made me so far considerate of Miss Carrington's feelings that I intercepted that letter. I guessed well enough what it contained, and would have torn it into fragments had I not realised in time that my brother might have suspected me of reading its contents before doing so. So I kept it intact, and it is fortunate I did so."

Bertie's list of objections was now exhausted, and, truth to tell, he was not wholly free from a feeling of relief that Jack had swept them away so effectually.

"All right," he said. "But you must keep her in London, or the truth will leak out."

Jack nodded.

"I'll see to that," he said quietly. And, with a stiff little nod to his brother, he left the room.

The afternoon train conveyed him to London, and a little after six o'clock he was ushered into the room where Beryl Carrington was sitting, her unseeing eyes turned towards him as he entered. Beryl's aunt, with a feeling of delicacy, closed the door softly on the two, and went, with a glad light in her kind, motherly eyes, to picture in the solitary state of the empty drawing-room the meeting between the two lovers.

Jack went swiftly forward and knelt down by Beryl's side.

"Darling," he said, while his voice shook with strong emotion, "I am sorry I could not come to you yesterday. But I have come now, dear."

He took her little hands in his and kissed them. There was no suspicion in the face that turned towards him. With a glad cry she put her arms about his neck and began to cry softly to herself, the tears falling upon Jack's crisp curls.

"Don't," he pleaded, drawing the tear-stained face down to his and kissing it tenderly. "You must not cry any more, darling. I am here to protect you, to care for you, and, if you will let me, to make a home for you."

A little glad sob rose in Beryl's throat.

"Oh," she said, "I can't let you, Bertie. You will not want a blind wife like me. You will grow tired of me. It is very noble of you to offer, dear, but I know it is only sympathy and pity which prompt you to do so. I must let you go, darling—I must, I must—and yet, I love you so—so dearly!"

She clung to him, and he soothed her again.

"Beryl," he said, and his words carried conviction to the girl beside him, "it is true I feel for you a sympathy I cannot express. But that is the least of all my present emotions. I love you, my sweet, with all the strength of a man's true heart. And life apart from you will not be life to me. I must have you, or my happiness will end from this day forth. And that which has befallen you only knits us together more closely in the bond of love."

Beryl clung to him as he spoke, and there were tears of joy shining in the sightless eyes that touched him to the heart.

So the days went by, and, at the end of two months, Beryl Carrington yielded to the pleadings of her lover and was quietly married to him in London.

She had loved Bertie Lorriston with all the idolatry of a romantic girl. Little things had jarred upon her sensitiveness, but love had excused them all. But since that great darkness had fallen upon her, he seemed to have changed. Before, he had been inclined to selfishness. Now his thoughts were only of her. It was the same dear, loved voice, but of late it had comforted her far more than ever it had done in the old days.

Then it had been she whose love seemed the greatest, the noblest, the truest. But now that love was met by another, as strong and deep and tender as her own, and she was learning to lean on this strong, self-reliant husband with a trustfulness that was touching to see. Strong? Yes, he was so strong. And yet he was as gentle as a child in his tender devotion to her, and the love in her heart grew day by day till its intensity swallowed up every other thought. And so the days grew into weeks and the weeks into months, till a year had gone over their heads since that well-remembered day when they had stood together by the altar-rails and voiced their vows to God. And then an unforeseen event occurred which for a time filled Jack's stout heart with dark foreboding.

Beryl had been persuaded by her aunt to seek fresh advice for her eyes, and Jack, not daring to raise any objection to the plan, had accompanied her to a rising specialist. A long and tedious examination resulted in the startling affirmation that there was reason to believe a cure might be effected. Beryl's heart bounded as she heard the glad news, but that of Jack sank with dread misgiving. But he said nothing, leaving it to Destiny to shape his fate as it listed. A month of dreary lying on her bed, with her eyes tightly bandaged and the room darkened, and one day the bandage was removed and Beryl could see.

When all was quiet, Jack stole into the room and knelt by his wife's bedside. She looked into his face long and earnestly, and Jack trembled as he waited, daring not to speak. For a long time there was no sound, while Jack's heart beat fast with suppressed excitement. And then the soft white arms of his dear wife stole round his neck and she whispered his name—the old name—in his ear:

"Jack—my husband—my—my love!"

The truth had come home to her in a flash as she looked into his face.

W. J. Mowbray.

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Fascinating Series.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY.

These are the principal characters in this series:

Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences. She takes some papers (which really belong to her lover, Sir Noel Masterman, and are of immense value) from her employers, Templeton and Co., and flees to Bedford. The firm follow her up, and using every means in their power to make Sara restore the papers, drive her to Northampton, Leicester, and Birmingham. She, however, successfully manages to elude capture.

Templeton and Co.—This is the firm of scoundrels who wish to do Noel Masterman so much harm. The partners are Templeton, Harrington Shackell, and Rigby Starr, all of them steeped in villainy.

Noel Masterman, who succeeded to the Baronetcy on the death of his cousin Herbert, who was foully murdered by Harrington Shackell. Sara heard the latter tell Templeton how he accomplished this act, but has no witnesses to prove it. Noel is in love with Sara, but is away on the Continent when she regains the fateful papers from Templeton and Co.; hence Sara has no one to help her.

Sidney Ilford.—An agent of the firm who tries to ensnare Sara.

Maggie Dunkley.—A young girl whose brother Sara rescues from death at Northampton. Sara confides in her, and is rendered great assistance.

Truscot Moran—Into whose hands Sara falls in Birmingham. He is an unscrupulous money-maker. In his house lives his niece, Lesbia, whom he is starving to death, so as to benefit by her insurance money. He forces Sara to pose as Lesbia in order to get the insurance policy signed, on the threat of exposing her to Templeton.

Arthur Merridew.—The lover of Lesbia, who conspires with Sara to help Lesbia to escape. This is successfully accomplished.

THE ACCIDENT AT NUNEATON.

PARALYSED with terror, I stood, waiting for the inevitable crash of the approaching car; even as I felt the breath of the engine hot in my face, even as the grinding jar of the wheels sent shock after shock along my nerves, I was seized tightly by the waist, thrown violently aside, and staggering, found myself, unhurt, once more upon the side of safety.

"A very near thing, Miss Gillespie," said a weak, quavering voice. "Another second and you would have been underneath the tram."

For a moment I did not realise what my preserver said, I did not even realise who he was, clinging to him instinctively as the one steady thing in a world that reeled about me in a mad whirl. An indistinct murmur of voices gradually swelling in volume to a roar, a sensation of icy coldness at my heart, and then—the mist cleared from my eyes, the earth was solid to my feet. I stood on the pavement in Corporation Street—Arthur Merridew at my side!

Even now the thought of my contemptuous regard for the youth brings an unpleasant twinge; I had looked on him as a weakling, a sentimental fool, with no capacity for daring, no courage, no foresight. I had patronised him and despised him, and now it was to him I owed my life. Something of what I felt, I tried to stammer out; Merridew cut me short.

"Don't say anything more, please," he said. "There isn't time for talk, much less thanks. We must get out of this as soon as possible. I doubt even now if we shall avoid that man"—he pointed to Templeton. "Ah!" as the senior partner hove in sight, "I was afraid of it. Look here, Miss Gillespie, you must let me take command of this affair, you must really; you don't know the man and have never heard of him, stick to that; I'll back you up and we shall pull through. Now then"—Merridew turned pugnaciously upon the head of the firm, "what do you mean by pushing against this lady? She's been nearly killed once already to-night. That's quite enough excitement for one evening, without your throwing her into the road."

The crowd, who had witnessed Merridew's brave act, cheered the speech with enthusiasm.

"Don't you dare to talk to me," went on my champion, "who are you to push women and children off the pavement! Call a policeman, will you? It will save me trouble if you do. I can give you into custody for obstructing the roadway."

For answer, Templeton firmly grasped my arm, and to the full extent of his powerful voice shouted "Police!" in a strident and determined fashion.

"Let go," cried Merridew, striking at the senior partner wildly. "Let go, I say," then, as Templeton, paying no attention to his lunges, still called for aid, still grasped me tightly, Merridew veered to another tack. "Help!" he screamed, "help! He's killing the girl. Murder! Help!"

The crowd, ready—as crowds ever are—to respond to a call of the kind, closed round us, and, pressing against Templeton, forced him, by the sheer weight of numbers, to release me. Waving his stick, Templeton still kept up his cry for the police, and to my consternation, I perceived the shining helmet of a man in blue, bearing down upon us.

By the time he arrived on the scene, however, Arthur and I had made good our escape. We dodged through the people, and, skirting the crowd, edged off up the left hand side of Old Square, and so into the maze of side turnings and narrow streets that lie at the back.

Once out of sight and sound of Templeton, we hailed a cab, and drove to Mrs. Merridew's, a small house in a turning off Moseley Road. Arthur informed me on the way that he and Lesbia had been so concerned for my safety, that he had started to go to the office in Colemore Row to find out if he

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could what had happened. He had, by great good fortune, crossed the Square in time to snatch me out of the way of the tram, and to prove that, sentiment notwithstanding, he was a man of courage and resource.

Lesbia was very pleased to see me and her gratitude for what I had done for her quite touched me. She looked very terrible, poor girl, and the doctor, whom Arthur had summoned to attend her, gave no great hopes of her recovery. He stated that she was suffering from blood-poisoning, that how she had contracted the complaint it was not easy to say. He listened to her account of Moran's treatment with evident incredulity, regarding her complaints as the fretful fancies of an invalid.

Lesbia, however, had guarded against such disbelief in a masterly fashion. She produced a parcel of food, some bread and meat, and a portion of rice pudding. The doctor tasted the latter, looked suddenly grave, and suggested that he should subject the remainder to an analysis.

Lesbia consented, and saw the departure of the medico and the pudding with feelings of elation.

"He will be found guilty," she cried, "and if I die, he will be hanged."

"You shall not die, my dearest," cried her lover, "you will get well and strong for my sake. Lesbia, you shall not die." He clasped her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

Meantime Mrs. Merridew, with great good sense, prepared a meal, to which Arthur and I sat down together. It was late, past ten o'clock, and I was once more racking my brain as to how I should discover Noel's whereabouts, when there came a loud ring at the bell.

"That's Moran," said Arthur. "He's come for Lesbia."

"You won't give her up?" I cried excitedly.

"No," he said slowly, "I shall never give her up"—and he advanced to admit the enemy.

Startled out of his usual calm, impassive self, Truscot faced us, indignation struggling with fear.

"You have abducted my niece," he cried, "you, and that red-haired minx. You may not know that it is an offence punishable by law, and that the term of imprisonment for such an offence is a long one. In consideration of the fact that you are both young, however, and acted possibly more from folly than wickedness, I am prepared to forego prosecution—on one condition—that you take me to my niece, offer no opposition to my removing her from here at once, refuse——" he paused dramatically—"and I shall apply for a warrant for your arrest."

"I fancy you'll find yourself a bit late, Mr. Moran," said Arthur, "long before I'm in custody, you'll find yourself on trial for the attempted murder—please God it will stop at attempted—of Lesbia, your niece. Oh, don't think you can bluff me," as Truscot sprang towards him, virtuous indignation shining in his eyes, "you can protest from now until to-morrow morning, it won't make a bit of difference; facts are facts, and not all the protestations in the world can explain the poison out of a rice pudding. We've got it here," he motioned to the cupboard, "or rather we had it. 'Tis under the care of the doctor now, the man who analysed it."

"Rubbish," snarled Truscot, snapping his fingers. "The mere idle ravings of an hysterical girl are not *proofs!* and if my cook uses some new-fangled essence in a pudding am I to be held responsible? You talk nonsense, impudent, libellous nonsense certainly, but as for anyone paying attention to such a farrago of absurdities—the notion is absurd!"

"Besides the pudding, there was bread and meat," said Arthur calmly. "I don't think the Insurance Company will regard the analysis as nonsense. However," he smiled at me, "I shall be in a better position to give you their opinion to-morrow, when Miss Gillespie has made her statement!"

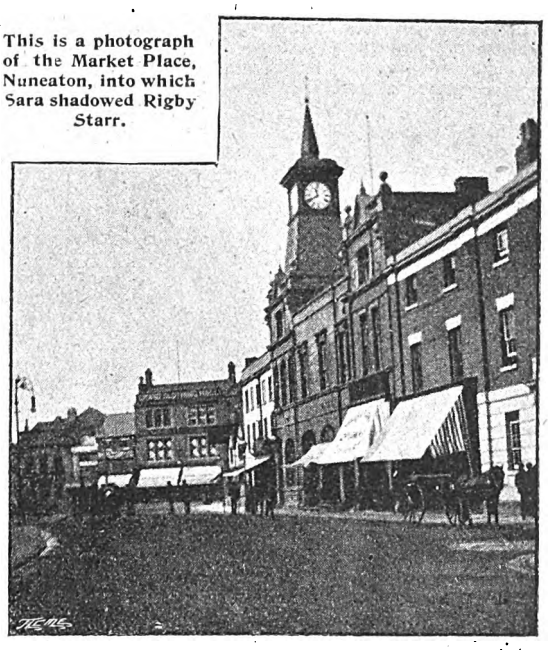
"If you confess to the fraud," he turned to me, "you implicate yourself. I don't fancy your philanthropy will carry you as far as going to prison, eh, Miss Gillespie; I shall be punished for my share in the conspiracy certainly, but don't suppose you'll get off scot free."

"I am prepared to run the risk," I answered doggedly. "To-morrow I shall go with Mr. Merridew to the insurance office and tell them the history of the whole affair. My statement, supported by Lesbia's story and the analysis of her food, will be strong enough to place you in a very awkward fix, I hope you will be sent to prison; at any rate, you will be disgraced."

"And you," he turned to me abruptly, "what will you gain by this? Come, Miss Gillespie, you're too sharp a business woman not to take advantage of your opportunities. Suppose you go to the insurance people, it would profit you nothing and inconvenience me a little—though by no means to the extent you suppose. Can't we come to an arrangement? If you withhold certain information, I might feel inclined to part with some. For instance——"

"Tell me where Noel is, and I'll keep silence," I cried impetuously. "I want to punish you—yes; but I want my lover more. Where is he?"

"One moment," interrupted Arthur; "how will you prove the accuracy of Mr. Moran's information? You may give your promise, lose your opportunity, and then discover you have been fooled; possibly find yourself in the hands of your enemies."



This is a photograph of the Market Place, Nuneaton, into which Sara shadowed Rigby Starr.

"Let him tell me where Noel is," I answered, "and I will start off for the place at once. If what he says is true—if I find my sweetheart—well and good; he is safe, so far as I am concerned. If not, I shall return to Birmingham and call at the insurance offices to-morrow morning."

"You need not be afraid," said Truscot; "here," he took out a sheet of notepaper, "is the address, written in Templeton's own writing. You will see that it is a letter of instructions from the head of the firm to Rigby Starr, and it refers to Noel Masterman."

He held the letter near enough for me to recognise the writing, and to identify the paper as belonging to the firm.

"Give it to me," I urged. "I'll promise anything; give it to me," and with trembling hands I tried to snatch it from him.

"One minute, if you please. There are other matters to be considered first. It is not sufficient for you alone to promise; I must have an undertaking from my niece and Mr. Merridew that they will refrain from statements likely to damage my reputation; or, better still, a letter signed by them, stating their belief in my affection and good feeling."

"That," said Arthur steadily, "you shall never have. I

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am prepared, for Miss Gillespie's sake, to refrain from any action against you for the present, and Lesbia, at my request, will do the same. But," the young man's face grew stern, "farther than that I will not go. Sooner or later you will have to answer for your crime."

I looked at him with all the pleading my face could express. He glanced back at me, sympathy, kindness even in his eyes, but of yielding not a jot. The weak-minded, dreamy young man I had known had disappeared; the Arthur Merridew who stood before me was of very different stuff.

"Lesbia must come before all things," he said gravely. "If it was myself that was concerned, I would do as you ask. But for her sake I must refuse."

"Well," said Moran calmly, "what do you mean by the present?"

"A week, no longer, Mr. Moran. At the end of that time I shall follow up the proceedings against you to-day. For a week, however, I will do nothing, providing the information you give Miss Gillespie proves correct."

"Providing also," I interrupted, "that I do not fall into Templeton's hands. You will have to keep the senior partner under watch, and—Mr. Moran. If I am taken the contract falls to the ground."

"Very well," he said lightly, a strange smile twitching at his lips, "I accept your terms; a week's time from now if my information proves correct. Here is the letter," he threw the document towards me, "now give me your word to keep silence for a week."

There was something sinister in the fashion in which he spoke the words. I had it in my heart to warn Merridew not to accept—to let me fight my battle single-handed, and help himself and Lesbia out of the compact. I knew instinctively that mischief would ensue, mischief to Lesbia and her lover—her poor young lover, whose brave heart was their only weapon of defence. And yet how could I warn him, when the price of such warning was the knowledge of my lover's whereabouts? Sorry I was for them both; but for love's sake, for Noel's sake, I was ready to sacrifice them and the whole world too.

Tuttle Hill Quarry, where Sara experienced such a thrilling adventure. It was near here that the house in which Sara expected to find Noel was situated.

Arthur gave his promise, and a few minutes later Moran left the house, a light-hearted message to Lesbia on his lips.

"I'll throw the senior partner off the scent, my dear," he said to me familiarly. "You're safe for a week. By-the-bye," he patted me on the shoulder, "here's your salary; I've paid you for a week. You've done more in three days than most clerks in six." I took the money, and said nothing. Truly Truscot Moran was a remarkable man.

He smiled in his usual charming fashion, and his serenity fully restored, departed.

No sooner had the front door closed behind him than I hastily seized on Templeton's letter. It was an artfully-worded document; couched in business phraseology, the instructions apparently referred to consignments of goods awaiting Starr's attention. The particular consignment that aroused my interest was expected at Nuneaton. A Mr. Masterman, wrote the senior partner, would arrive at that town by the down train due at ten minutes past twelve midnight, on Friday of that week. Eagerly I turned the letter over and observed the date. It had been written on the previous Monday, it was therefore to-night—*to-night* that Noel was coming to Nuneaton.

"A time-table, quick!" I called to Arthur. "I must start immediately."

A quick scrutiny revealed the fact that there was a train leaving Birmingham at eleven thirty-five, which would reach Nuneaton at twelve three, just seven minutes before Noel. It wanted but a few minutes to eleven; there was no time to lose. Leaving Arthur to pack up some sandwiches for my refreshment, I rushed upstairs to say good-bye to Lesbia.

She clung to me despairingly, and begged me not to leave her longer than a day without a letter.

"Let me know where you are," she pleaded; "promise to let me know."

I said a few words of comfort to her, telling her not to worry, and bade her farewell.

Arthur was ready to take me to the station when I came down, Mrs. Merridew embraced me in a motherly fashion, and hoped that I should soon return. The poor lady did not in the least understand why all these things were happening in her house, nor, to do her justice, did she try to find out. Blessed is the woman who does not ask for tiresome explanations.

The train was some two or three minutes late, and anxiety lest I should miss Noel possessed me as I entered the carriage. It seemed a long journey. Imagination outstripping the engine, pictured my lover at the station, pictured myself just too late!

I craned my head through the window, studying eagerly the country side. In the darkness the hedges took strange shapes; the distant hills, wooded with thickly-growing trees, frowned darkly at me; the signal posts along the line pointed a spectral finger, a warning it seemed to me, of coming ill.

We reached the sleepy station of Nuneaton some few minutes late. I had barely time to cross the line to take up a position on the platform, where I could scan the passengers without being seen, when the twelve-ten steamed in.

Three men alighted—Shackell, Rigby Starr, and a tall, heavily-bearded man, a stranger to me. No one else got out of the train. Noel, apparently, had not arrived! I moved into the doorway of the waiting-room, well out of their line of vision, and thought out the situation. There was a hitch somewhere; Rigby Starr had been instructed to meet the twelve ten—there was no suggestion that he would be travelling in the train. I drew out Templeton's letter, and gazed hard at the date; to all appearances it had not been tampered with. Moran had not, as I was at first inclined to think, palmed off a forgery upon me. The senior partner had evidently changed his plans, and wired a fresh set of instructions.

Meanwhile where was Noel? The disappointment brought the tears to my eyes, and made me clench my hands, raging against my impotence. There was but one thing to be done—

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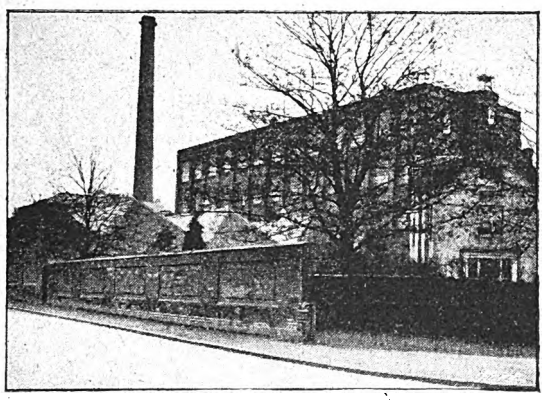


A silk factory in Nuneaton. It was at the gate of one of these factories that Sara encountered Sidney Ilford, and in consequence experienced—

I must follow the three men, Shackell, Rigby, and the stranger, and discover their destination.

My purpose was foiled, however; the two partners, arm in arm with the stranger, a dull-eyed man, whose heavy beard obscured his face, walked together from the station. Immediately outside Shackell hailed a shabby-looking carriage, in which the bearded man took his seat. Shackell stepped in after him, but Rigby Starr remained at the road side. For a moment I hesitated. Should I charter another conveyance and follow Shackell, or remain and keep Rigby well in sight? I decided on the latter course, and watched the carriage out of sight, waiting till Rigby chose to move.

It was a damp, unpleasant evening, the air was misty, the roads muddy, but undeterred, Rigby stepped out at a swinging pace, while I, at a discreet distance, followed, my heart quaking for fear I should be heard up Abbey Street—surely the longest street ever built—through a narrow turning into the Market Place, and then into the Bull Inn. Starr had evidently engaged a room, for his summons at the door was speedily attended to, and he was ushered through the portals with a hearty greeting.

A few minutes afterwards the door opened again, and a man, evidently employed in the establishment, passed into the street.

I crossed the road and met him at the corner.

"Can you tell me of a hotel?" I asked. "I've missed my train at the station, and find I shall have to stay here all night."

He stopped and looked at me with curiosity.

"The Bull is for commercials," he said slowly, "we don't take ladies there, you'll have to go to the Temperance place, they'll let you have a room. It stands at the top of Abbey Street, round the corner there, you can't miss it."

"Thank you," said I, and then, "I saw that gentleman go in to the Bull just now, is he stopping there?"

"For the night," he answered. Then, "Do you know him?"

"I think so, but I'm not quite sure. I only just caught a glimpse of his face. I should know if he is the man I think directly I saw him in the daylight."

"It's awkward like to speak to a stranger," said the lad.

"Very," I returned with feeling, "and yet if he is the gentleman I mean, he will be very disappointed not to meet me."

"I can take a message," was the answer.

"Oh, I sha'n't trouble so much as that. You might find out when he's leaving Nuneaton, and by what train; if you like to let me know, I'll pay you for your trouble."

By this time we had reached the Temperance Hotel; pealing the bell I waited for admittance. At last a footstep sounded in the hall. I turned to the lad from the Bull and slipped a shilling in his hand.

"Call here for me to-morrow about ten, and I'll give you as much again."

He pocketed the money gleefully, assured me he would find out what I wished to know, and went on his way rejoicing.

I stopped the night at the hotel, and, worn out with fatigue, slept soundly. Punctually at ten, my companion of the previous evening put in an appearance.

Rigby Starr, he said, was stopping at Nuneaton for a day or two. He had given orders for a trap at three that afternoon, and my friend, it seemed, was to drive him.

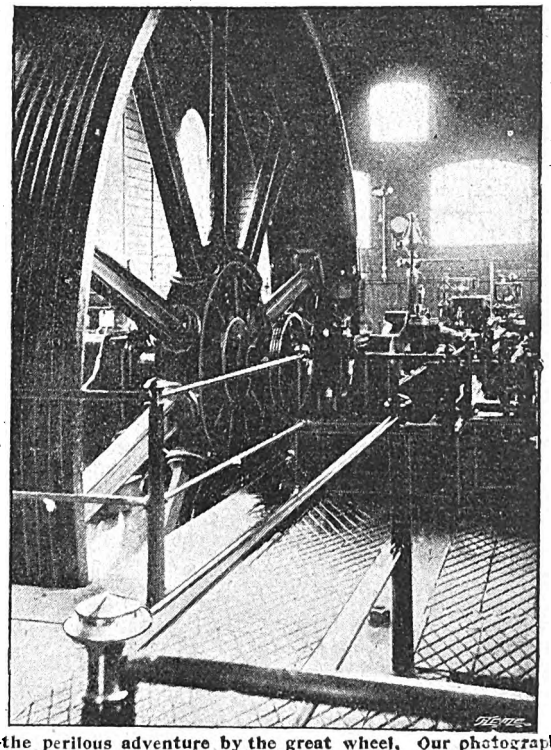
"We're going up Tuttle Hill," he said, "past the quarries. We shall be out the best part of three hours."

I rewarded my informant, and set out to study the geography of Tuttle Hill.

A long, straggling place, built without plan or sequence, Nuneaton is a depressing spot. It boasts no parks or open spaces, the small inclosure commonly called the Recreation Grounds being a sandy waste, in which islets of grass and hungry-looking shrubs form the "Grounds," and a few swings and see-saws the "Recreation." All day long its inhabitants toil in the neighbouring quarries, coal mines, and factories, returning after their day's labour to a tiny house in a cheerless street, empty of life, devoid of colour. All the dreary monotony of town existence, with none of its stir, all the sleepiness of village life, without its peaceful setting. An hour's walk from the green country, Nuneaton reminds me of those desolate suburbs that spring up almost in a night upon the fringe of London.

Slowly and by degrees, having regard to the yet weak condition of my ankle, I made my way through the town to Tuttle Hill, a long ascent at the extreme outskirts of Nuneaton.

Some distance up the hill I was attracted by a notice, setting forth that anyone who trespassed on the quarry and the grounds adjoining, would be prosecuted—fatigue and the inclination for forbidden things, inherent in human



—the perilous adventure by the great wheel. Our photograph shows a specimen of one of these huge machines, and the great danger that Sara was in can easily be imagined.

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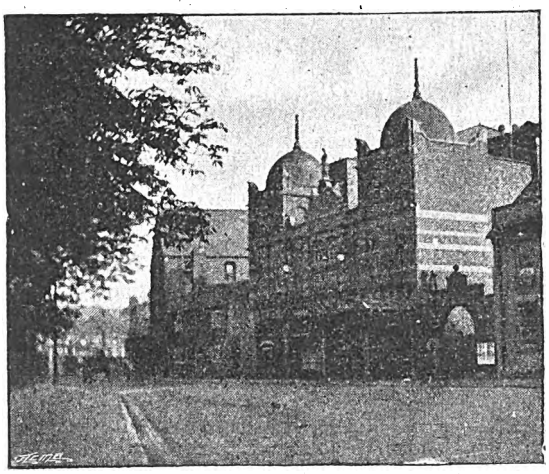

Nuneaton Theatre. It was outside this pretty place of amusement that Sara first had her attention drawn to the detective who was following her.

nature, induced me to scramble over the fence and make my way to the quarry's brink. A lonely, deserted spot, with not a workman in sight, it gave one a strange impression of desolation. Scarred by the many hands that had hewn huge blocks of granite from its side, the quarry yawned like an open grave beneath one's feet.

I stooped to look over the brink; then with a shudder drew back, dizzy at sight of the depths below.

Resting against a boulder at a safe distance from the edge, I fixed my eyes upon the road.

Some half hour later I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping up the hill. It was no cart that hastened towards me, the pace was all too quick. I started to my feet and drew near to the fence that marked off the inclosure from the road—ready, if needs be, to conceal myself behind a clump of elder bushes. A trap stopped suddenly, the driver, my friend, the shabby lad, hailed me in cheery tones:

"Mr. Starr's got down yonder," he pointed over his shoulder. "He's taken a short cut to the house over there," and he motioned again to the other side of the quarry, where, on the brow of the hill, a square stone building was visible.

"You won't overtake him on the road, miss," said the boy. "If you want to catch him you'd best take the path by the quarry; you'll get there as quick as he will that way."

I nodded my thanks, and having ascertained that the lad was not to await Rigby's return retraced my steps. The path he spoke of skirted the edge of the great pit; on the one side yawned the quarry; on the other, steep banks perpendicular as a wall hedged it in. A false step might send me hurling into the gulf.

And yet it was essential I should reach the house upon the hill before Rigby arrived. In that bleak place, strong as a prison, silent and remote, something told me I should find Noel. I would clamour at the door, beat at the window till they let me in—into my lover, and he and I would surely find our way to liberty. If not, if at the worst, they kept us prisoners, it could not be for ever, and—we should be together!

I set my eyes upon the square house upon the hill, far, far above those shuddering depths; slowly, painfully, and with infinite care, I picked my way along the track.

Half the distance was traversed, when down the hill side, from the direction of the house, a man, running quickly, came into view. He glanced back, every now and then, over his shoulder, as if fearing pursuit. As he came nearer I recognised in him the dark-bearded stranger I had seen the previous night at the station.

He appeared to be making for the quarry, and to my astonishment and fear—the descent was terribly precipitous—proceeded to clamber over the edge, hanging on to roots of shrubs and jutting stones, clinging ant-like to the face of the cliff.

Just as he touched the bottom, I caught sight of a figure moving amongst the boulders that strewed the ground, trying it seemed to hide from the new-comer.

The bearded man evidently shared my opinion, for, with a cry of rage, he rushed towards the other, bearing him to the ground.

In a second my mind leapt to a colourable explanation of what was taking place. Noel, by some happy chance, had escaped from the house on the hill, and was making his way through the quarry as a short cut to the road. The bearded man had discovered his absence and had given chase. In a short time Shackell would find it out also, and joined by Starr, would come to the rescue. At that very moment Shackell's big figure hurried down the hill. The two combatants were rolling over and over on the ground, Noel, or the man I thought was Noel, showed plenty of fight, and though smaller than the other, seemed able to give his adversary plenty of trouble. At last the bearded man clenched the situation by a savage blow that knocked the man flat upon his back. For a moment I was tempted to rush down the incline to his assistance; the next a more effective means of disabling his adversary suggested itself. I began to throw down pieces of stone hoping to distract the bearded man's attention. He glanced up as the pieces fell at his feet, and strained to see from where they came.

Encouraged by my success I launched a fusillade of stones, that had the effect of driving the bearded man still farther

The imposing-looking bank at Nuneaton to which Sara intended to go to endeavour to change two of the notes for gold, in order to pay Sidney Ilford.

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back from the prostrate figure of his enemy. One of these stones, larger than the rest, in its path down the quarry side, cannoned against a small granite boulder, which, thus set free, loosed in its rush a yet larger piece of rock. This last, with great velocity, rolled like a cannon-ball, jumping from ridge to ridge, from ledge to ledge, until it reached the bottom with an immense thud.

Immediately upon the thud, rose a piercing scream.

Someone was hurt, someone—I looked over the edge, a sickening fear at my heart. I had not meant to hurt the bearded man, and then I realised that it was the figure on the ground the stone had struck, the figure I had thought was Noel.

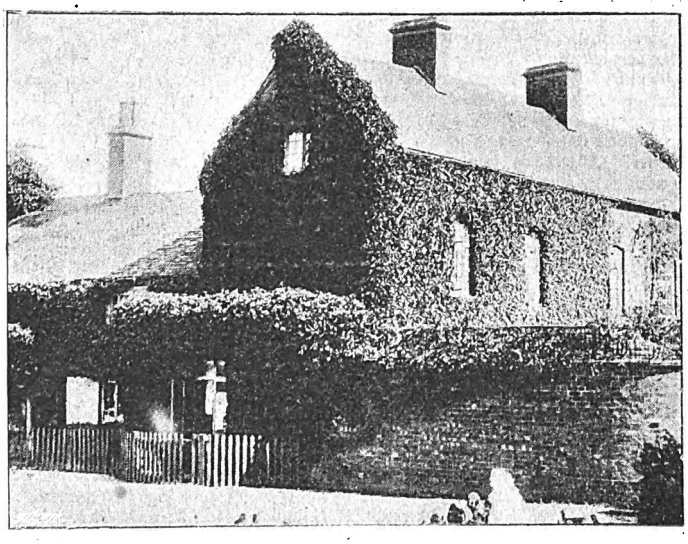
Again the shriek of agony came up to me, and then—silence. And in the warm sunshine I felt my heart turn chill, the blue of the sky turned to a sullen grey, the earth grew dark before me—I felt the bitterness of death!

I could not move, my limbs seemed turned to stone. I could not cry or call, but sat cold and motionless against the granite wall.

I did not faint, nor for a moment lose consciousness, but all apprehension of what was happening seemed to have left me.

I gazed at the scene below, and saw without understanding what took place.

Shackell, who by this time had reached the bottom of the quarry, advanced to the bearded man, who seemed inclined to extend hostilities in his direction. After some difficulty Shackell succeeded in convincing him of his friendly intentions, and induced him to take a longer but much safer path that led up the other side of the quarry. Neither of them so much as looked at that still white face upon the ground, neither put out a hand to help him. As the two disappeared from view, the possibility that after all the blow had not been fatal, after all my lover was stunned, not dead, came to me with a flash of hope. It seemed to bring fresh life to me, to put new strength into my limbs.



Griff House, the residence of the late George Eliot, where it was arranged that Sidney Ilford and Sara should meet.

I managed to make my way round the quarry's brink till I reached the path, by means of which Shackell and the other had ascended.

Soon, very soon, I reached the bottom of the quarry, and drew near to where he lay—the stone upon his breast.

With a great cry I knelt upon the ground, and lifting the stone away, I took his head upon my knees. Then, for my eyes were dim, bending down closer, I gazed into the face of *Rigby Starr!*

Not Noel! Not my beloved, but his enemy and mine lay in the dust. For the moment fierce joy of the discovery kept fear at bay—the fear that I had killed him. The next, fear had its way. I was a murderer; he was dead.

His heart, surely it had not ceased to beat? I grasped his wrist and felt for his pulse. I pressed my ear to his heart, and counted the faint, sobbing breaths.

He was not dead. Thank God—he was not dead! Then—and the question clutched at my heart, he being Starr, who was that other, who was the man that fought with him?

With shaking hands I loosened Rigby's collar, propping him up against the stone that all but ended his career. After a while he opened his eyes; but with reviving consciousness pain returned, and he moaned piteously. I placed him in an easier posture so that the pain abated. Then,

"Where is Noel Masterman?" I asked.

He did not know me, did not understand the full significance of the question.

"Over there," he motioned with his head towards the house on the hill.

"Why is he there?"

His lips twitched, suddenly a light of understanding gleamed in his eyes.

"Why is he there, you red-haired minx?" he gasped. "Why is Noel Masterman there? Because he's mad—stark, staring mad. We've drugged him until he's clean out of his mind; you'll never see him again; we've altered him completely, grown a beard for him, and, and——" his voice trailed off into a moan.

"Oh, heavens!" he cried, "the pain is horrible; can't you help me?"

"I can do nothing but fetch assistance. Shall I leave you?"

He nodded, white to the lips with the torture he endured. I needed no second bidding to quit the place and him. Mad! my sweetheart mad! It was a lie, a wicked, awful lie. And then the remembrance of his face, the dull look in his eyes, the strange, excited way in which he had behaved to Shackell, returned to me. I hurried along the road, pausing at the first cottage that I passed to ask for help for Rigby.

Shackell had already forestalled my request as it turned out, a party of workmen, I was informed, and a doctor, had already set out for the quarry.

My next step was to inquire the way to the house on the Hill. It was possible I might yet be in time to rescue Noel. Shackell having seen him home, would doubtless return to Rigby; it was possible that Noel was left in the custody of a stranger, who might be induced to let my sweetheart see me.

When I reached the house, however, it was empty! The front door was shut, but through a small door at the back I effected an entrance. The place was in confusion, and showed signs of a hasty departure. In one of the upstairs rooms some papers were smouldering in the grate; there were small fragments of a letter on the floor, and a portion of a telegram. I picked up the latter; there were the last syllables of two words, "ton" and "ster." The first I guessed was Templeton in its complete form, the second was more baffling. Probably the name of a place, perhaps their next destination. Was it Chester, Manchester, Worcester—a perplexing choice presented itself. I left the house, and turned towards the town, still undecided.

I resolved to make inquiries at the L.N.W. Railway Station; perhaps the fugitives could be traced from the ticket office. On the road to the station I passed various factories—straw plaiting, blanket weaving, shoe making, all bleak and forbidding places, from which the operatives issued like captives from a prison. The silk mills were more attractive,

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architecturally speaking. Instinctively I paused, glancing up at the tall chimneys and square front. The yard door was open, a knot of men were gossiping just inside. One of them, tall, slim, and good looking, moved towards me.

"Miss Gillespie," he said softly.

And with a gasp I answered:

"Sidney Ilford!"

"You need not be afraid," he said, with all the condescension of a coward. "I've no particular instructions in regard to you at this present moment."

"Where is Noel?" I asked. "Come, Mr. Ilford, don't pretend. Surely there's no need for that at this stage of our acquaintance. I want to know where your people have taken Noel! You want—don't protest—money for the information. I'll give you a hundred pounds for his address so soon as I've verified it."

"Come inside," he said, quietly; "we can't talk here." He glanced round with apprehension.

"I daresay you'd like to take a look round the works," he added, for the benefit of the bystanders. Then he moved towards a tall, spare man, evidently an official of the premises, and asked for permission to show me round.

"The engine room is the most interesting, in my opinion," said Ilford, and showed the way into a lofty room, full of the whirl of wheels, the clatter of machinery.

A gigantic wheel, sixty feet in circumference, revolving with an incredible velocity, supplied the motive power for the whole factory. It reached up almost to the ceiling—far above one's head and down deep beneath one's feet, a shaft being driven right through the floor. A railing fenced off the opening of the shaft, high enough to stop a fall, sufficiently low to lean upon with comfort.

Irresistibly attracted, I gazed at the great wheel. Then, shaking off its fascination, turned back again to Ilford.

"You know Rigby Starr has met with an accident?"

He shook his head.

"Where?" he asked incredulously.

"In the quarry, up at Tuttle Hill, near the house where Noel was imprisoned. He's been taken from there now," I added, stopping a ready lie upon his lips. "See here, Mr. Ilford, don't waste time and talk. Will you tell me where Shackell is taking him for a hundred pounds?"

His eyes, bright with greed, gazed hungrily at mine. He moved a little closer, resting his hand upon my arm. Instinctively my hand went to my side, in involuntary protection of the notes. The action seemed to madden him.

"A thousand—I must have a thousand," he said hoarsely.

The man who looked after the machinery was engaged in another part of the room. Ilford's expression frightened me. He looked desperate, as if—the next moment an awful thing had happened.

In his eagerness Ilford had pushed me close to the railings; with a shudder of repulsion I threw myself back to escape his touch. The draught from the great wheel came like a wind on my face—a wind that caught the loose ends of my scarf, entangling them among the spokes.

In a second I was caught from the ground, suspended by my scarf. A collar as of iron seemed round my throat, a whir as of many wings flashed through my brain. A second, no more, with the next revolution of the wheel I should be dashed down the shaft, crushed out of life!

In a flash my life, its past, its present, rushed before me. My life so soon to end, and then—the wheel stopped, eager hands caught and drew me gently to the ground. Death has passed by me, but his breath had chilled my very soul.

Ilford, white and shaking, murmured some incoherent words, whether of congratulation or regret I cannot say.

"You tried to kill me," I said slowly. "It was through you my scarf caught in the wheel. You did it to rob me of Noel's money."

He protested eagerly, and after a while I accepted his denials. Finally he agreed for £100 to tell me whither Noel had been removed.

"It will take some few hours for me to discover where they have taken him, Miss Gillespie. You had better meet me at a remote place, say near Griff House, this evening at seven. I shan't know before."

"Griff House is a long way from Nuneaton."

"That's why I choose it. I dare not be seen with you nearer the town. And now if you feel able you'd better get off. If you're wise, you'll keep in hiding till to-night at seven."

But I was past wisdom so far as my own safety was concerned. Noel and Noel's danger drove considerations for myself out of my mind; the pain, the short terror of my late experience only intensified my terror for him. If I had suffered, what must he have endured?

From the mill I went to the Market Place, meaning to call at the imposing looking bank opposite the Clock Tower. I wanted to inquire if they could change two of the notes for gold. It occurred to me that Ilford might demand payment in cash. I was deterred from making the inquiry, however, by reason of the strange conduct of a small, dapper-looking man, who watched me so intently, that I felt nervous, and, suspecting him to be the agent of Templeton and Co., hastened in the other direction. To my discomfiture he followed, at a distance, truly, keeping me well in sight.

I divined the reason later. Outside the theatre, a pretty building—the one place of amusement Nuneaton boasts—a lot of loungers were gathered.

"That's Smithers," said one to the other. "I wonder what he's up to."

"And who's Smithers?" asked a man, evidently not a native.

"He's a local detective," was the reply; "no fool either, I assure you."

A detective—following me! In a flash I realised what had happened. Shackell had been to the police, in regard to the accident to Rigby, and I was being shadowed so that at any moment they could lay their hands upon me.

All the afternoon the dapper individual kept me in sight. About six, however, I contrived to give him the slip. I had had tea at the hotel, and was half-way down the Coton Road, on my way to Griff House, the early home of the great novelist, George Eliot, when the detective hove in sight. It was quite dark, and impossible to accurately distinguish the outlines of his face, but his figure betrayed him. At the moment, a girl about my size and shape, and dressed in coat and skirt, came out of a house, and commenced to walk rapidly towards the town. Creeping into the shadow of a doorway, I watched the detective pause, hesitate, and finally follow the girl instead of me.

After that my spirits rose, and I set out on my long tramp—and what a tramp it is every devotee of George Eliot, who has paid a devotional visit to her early home, can testify—with high hopes of success.

I reached the quaint old house, with its flower-gardens, green lawns, and ivy-covered walls, just after seven. There was no sign of Ilford, nor when I questioned a group of girls laughing in the porch, could I hear any report of him. No stranger had been there that afternoon, they answered me. Bright-faced, pleasure-loving lasses all of them, pupils, so they told me, of Griff House, which the County Council had of late turned into a dairy farm, where daughters of leafy Warwickshire learnt to make cheese and butter.

They gossiped with me awhile, and discussed their chances of passing the forthcoming examination in butter-making. They seemed doubtful as to their success—the "theory," they explained, was far more difficult than the "practice." I wished them all "Good luck," and envious of their quiet life and simple happiness, returned to the highway—the road to Coventry—on the look-out for Ilford.

It had struck eight when he appeared, breathless with haste.

"Follow me," he said shortly, and led the way to a coppice by the road side.

"Masterman's going to Manchester to-night in charge of Templeton. Shackell took him to Birmingham this afternoon, they start from there by the eight-forty; if you're quick——"

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There was no time for him to finish the sentence, a figure crashed from the bushes at our side, and aiming a furious blow at Ilford, cut the words short.

"Shackell!" I gasped, and, unable to move, watched the two struggling.

"Make haste, you idiot!" screamed Ilford. "He'll telegraph to stop 'em if you don't make haste."

I needed no second warning, but flew as fast as my feet would carry me down the road. I had reached the canal bridge, when the pad of pursuing footsteps struck on my ear.

I realised the situation, and knew that before me lay the toughest struggle I had yet encountered.

It was past eight; the train left Birmingham in half an hour, if Shackell reached the Post Office before me—if I got there first—my breath came in great sobs, I staggered on, until the lamps of a receding cart flashed into view. With a mighty effort I put on a spurt, gained the cart's side, and clambered up. The shouts of Shackell came down upon the wind.

I urged the driver to put on top speed.

"I want to reach the Post Office." I gasped, "important wire."

"It's too late, miss," was the answer, "the office shuts at eight, you must go to the L. N. W. station; you can send a telegram from the signal-box."

"Are you going that way?" I asked.

"Only as far as Coton Road; we'll put you down there."

We drove off through the darkness, at a steady jog-trot, that not all my prayers could increase. I seemed to hear Shackell gaining upon us, over and over again I caught his voice shouting to us to stop. Thank Heaven! the driver did not hear him.

We stopped at Coton Road, and with hasty thanks I climbed down and ran along the dark, quiet streets. Through the Market Place, past the Clock Tower, past the theatre, where I heard those footsteps behind me, that voice calling me to stop.

At last the station comes in sight, I run into the platform, and essay to cross the line. An indignant porter drags me back, and points out the subway. I make a headlong dash down the steps. Up the steps at the other end, then I fly down the platform, and cover the distance between it and the signal-box in a flash.

Up the steps, rickety and dangerous, into the signal-box, slamming the door behind me, and then rapping violently upon the window, I call out to the clerk:

"No time to write," I cry, and dictate a long and rambling message. As I turn to go, Shackell rushes on to the steps, a telegraph form in his hand

"Too late," I cry, "too late. The eight-forty has left for Birmingham, and I—I shall have it met at Manchester."

For answer Shackell moves aside, and motions to someone behind to approach.

I find myself face to face with the detective!

(The concluding instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

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Your Editor Chats.

I have great pleasure in announcing that the winner of the guinea offered by me in respect to the first Unsolved Love Problem, "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," is Mr. Chas. G. F. Chute, of 3, Belleville Avenue, Rathgar Road, and heartily I congratulate him upon his success. Although there were many interesting replies sent in, I consider that his was the best, both in good arguments and lucid reasoning.

I am glad to see that this feature has taken on so remarkably well, and next week I hope to be able to announce the winner in the Second Problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

Those who intend sending in replies to the Fourth Problem, "The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple," must note that the latest day on which I can receive their letters is Friday, December 4th. None arriving after this date will be considered.

Mrs. S. McQuillin, 12 Carlton Street, Welford Road, Leicester, is the fortunate person who wins the Gramophone I offered for distributing leaflets advertising "The Pursuit of Sara." I sincerely trust that Mrs. McQuillin, who pressed her little son and her daughter into her service, will spend many a happy evening through the long winter months listening to the enjoyable entertainment of the prize she has won.

The week after next will appear our grand Christmas Number. I hope you are making a note in your diary to order your copy early, for I fully expect that the issue will soon run out of print, and then you will be sorry that you missed it.

Besides the splendid humorous story by Mr. W. Pett Ridge, which nobody could read without a hearty laugh, and the numerous other fine stories and illustrations that go to make up the number, there will be the opening chapters of a marvellous new serial story from the pen of your favourite writer, Blanche Eardley. She it was who wrote: "The Bond Between," a romance that you were all delighted with, and so you will be with "Dupes of Destiny," the title of the coming story, because it is quite up to her very best standard. Besides this, there will be many valuable prizes offered in connection with some novel and interesting competitions.

In our next issue "The Pursuit of Sara" concludes. The city of Manchester is the scene of the final instalment, and I think that you will all agree that the end is a brilliant climax to a thrilling series. Those who have followed Miss Gillespie throughout her adventures will doubtless be very eager to learn how love triumphs in her case over everything, and what befalls the hard-hearted scoundrels who are the cause of all the mischief. I can assure you that the concluding instalment is also a very enthralling one.

Your Editor.

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CLAUDIA'S RETALIATION.

The Story of a Hasty Conclusion.

"THAT must be Harold ringing me up!" cried Claudia Silburn as the whirring tinkle of the bell made itself heard from the small room at the end of the hall. "He is about to leave the office and he wishes to tell me that he will be here a little before the agreed time, I expect!"

She sprang from her seat and made her way to the door; Mrs. Silburn, placidly working through the maze of some very fancy crochet work, looked up in time to catch a glimpse of the happy face of her daughter, and the sight of those sparkling eyes and the flushed cheeks carried her thoughts back with a rush to the time when she was Claudia's age and also just engaged to the man of her choice.

Claudia went swiftly across the intervening space in order to reach the instrument before anyone else could answer it. The telephone was so convenient! She was glad that her father, a not-too-successful general practitioner, had taken advantage of the introduction of the "message rate" system to have the instrument installed in his house.

A moment later, Mrs. Silburn heard the following remarks through the two open doors:

"Yes, I am Miss Silburn!" A pause. "Oh!" in a tone of mingled disappointment and vexation; "thank you! I understand! Good-bye!" And then the combined receiver and transmitter was replaced on the hooks with quite unnecessary vigour.

"I won't tolerate it!" Claudia declared hotly, as she tumultuously re-entered the sitting-room and threw herself in her chair. "I wonder if Harold thinks he can play with me in *that* way!" This last remark was uttered in a scornful tone.

"Mother," she continued, turning to that worthy lady, who still sat placidly at her work, "can you imagine anything so—so rude and off-hand? Here is Harold actually getting his office boy—his *office boy!*—to ring me up and tell me that he is sorry that he cannot keep the appointment for this evening because he wishes to attend a meeting of the directors of his company, the Neverdull Paint Co.! I know very well that he is not bound to attend these meetings except *very* rarely; he was telling me only the other day that he was glad it was so, because they usually hold their meetings when everybody else wanted to go home!"

Claudia stopped through a deficiency of breath and an excess of indignation.

Mrs. Silburn looked up at the excited face of her daughter, noting mentally that Claudia appeared really very beautiful when she was cross, and was about to make some soothing reply when Claudia found breath enough to continue.

"He is commencing rather early, I think! Here have we been engaged one week only, and he slips away from the office early to keep an appointment which has more attraction for him—a music hall, very likely!—instead of coming to see me, as promised, and gets his office boy to ring me up at the proper time and tell me that he must attend a meeting of old directors!"

She ceased speaking once more, and Mrs. Silburn said a few words in her usual calm manner.

"Your father slipped away while we were on our honeymoon in order to play a game of cricket with his team, my dear, and he has turned out to be a very creditable husband, as, I suppose, you will admit!"

"Oh, yes! But then papa is different from Harold and—I don't care if he has gone cricketing or anywhere else. I call it downright neglect, and if I allow it now, what shall I have to put up with after marriage, I should like to know? And he has the audacity to say, through the office boy, that he is free of engagements for to-morrow evening!

"Free of engagements!" she repeated, as the significance of the phrase struck her. "I will see to that! He shall be quite free; he may conclude that our engagement is broken and that he can look out for another girl to deceive! I'll write to him so that he knows it first thing to-morrow morning!"

Mrs. Silburn sighed, her daughter was not like her, for she took things very equably, while Claudia was impulsive.

Mrs. Silburn thought of interfering, but she decided not to do so. Every generation must gain its experience in its own way and an impetuous nature can seldom be calmed without dashing itself against the rocks of suffering. Claudia would not listen to her if she spoke, she was afraid!

The girl had seated herself at a little writing-table and was viciously dipping the pen in the ink. She forgot the usual form of letter writing, and began at once, without address or date.

"My dear H——"

"No, that won't do!" she decided. "He isn't that any longer. I can alter the 'H' into 'M' and make it 'Mr.' quite easily!"

She did so. It did not look very well, and, moreover, why should she call him "My dear Mr. Churchill"? She tore up the sheet of notepaper, took another and dashed off the following:

DEAR MR. CHURCHILL—*I received your message through the intermediary of your office assistant. I understand that you are, or wish to be, free of all engagements to-morrow evening, so I hasten to let you know that I shall be too busy to-morrow evening to see anybody. Yours truly,* C. S.

"There!" she cried, passing the letter to her mother,

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"That will teach him that he mustn't play with the young ladies of the present day. It may have been all right in your time, mother, but this is different!"

"It's rather stiff, isn't it, Claudia?" ventured Mrs. Silburn. "It looks as if you didn't want him to call again!"

"I don't mind what it looks like!" said Claudia. Her mother's words caused a peculiar little sensation to strike her in the region of the heart, but she crushed it ruthlessly. "It means that I am not easily hoodwinked and not to be trifled with. I have read a good many things about husbands having to stay late at the office, and all that, and I shall nip it in the bud."

She folded the sheet of paper with much emphasis, pushed it into the envelope, sealed it, and took up a postage stamp.

"I'll post it at once!" she remarked, affixing the stamp in position with a vigorous dab.

She ran out with just her hat on, and jerked the letter into the slot of the wall-box about fifty yards from the house. She had just missed the 7.10 collection, so it would go by the 8.25. That was rather a pity, as the letter might have reached him the same evening if she had caught the 7.10. Well, it would make him uncomfortable at breakfast!

She went back to the sitting-room and took up her sewing once more. Needlework is a soothing occupation to those who are fond of it; Claudia liked it, which was somewhat surprising in a girl of such impulsive disposition, and after half an hour, she began to feel that she had been too hasty.

She tried to crush the feeling, but it rose to the surface in spite of her efforts, and her cheeks began to burn.

A sound caused her to start; it was the well-known ring of the telephone bell. For the second time that evening, Claudia dropped her work and hastened to answer the summons.

She shut the door behind her, so Mrs. Silburn could not hear any of the conversation. Three minutes later, Claudia returned with her face wreathed in smiles. It was the old happy look and Mrs. Silburn smiled wisely.

"Oh, mother, I wonder how I could have thought so ill of dear Harold. He has just rung me up to explain. The directors' meeting was unexpected; it was called by telegram this afternoon, and Harold thought it would be a good idea to take advantage of the occasion. He tried to ring up this afternoon so as to tell me himself and in good time, but the foolish girls at the exchange kept telling him that they could get no answer from us. At last he got through, but just at that moment he was called in to the room where the directors of the Neverdull Paint Co. were sitting, so he had to give a hurried message to the boy. He wished to attend the meeting in order to get the directors to settle on his leave of absence for our wedding, because, so he says"—this with a deep blush—"he is not going to wait! I am *so* sorry that I——"

"What's the matter, dear?" asked her mother, disturbed out of her equability for the first time by seeing Claudia's cheeks suddenly lose their bright colour and become deadly pale.

"I have posted that cruel letter, mother!" came slowly from the girl's lips. "What shall I do? He has left the office now, but it won't matter how much I explain, he will read the letter and he will think—— Oh, dear! I can't bear to imagine what he will think! I must get that letter back! I'll fish it out of the box with a piece of string and a gummed pad at the end, or I'll stick it with a wire skewer or something! It mustn't go!"

It was a hopeless kind of notion, and Claudia realised it when she began to make hasty preparations for carrying it into effect; but she finally determined to have a good try with the skewer! Meanwhile, the large hand of the clock was hurrying towards twenty-five minutes past, while the hour hand was painfully climbing towards the nine. Thus it came about that, while Claudia was engaged in the impossible task of inserting the skewer and her fingers into the slot in such a way as to effect the object she had in view, a hand was placed on her shoulder and a man's voice exclaimed:

"Trying to steal the letters, by Jingo! Got you this time, my lady!"

It was the postman come to collect the letters from the box at 8.25! Claudia uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh, I am not trying to steal them, Mr. Postman, indeed I am not! You know me well enough, and you wouldn't think me guilty of that! I have dropped a letter into the box which I don't wish to go now! Will you give it back to me?"

"Can't do it, miss!" returned the man stoutly. He recognised Miss Silburn and dropped the accusation of stealing. "As soon as a letter is dropped into that 'ere box, miss, it is the property of His Majesty's Postmaster-General, you know! I can't do anything for you!"

"But I can tell you which one it is and who it is addressed to!" pleaded Claudia earnestly. "It will make several people unhappy now, if that letter goes. There!" as the man opened the box. "You will see it, for there are only three. It is the one in the lavender envelope."

"This is the one, I expect," said the man, picking up the lavender envelope and holding it tightly, lest Claudia should make a clutch at it. "I'm very sorry, but I can't give it to you! Hallo! Why, if you haven't slipped it in the box without addressing it!"

It was a fact! Claudia gazed at the blank envelope, with the red stamp fixed to the top right-hand corner, and vaguely wondered if this omission would help her. The man soon explained the position.

"That letter will come back to you, miss! When they get hold of it at the G.P.O., the first man will sling it into the 'blind' box, as they call it. That's when the letters ain't plainly addressed or anything o' that sort. After that, your letter will find its way to the Dead Letter Office; they'll open it, see your address and return it to you, unless you've put the name and address of the other party inside, which ladies don't do, as a rule! Good evening, miss! I hope as it'll be all right!"

He swung the door to with a clang and continued his round of collection. Claudia gave a happy little laugh and sped back home, dropping the skewer unconsciously as she ran along.

"There was no address inside, so they can't send it back to me or anyone else!" she laughed. "Oh, how glad I am!"

G. E. Lingen.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

BIBLIOTECA BODLEIANA

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY:

Isolo Staunton, a criminal millionaire, who was once a convict on the Chincha Islands. He is the ruler of a kingdom under the sea, of the existence of which nobody knows. Here he forges in great number coins of every nationality. With the wealth he is amassing he intends to form a United States of South America and to make himself President.

Mercedes Staunton, his beautiful daughter, who falls in love with

Wilfrid Ellerton, a young man of whom Iso'o Staunton is greatly afraid because he holds it in his power to send the millionaire back as a convict to the Chincha Islands. So Staunton secures Ellerton on board the *Isola*, his magnificent yacht, and consigns him to the Underworld. It is then given out that the young man has fallen overboard and been drowned.

Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.—The right-hand friend and confidant of Staunton. He carries out the kidnapping of Ellerton.

M. Herarra.—The viceroy of Staunton in the Underworld.

Stanislaus Smith.—A detective, who is endeavouring to find the perpetrators of the colossal coin frauds. He lives a double life as Herr de Ronski, the famous musician, but only his wife and daughter, Paula, and Arthur Dennison, a Treasury solicitor, know of this.

Derrick Kesteven.—The partner of Staunton in all his great schemes. He has a beautiful daughter, named Cora.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.—Two engaged persons who have suspicions about the unscrupulousness of Staunton.

Janet Yuill.—A nurse who is taken on board the *Isola* to tend Mercedes, who falls ill when she hears of the alleged death of Ellerton. She there meets her husband, Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and her suspicions are aroused.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Mint Below the Sea.

"YES," continued Ellerton, getting up and stretching himself, "I certainly should prefer a stroll after dinner instead of sitting down. I don't seem to have had much exercise lately. In fact, I feel more as though I were just recovering from a pretty bad illness."

"Which is exactly the case, Señor," replied Herarra, lying with a certain amount of truth. "I can assure you that your recent illness has not only been serious but prolonged."

"I suppose so," said Ellerton, beginning to walk up and down the room as he lighted his cigar. "Though, of course, I don't recollect anything about it. What was it, by the way?"

"An injury to the brain, followed by fever," replied Herarra according to instructions, "and now, if you are ready, we will go."

"With pleasure," said Ellerton. "I have distant memories of being very fond of engineering and chemistry, and I suppose that down here you have to depend on science for most, at any rate, of your necessaries and luxuries, saving, of course, your champagne and cigars, and that very excellent coffee, which, I presume, is not grown in a world without a sun?"

"No, no, naturally not," laughed Herarra. "Those come from what I may call another world—one of which your happily recovered memory doubtless affords you some pleasant if distant recollections."

"My worthy host has either been drinking too much champagne, or he must think he has got me very tight," mused Ellerton.

The fact was that, in a sense, Herarra was beginning to feel that the despot who held his liberty, indeed his life, in his hands, had put him into a somewhat difficult position.

For one thing he never expected that his prisoner-guest would be a man who could speak English and Spanish so perfectly, and could thus converse with both the slaves and the officials of his domain. In his own line he was one of the most expert criminals in the world, but his intelligence was limited to his craft, and, with the usual suspicion of his kind, he did not like Ellerton's queries as to the source of light and heat in his new world—of which he was himself entirely ignorant.

At the same time, believing as he did, that he would never leave the Underworld alive, he had no hesitation in obeying his instructions to allow Ellerton to learn all he liked, and to make himself useful to his captors.

Could he have foreseen the possible result of doing this, slave and all as he practically was, he would have taken the law into his own hands, and Ellerton would not have lived many minutes after he opened the steel door leading into the central chamber.

He felt instinctively that he had to deal with a man of a much higher intelligence than himself and he was disagreeably puzzled. At the same time, until he received further orders from the Lord of this World of Criminals he was helpless, and those orders could not possibly reach him until the *Isola* returned to the anchorage and re-established communication with the outside world. If he could have read the idea which was already working in Ellerton's mind this narrative would never have been written.

"That contrivance is not only distinctly ingenious but it hasn't been invented and installed here without some very

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definite purpose. I wonder whatever these people are doing down here. Under the sea and yet in communication with the other world, obviously by means of the yacht. What does it mean? Well, I suppose I shall find it out some day, if I live."

Thus Wilfrid Ellerton thought to himself as he watched the opening and the closing of the door. When they got into the central chamber, Herarra said:

"Now, as you reminded me that you are interested in engineering matters we will pay our first visit to Señor Battley's domain."

As they reached the opening of the Gallery towards which Herarra led the way, one of the grey clad figures rose from the ground out of the shadows, raised his hands to his forehead, and cried:

"Hail, master!"

Herarra nodded, and at the same moment Ellerton heard a bell tinkle and saw a light sparkle from the roof of the gallery about a hundred feet away.

"It looks as though we were expected," he said as they walked towards the light.

"The unexpected, Señor," replied Herarra out of the depths of his unsuspecting ignorance, "does not happen here."

"What a very admirable organisation you must have," said Ellerton with a laugh. "What a pity it is I have forgotten all this. Still, I suppose I shall have plenty of time to re-learn it all."

"On that subject, Señor, I think you can set your mind at rest. I can assure you that you will have ample time."

"Yes, I thought so," said Ellerton to himself, "that means imprisonment for life if they can do it," and then he went on aloud:

"It will be most interesting, I am sure. Yes, good evening again, Mr. Battley," he continued in English, as they stopped under the lamp and the engineer came forward to meet his master.

Their eyes met for an instant and then Mr. Battley turned his head away and Herarra said rather sharply:

"We have come to have a look at the machinery. Mr. Ellerton is interested in that sort of thing."

"In everything, sir?" asked Mr. Battley, raising his eyes for a moment.

"Yes, everything, why not? Is he not a dweller amongst us?"

"It is as you wish, sir," said the engineer, wondering how he was going to get through the unexpectedly unpleasant experience. In one sense he was disconcerted and in another reassured by the fact that Ellerton continued to treat him as an absolute stranger.

Herarra led the way through a narrow tunnel, partly natural and partly hewn out of what certainly looked to Ellerton like the foundations of the world. This was about a hundred feet long, and when they were half way through, a light shone out from the farther end. As they passed under this Ellerton found himself in another tunnel much higher and broader than the one they had come through. He guessed it to be some fifty feet high, and seventy-five broad.

Herarra showed Ellerton some of the coins they manufactured in the Underworld.

To his left hand, standing on a platform of levelled rock he saw three little engines, each with double fly-wheels, revolving at a tremendous speed and making a sound something like the purring of a dynamo. So far as he could see there were no boilers or steam pipes and yet the engines were of the ordinary double cylinder type, and from each of the fly-wheels a driving band ran up to a shafting in the roof. From the shafting other bands ran down to twenty-four machines which looked to him like stamping or cutting machines. There were twelve of these on each side of the gallery and in front of each of them was a pile of ingots of white metal. At every machine there were two of the grey-clad silent figures which had already become unpleasantly familiar to him.

"You don't seem to use steam with your engines, Mr. Battley," he asked in a tone of half careless inquiry. "May I ask what your motive-power is?"

"Heat, sir," he replied, as though he were anxious to take refuge in a technical explanation. "You see we are fortunately situated here. We have that part of the work done for us and these engines which I had the honour of designing, merely translate the heat into energy and so we get the work done with very little trouble."

"And where do you get your heat from?"

"Oh, from the volcano, or rather from its tributaries, if I may call them so, of lava. I shall be happy to explain the whole process to you at any time it will suit you."

"Thanks," replied Ellerton, "I'll come round to-morrow, if you can give me an hour, but from what you say, I take it that they are really hot-air engines."

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"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Battley, "to a certain extent, but, to put it shortly, they are driven by superheated air under great pressure, so great indeed that, but for the amount of heat, the air would be almost liquid."

"I think I see," said Ellerton, remembering the stolen specifications, "but we can go into that to-morrow. I have got a sort of recollection of a plan of the kind, which, perhaps, I dreamt about."

As he said this he looked hard at Mr. Battley, who dropped his eyelids and turned away to look at one of the engines.

"And what might these machines be doing, Señor?" Ellerton continued in Spanish. "Like the rest, I have forgotten all about them."

"Let us go and see them, then," replied Herarra, moving towards the nearest of them, "I think you will very soon remember what they are."

It certainly did not take Ellerton very long to find out what they were, for a single glance at the first one of them told him that it was as perfect a minting machine as the wit of man had as yet devised.

The moment they had entered all the grey figures ceased work at the machines and stood to attention like so many school-boys, looking down at the rock-floor of the gallery.

Herarra looked round at them and exclaimed in a loud, harsh tone:

"Work, slaves!"

And instantly every motionless figure started into activity and the feeding of the machines was renewed.

Ellerton looked keenly at his host for a moment and said:

"I see that you employ slave labour, and," he continued, going behind one of the machines and looking at a pile of bright new silver coins, "you apparently find it, if you will excuse the play on the words, a money-making business. I never saw a better five-franc piece in my life. And these machines of yours seem to turn them out very quickly."

"Yes," laughed Herarra, "it is as you see," taking up a handful of the coins, "and as for speed, each machine can turn out its six thousand an hour, and as we mint only the larger values such as crowns, five-franc pieces, and dollars, we not only make money, but we make profits."

"And pretty large ones, too, I should think," said Ellerton, "provided always that you can spend the money, which you can hardly do here. Wherefore it stands to reason that these pretty things are made for export."

"Naturally," was the reply, "our goods find a most ready sale, I can assure you."

"No doubt. They are excellently made," said Ellerton shortly, as he walked on down the line of machines. "Ah, and I see you manufacture gold goods as well."

"Oh, yes, of all denominations. It is not quite as profitable perhaps as the silver manufacture, but as these for whom we work own their own mines, we have some knowledge of metallurgy, there is no fear of loss. And now," he went on, moving away into the middle of the chamber, "if you will follow me, I will show you another process of what you rightly called our money-making."

Ellerton followed him, thinking pretty hard all the time, into the central gallery, and down through another arched tunnel on the other side, which opened out into a large chamber somewhat similarly fitted with engines and machines, but the latter differed considerably from those they had just left. The slaves stood to attention as before, and were curtly ordered to go on with their work. The visitor glanced at the machines, and said:

"Ah, this is a much more profitable department even than the other, I presume. Here you must make millions—and most excellent forgeries they are, I must admit," he went on slowly, picking up a dozen or so of bank-notes of various nationalities and denominations.

"Pardon, Señor," Herarra corrected, "these are not forgeries, they are genuine in every sense; they are printed on genuine paper from blocks identical with those used in other manufacturies. There is no difference save in the authority by which they are made. When you have once got that far it is a simple process. Here is a piece of paper worth nothing. There is a block worth a few shillings. Bring the two into proper connection, and you have a thousand francs or a hundred pounds."

"Admirably simple!" laughed Ellerton briefly, for he was thinking harder than ever. "And now, what about the light and heat problem?" he continued, after a short pause. "All this is, of course, very wonderful and interesting, but I think that question would interest me even more. Will there be time to have a look into that question to-night, if one may use such a term here?"

"I fear not, Señor," replied Herarra, looking at his watch, "you see it is getting near what we call sleeping-time, and the works will be stopped in a few minutes. After breakfast, of course, if you wish."

"That will do just as well," replied Ellerton, who was beginning to feel a little sleepy and was, moreover, looking forward to the dreams in which he might perchance escape from this prison-land and rejoin his beloved Mercedes, wherever she might be now.

"But, look here, Señor," he continued. "I am quite well now and I don't want any attendants—I mean, of the sort you gave me when I was ill. Of course, if you can give me a decent servant, say one of these poor wretches that you call slaves, to look after me, well and good."

"Your wish shall be obeyed," was the reply. "There are several of them trained to personal service, and you can take your choice."

Half an hour later Ellerton was in bed in his gorgeous chamber, thinking hard of all he had seen and heard during the day until the thoughts got confused and melted away into oblivion, and ere long he found himself with Mercedes on the deck of the *Isola*, which, by some magic, changed into a submarine and started out on a trip to discover the entrance to the Land beneath the Sea.

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Clue upon Clue.

Precisely at a quarter to two Dennison and Captain Iddison announced themselves at the Grand Hotel, Cimiez. M. de Ronski was waiting for them in the vestibule. He came forward and took Dennison by both hands in his admirably simulated foreign manner, saying in equally admirable foreign English:

"Welcome, my dear Monsieur Dennison, welcome. And this is your friend, the gallant Captain of whom you told me, Sir," he continued, turning to Iddison, "I am charmed to meet you. Please follow me. We shall find the ladies upstairs."

Iddison shook hands, and they went upstairs, Dennison saying to himself:

"Excellently done, my dear Mr. Smith. No wonder no one has ever penetrated that disguise of yours. Won't Iddison open his eyes when he's introduced to your other self!"

It would hardly have conduced to Lady Maud's temporary peace of mind could she have read the exact thoughts which passed through her engineer's soul during his introduction to Madame de Ronski and Paula. Not that his allegiance was shaken in the least, but no woman is quite so perfect as not to feel a trifle uncomfortable when she finds her lover in the company of a more beautiful woman than herself, though wild horses would not drag the admission out of him; and that is why Iddison's thoughts would not just

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Captain Iddison was astounded when he was informed of the identity between Herr de Ronski and Stanislaus Smith.

then have been pleasant ones for his best beloved. As a matter of fact Madame de Ronski and Paula were by far the two most lovely women he had ever seen in his life, and, to himself, he frankly confessed that they were.

During lunch, de Ronski remained de Ronski, and the conversation ran on the general topics of the place and hour, from the last scandal of the Casino to the possibilities of war in the Near East. But when the cloth was removed and the waiter had brought the coffee and cigars and disappeared, Madame gave permission for cigarettes by lighting one herself, and de Ronski went out and locked the door of the outer room. When he came back he said to Dennison, in a voice totally unfamiliar to his friend:

"And now, my dear Dennison, as we are all quite assured that you would not have suggested that you should introduce Captain Iddison to me as well as to my friend de Ronski without some very good reason, and as we are quite alone now, the other introduction may as well take place at once."

"I beg your pardon, but what the—— I'm awfully sorry, but what in the name of impossibility does this mean?" exclaimed the soldier, getting up and staring blankly from his host to Dennison, "I was under the impression——"

"And a perfectly correct impression too, my dear fellow," laughed Dennison, hugely enjoying the bewildered expression of his friend's face. "This is Stanislas de Ronski, the musician of more than European fame. But he happens to be one of those fortunate men who possess two identities, and have come by both of them honestly. Allow me to present to you Mr. Stanislaus Smith, our London Chief of the International Police."

What Iddison would have said had there been no ladies present may be guessed at. What he did say, when he had sufficiently recovered himself, was:

"It's no use saying that I'm astounded, because the word doesn't half express it, and so you must take my feelings for granted. Mr. Smith I know, and M. de Ronski I know, but to find them both in the same person is almost beyond the limits of human credulity."

"Nevertheless, you see, it is true," smiled his host, passing his hand through his wig. "Were I to remove my professional adornment you would have no doubt of it."

"Oh, I have none, I can assure you," answered Iddison, still laughing, "I'm quite ready to take your word for it." And now he went on more seriously, "I suppose you will allow me to ask why a very humble person like myself should be permitted to learn a secret which cannot be known to many people in the world?"

"It is known only to those who are in this room," said Madame de Ronski, handing him a cup of coffee, and I don't suppose it will ever be known to any more."

"Not through me, of course," said the engineer stiffening up as he took the cup.

"That would be impossible," said Mr. Smith, quickly. "And now that we understand each other let us get to business," he went on, sitting down. "My friend Dennison tells me that you were one of the guests on board Mr. Staunton's yacht when that unfortunate affair about poor young Ellerton happened. To save time, Captain, I am going to ask you, point-blank, whether you have any reasons for suspecting that that was not altogether an accident?"

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The directness and the utter unexpectedness of the question, as he would have said, stumped the soldier for a moment. Then he replied quite quietly:

"I know that you would not ask me that without very good reason, and so I will tell you candidly that I find it very difficult to believe that it was an accident. In fact it seemed to me, as well as to—well, Lady Maud Hyam, whom I am going to marry shortly, that it could not possibly have been one."

"Then if your suspicions are correct," said Mr. Smith slowly, "it must have been murder, and people don't commit murder without motives."

"That's exactly what bowls us out completely," replied Iddison, "but at the same time there is another very funny thing to be accounted for, if it can be. When Miss Staunton, who, as perhaps Dennison has told you, fell suddenly in love with poor Ellerton, and apparently as deeply as he did with her, became so seriously ill, why did her father leave her, and why did the yacht go to Iceland when she was evidently bound for the Riviera? That's what I'd like to know."

"And that is what a good many others would be very glad to know," said Mr. Smith. "Now, may I ask, Captain Iddison, if you could tell me anything more about the circumstances of what we may call Mr. Ellerton's disappearance?"

"Nothing of any importance, I am afraid," he replied, "except perhaps one thing that struck me, which so far I haven't mentioned to anybody, not even to Lady Maud, because I didn't want to upset her. I was awake when the accident happened and my porthole was open. I heard the cry of 'Man overboard!' and I saw through my porthole one of the boats splash down.

"Of course I jumped into my deck shoes and started for the deck. I found the saloon entrance locked. I tried at the smoking-room, but that was locked also, and that had never been done before during the trip. I must confess that to me it looked rather as though they intended the accident to be strictly private."

"Very likely," said Dennison, "if it was not an accident they would naturally not have wanted anyone like yourself to jump over after him."

"That certainly is a point, or rather a link in the chain, if a small one," said Mr. Smith, musingly, "and it may possibly have something to do with the main problem which we have in hand, a problem of which I am almost beginning to think even Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is only a part."

"You mean, of course, the great Silver Problem, papa," said Paula, leaning her elbows on the table and looking not without a certain maidenly admiration at Iddison's bronzed, clear-cut features and splendid length of limb. "Of course you have heard about that, Captain?"

"What," he exclaimed, looking round, "this mysterious flooding of the markets with money and notes which the Mints can't account for? Naturally I have heard of that, but surely, Miss de Ronski, you don't mean to suggest that Mr. Staunton, the great millionaire and financier, a man who, I am told, is a friend of statesmen and princes, could have anything to do with a swindle like that?"

"There is no telling nowadays, you know, how people get rich. I mean so very, very rich," she replied gently. "I don't make any charge against him, but, as papa will tell you, there are other things. For instance, why did the *Isola* go to Iceland to get here, and how did she manage to go to Iceland and get back here in about the same time that it would have taken her to come from Scotland, and, lastly, why did Mr. Staunton tell Lady Medcalf-Mears that they had come from Leith and say nothing at all about Iceland?

"Now," she continued, smiling, "I think it's a little bit suspicious."

"Certainly it is," replied Iddison, "especially as if he really did go to Iceland in an honest fashion, the yacht's papers should show it."

"That is also a point," said Mr. Smith, "and one which I shall clear up now. My friends at the Customs tell me that, according to her papers, she came straight from the port of Leith."

"Then in that case," said Dennison, "granted always that Miss Yuill was not mistaken, and I don't see how she could be, that trip to Iceland was a strictly private one. Now I wonder whether that has anything to do with Ellerton's disappearance, or the other thing."

"I think we are gradually getting out of the fog," said Mr. Smith, staring hard up at the ceiling. We have certainly got far enough to permit ourselves to look upon Mr. Staunton and his millions with a certain amount of suspicion. And then there is another point. This yacht is registered as of twenty-one knots speed, and such a journey would be absolutely impossible unless she possessed a speed which not even the fastest destroyers could equal. Why is the fact of that speed concealed when I will say an honest owner of such a wonderful craft would be only too proud not only to admit it, but to prove it against all the ocean raters of the world?"

"Yes," said Dennison, "that is undoubtedly so. If an American millionaire had a thirty-five or forty knotter, as she must be, he'd put the American Eagle on her bows and go screaming over the Seven Seas. Yes, as you say, we're getting nearer. Go ahead, my friend."

"Then," continued their host, taking a thousand franc bank-note and a photograph of Pedro Ramiero out of his breast pocket, "we have these," and he proceeded to explain their inner meaning to Iddison.

"Oh, that's the man I met in the box last night," said Iddison, "right enough. A little younger and not so prosperous looking, but still, if I know anything about faces, that's either Don Ramiero Valdez or his twin brother. Another link, I suppose, or a mesh in the web that you appear to be weaving."

"And which I now believe we shall weave," said Mr. Smith decisively. "We have far to go yet, but, as I said, we are getting on. I am very glad to have your independent opinion of the photograph. Now this note," he went on, "had on it, or rather in it, a mark which can only be detected by those who know where to find it by the microscope. I may explain that as the counterfeit notes are so perfect that if you put one beside a genuine note of the same number an expert could not tell the difference. All genuine notes are now marked in this way by a high official after they have been delivered by the printers, so that even if the original block were stolen we could tell the notes printed from it to be forgeries. Now this note," he went on, taking one out of his pocket-book, "is a forgery, and it came from the *Isola*, and was cashed by the original of this photograph."

"Great Scott, you don't say so," exclaimed Iddison, for the moment half forgetting his perfect manners. "I should think that, as the children say, you are getting warm."

"I hope so," said Mr. Smith, "but warm is not hot, you know, and therefore it may be some time before we strike the iron. And now, Captain Iddison," he went on, looking steadily at him, "have you any objection to assist the course of justice by helping to lay the man whom I believe to be the greatest criminal of modern times by the heels?"

"You mean Staunton, I suppose?"

The detective nodded.

"It would be excellent sport," continued Iddison thoughtfully, "but, you see, it's hardly playing the game to accept a man's hospitality and help to run him in, is it? Besides, I should hardly like to take Lady Maud on to his pirate yacht, or whatever it is, under the circumstances. Of course you are not absolutely certain. Lots of good men have been suspected. Still I don't think I can help you in any detective way."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Smith, interrupting him, "by no means. That is the last thing I should ask you to do. I must have expressed myself clumsily. I should have asked you whether you were willing to tell our mutual friend Dennison anything that you may notice in connection with Mr. Staunton or the yacht during your visits."

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"Oh, of course I could do that," said Iddison, "even if I had not come here to-day, and I'll tell you what else I'll do. I believe Miss Yuill knows a little more than she told me. I don't mind having another talk with her, and, if you like, giving her a hint that there are distinct suspicions that everything is not right about the *Isola*. I'm quite certain that she has suspicions herself. If you like, too, I shall be most happy to bring you into personal communication with her."

"That is not at all a bad idea, Captain," said Mr. Smith, "but it will have to be done carefully, and I must see her in my other capacity. Yes, it is the thing to do, and I will do it."

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

A Council of War.

On the morning of the same day, a little after eleven, Isolo Staunton was sitting at the head of the table in the Council Chamber, with Kesteven on his right and Don Ramiero on his left.

Five other gentlemen, all of unmistakably Spanish or Spanish-American appearance, dark or black-haired, bright-eyed, and bearded or moustachioed, were also seated round the table, each with a small dispatch-box and writing materials before him. The end of the table at which Staunton sat was covered with papers, mostly tied in bundles with green tape.

He looked not unlike a Chancellor or a Prime Minister holding a Cabinet meeting, and, as a matter of fact, the simile was not very far wrong, for these gentlemen, who were not incorrectly supposed to be his financial associates, were also a good deal more—they were literally the Ministers of a Government of which he was the head, a Government which it had been the ambition of his life to establish over one of the vastest divisions of the world, which only needed a strong united rule to make it also one of the richest and most powerful.

The true nature and object of the meeting may be best gathered from what follows here:

When an hour or so had been occupied in receiving and considering the reports of the "Ministers," who were in reality delegates from the Governments of Peru, Chili, the Argentine, Brazil and Colombo, representing further all the minor South American States, Staunton, or "the President," as he was wont to be called, took up a folded newspaper which was lying before him, and after a few words in English with Kesteven, began in Spanish:

"Señores, I think I may take to myself the pleasure of saying that all the reports are as satisfactory to myself and my colleague as they are, I trust, to your Governments and yourselves. The good work, the work to which we have devoted ourselves, some of us at very considerable risk, is progressing excellently, and so well, indeed, that the day is not now far distant when the signal may be given for the Latin nations of the West to rise as one united world power and take, by force if necessary, their proper place among the nations of the earth."

A murmur of applause ran round the table, and dark, fierce eyes gleamed meaningly at each other and at the speaker. He smiled and went on:

"We have done much. We have united warring interests which for so long have retarded the development of the countries we love; we have made friends of those who, unhappily, once were enemies, and, perhaps best of all, we have, as I firmly believe, stamped out the bane of Revolution.

"By common consent now, the man who raises the standard of revolt in any South American State henceforth will be treated as a common enemy by all the other States and crushed. Our plans for internal development are practically complete, even to the provision for the construction of the Panama Canal by South American capital and under

NO DINNER IS COMPLETE

Relish for food and power to digest it are essential to sound health, for only by the digestion and assimilation of food, can the wear and tear of bodily tissue be replenished and life sustained. When digestion fails, as in dyspepsia or indigestion, both body and brain are starved and the patient becomes languid and weak, incapable of active, vigorous effort, or clear sustained thought.

WITHOUT THE DIGESTIVE TONIC

Headaches, loss of appetite, pains after eating, fulness at the chest, palpitation, anæmia and sleeplessness are but a few of the many disorders which have their origin in imperfect digestion and nutrition. Thirty drops of Mother Seigel's Syrup, taken daily after meals, *makes food nourish you.* Compounded of fruits, roots and herbs, it is a digestive tonic of unequalled value, producing none of the evil after effects so commonly caused by so-called "pick-me-ups" and alcoholic stimulants.

SEIGEL'S SYRUP

Mrs. Mary Rogers, Fay Gate, Horsham, Sussex, writing on May 2nd, 1903, says: "I have pleasure in telling you of the benefit I derived from your Seigel's Syrup, when I was suffering from indigestion. My illness began with loss of appetite, and a general low and depressed feeling. I could not eat, and my strength failed rapidly.

THE WORLD'S ANTIDOTE

"I suffered much from headaches, dizziness and nervousness, and though I consulted doctors and took quantities of medicine, I got no better until, on the recommendation of a friend, I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup. After taking a few doses I felt myself getting better. My appetite returned, I was again able to sleep soundly, and soon lost the drowsiness, headaches and dizziness and was as well as ever. I think Seigel's Syrup is a splendid medicine, and shall always recommend it."

For INDIGESTION.

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the flag of the United States of South America. I need hardly remind any gentleman present that the absolute command of the waterway from the Atlantic to the Pacific will not be the least of the sources of our strength."

Here there was a louder murmur of approbation, in which Kesteven did not join. He looked down at the papers before him, and his lips moved slightly under his moustache.

"But, Señores," Staunton continued in a graver tone, "in spite of all this progress, all this triumph, I had almost said, it is my duty to tell you that there is still need, urgent need, for the greatest caution and discretion. Remember that the nearer we get to victory the more perilous our path becomes. In the issue of the *Times* which arrived from London this morning there is a leading article which demands our most careful, indeed, anxious consideration.

"I need hardly tell you of what importance this article is to us. Our good friend Señor Valdez will translate the whole of it for your use during the day; just now I will only ask you to listen to a few extracts which it may be necessary to discuss at once."

He took up the paper and began to read aloud in Spanish some passages marked in blue pencil.

"'There are two points of great significance which cannot fail to have struck the careful observer of South American affairs.

"'One, and that the most important, as well as the most mysterious, is the fact that all the South American Republics, even the most insignificant, have been arming both by land and sea to an extent totally disproportionate to their ordinary needs. The second is that, during that period, not only have inter-state jealousies and difficulties disappeared, but, more wonderful still, by some magic or other the demon of Revolution has apparently been laid.

"'It is practically impossible that these results can have been achieved without some powerful influence working from outside, nor is it credible that, in their present financial state, the Republics can have borne the vastly increased expenditure unaided. And yet there has been no attempt to raise new loans, nor, so far as we know, has there been any increase in taxation. On the contrary, if anything, the taxes are lower now than they were two years ago.

"'So far as we can discover, cash has been paid for everything in the way of armaments, and, if that is so, cash must have been pouring into the Republics from somewhere. The question is where?

"'Who is the magician who has worked these miracles?'

"That, Señores," continued Staunton, "will be enough, I think, for the present. In my opinion this article shows that although we are still unknown, and, therefore, unsuspected, our work is beginning to attract the suspicious attention of the world. That, perhaps, was only to be expected, and I think my agents have taken sufficient care that, for some time at least, there shall be no inconvenient diplomatic interference with our plans. At the same time I should like to have your opinions on the subject."

"Let us settle the matter by striking at once," cried a revolutionist from Colombo.

"It would, I think, be better to wait a little until our political affairs are fully settled. We must be certain of everybody before we declare ourselves," objected Isidore Pinheiro, a short, shaggy-browed, Portuguese Jew from Brazil. "We might spoil everything by haste."

The Argentine envoy agreed with him, and, as both Staunton and Kesteven, the latter for reasons which he would not have cared to explain to the meeting, were also in favour of continuing their present policy for the present, the more ardent spirits were obliged to yield on receiving a promise from the "Señor President" that operations should be hastened as much as safety permitted.

As Don Ramiero stood aside for his master to pass out, Kesteven said in a low tone to Staunton:

"Say, partner, ask the Señor to go out and look after our guests for a bit while they get their cocktails. I want a word with you."

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Staunton, not too good-humouredly, as the doors closed.

"I've been thinking," replied Kesteven slowly, "that it's about time I asked you to let me out of this business. The fact is I've had enough."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that. May I ask what you have to complain of?"

Staunton spoke coldly, and with a note of something like hostility in his tone, for, truth to tell, the partners in the greatest swindle that had ever been worked off on civilised society, had not been the best of friends since they had almost quarrelled over the disappearance of Wilfrid Ellerton.

"I'm complaining of nothing," replied Kesteven just as coldly. "I'm just going to ask you to remember that when we became partners again it was on the understanding that, when the business was fixed up, either could go out when he wanted to."

"From my point of view the work is anything but finished. On the contrary, it is only just beginning. You know Spanish enough to have understood all that was said just now."

"And just because I did understand it I'm going out," said Kesteven, looking him full in the eyes. "I've told you before that I don't take any stock of this political business, and I won't have any. I've helped you so far, as I said I would, but you're going too far for my taste. If you want reasons you can have them. In the first place, even you, strong man as you are, will no more get these greasers to hang together than you'd get a hundred assorted snakes to dwell together in unity. It isn't in their evil nature to do it."

"I think that is my business, and it is certainly my belief," retorted Staunton angrily, for this was a tender subject with him. "And your other reasons?"

"Are a bit stronger than that. In the first place I've got Cora to think about, and she's dead against the scheme.

"She knows that I've made a pretty respectable pile, and she has the natural inclinations of the properly-raised American girl towards coronets. There are two or three in England and over here that she may have for the taking, and coronets don't go with South American politics—not much. But what I go on most is this, my friend, and you may as well take a note of it. Suppose you do get this proposition of yours through, you can bet your life there's going to be a heap of trouble over it, and the other United States are going to take a hand in that. Well, I'm an American."

As Staunton was about to reply the telephone-bell rang. He took up the transmitter, hung it up again, and said:

"Lunch will be served in a few minutes. We shall have to postpone this discussion."

"There's no discussion on my part," replied the other shortly. "I'm done. Of course I shall keep faith as tight as if I was with you, but you must consider me out of the business. It's getting too sultry for my health."

"Then, of course, you'll draw the reduced dividend under the circumstances," asked Staunton, not very pleasantly.

"Not a cent, partner. You can have the lot. I'm getting tired of that, too, and my pile's quite big enough to make it bigger by what they humorously call legitimate means."

"Eh?" asked Staunton, a trifle anxiously, "you've not heard anything in the way of suspicions, have you, Kesteven?"

"Nothing definite, but I had advice from London this morning that this Mr. Dennison is one of the smartest men in the British Prosecutions Department, and also that Mr. Stanislaus Smith, who I needn't tell you is known to our detectives as about the smartest man in the International, has made another of his mysterious disappearances.

"We also know that they work together a lot, and maybe he isn't down here altogether for a holiday. Well, I guess we oughtn't to keep the Señors waiting too long."

Staunton's face wore a very troubled look as he passed out.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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A Life Sentence.

"Would you call stealing a kiss, larceny?" queried the inexperienced young man. "I suppose so," replied the married man, who was working from dawn to dusk to support his family. "What is the penalty?" "Why, I stole a kiss once, and was sentenced to hard labour for life."

Market Prices were Low.

Mrs. Joy: "If I do say it, my husband is worth millions of money to me." Mrs. Blunt: "How lucky of you to snap him up when he was going cheap!"

The Same Thing.

Ethel: "Did you hear of the engagement of Jack and Penelope?" Harold: "Dear me! Then Jack has finally succeeded?" Ethel: "No; succumbed."

Why She Enjoyed it.

Laura: "Alice Flitter is such a restful friend." Charles: "Restful? She talks all the time." "That's it; I never have to think about what to say when I'm with her."

She was an Unkind Miss.

Mr. Softly: "I feel—aw—vewy strongly tempted to blow out my bwains." Miss Cutting: "What a pity nature has put such a tragedy out of the bounds of possibility!"

Won her Consent.

"I am amazed, sir, that you should propose to my daughter. You have not known her a week." "True, madam, but I have known you for some time and everybody says your daughter takes after you."

Prepared for Emergencies.

He: "If you loved me, why did you at first refuse me?" She: "I wanted to see what you would do." He: "But I might have rushed off without waiting for an explanation." She: "I had the door locked."

It Did not Reassure Him.

Mr. Softleigh: "Tommy, do you really think your sister likes to see me better than she does Mr. Brown?" Tommy: "I'm sure of it, for evenings when he's in the parlour she turns the light down so low she can't see him at all."

Satisfactory Evidence.

Father: "Now, if you want a good husband, marry Mr. Goodheart. He really and truly loves you." Daughter: "Are you sure of that, father?" Father: "Yes, indeed. I've been borrowing money from him for six months, and still he keeps coming."

They Slated him Dreadfully.

"Why, Clara, dear, what has happened? It is not a month since your marriage, and I find you in tears already!" "Ah, Hilda, darling! George is standing as member for the county, you know, and I've only just learnt from the opposition papers what a really dreadful man I have married!"

She Wanted Them Squeaky.

Blanche: "I want a pair of slippers for father—number tens, please, and—squeaky." Genial Shoemaker: "Squeaky, miss? I'm afraid we haven't any of that kind." Blanche: "I am so sorry. Couldn't you make him a squeaky pair? There is a certain young gentleman who visits me frequently, and it would be very convenient for him to know just when pa is coming downstairs."

That Silenced Him.

He: "Yes, I only need to talk with a lady fifteen minutes and I know just what she thinks of me." She: "But you must find it very unpleasant."

She Made a Bad Bargain then.

The Husband (during the quarrel): "You're always making bargains. Was there ever a time when you didn't?" The Wife: "Yes, sir; on my wedding-day."

The Reason.

He (mournfully): "I would I were a cloud." She: "What on earth for?" He: "Because they say that 'every cloud has a silver lining,' but my pockets are quite empty."

So What was the Good?

Mother: "I'm surprised at you! Couldn't you tell he was going to kiss you?" Daughter: "Yes, ma, but there was no one for me to tell, except him, and he know it already."

Artful, Very.

"You want a keepsake that will always remind you of me?" she said. "I do, darling," he said tenderly. "What's the matter with myself?" she whispered. There will be a wedding shortly.

Better than He Expected.

Beryl: "Yes, when Jack married her he thought she was an angel, but it wasn't long before he found out his mistake." Sibyl: "Disappointed?" Beryl: "I should say not. He found she was a good cook."

The Worm Turned.

"John," she said, "there's nothing I enjoy more than reading the last words of great men. I wonder what your last words will be?" "Maria," he replied, "the last word is something I never expect to have." However, he got it that time.

They Wouldn't be Ladylike.

Young Mr. Spoonamore (who has just been accepted): "But what will your father say, darling? You know he doesn't like me any too well." The Young Woman: "Well, you can't expect me to use the exact language in which papa will express himself when he hears of it."

He was Not at all Poetic.

"Do you often wonder, George," she said softly, as they stood at the gate, "at the infinite number of stars, where that vast, silent, eternal procession is going, and whence it came?" "Ye-es," replied George, rather hesitatingly; "but don't you find that to look at the sky for any length of time makes the back of your neck ache?"

No Excuse for That.

She: "Have you been to see the menagerie yet?" He: "No; I intended going last evening, but was stopped by one of the animals." She: "How was that? Did one of the lions break loose?" He: "Oh, no; nothing so exciting. I was prevented from going by the reindeer. Er—you see, it was a wet night."

What He Intended.

"Young man," said a stern parent, "do you intend to stay here all night holding my daughter's hand and looking into her eyes like a sick calf?" "No, sir." "What do you intend to do, then?" "Well, I thought that when you did us the kindness to retire I would put my arm round her waist, and if she did not object too forcibly I might risk a kiss."

Affinity.

"Yes," sighed the fair young thing. "I admit that I like you—but it does not seem to me that we were ever meant for each other. We have not a single taste in common." Mournfully the young man studied the floor for some moments. At last he looked up with the dawn of hope in his eyes. "But, yes," he whispered. "Are you not very fond of onions?" Blushingly she nodded a confession. "So am I!" he cried rapturously.

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Early Morning Catarrh

In an editorial on Catarrh in the last number of the *Review of Nose and Throat Diseases*, there is mentioned the tendency of catarrhal diseases to become especially troublesome in the morning. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact that during the night when the body is recumbent, the catarrhal accumulations pass backward from the nasal cavities into the throat. In the morning, on waking, these accumulations cause hacking, coughing, or scraping to free the throat from the phlegm. Nearly all those who suffer from nasal complaints have this symptom, and in some cases it becomes so prominent as to be called "Early morning catarrh." This number of the *Review* also contains a "Supplement" giving the details of a large number of cases of catarrh cured by a new method, which has been successful where operative procedures and cauterisations have failed. There is, likewise, a Report Form, by means of which patients suffering with deafness, or ear, nose, or throat ailments can obtain free advice by post. Those who are interested can secure a copy of the *Review* (with supplement and report form), free by post by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Weary One.

"W. E. R." is afraid his sweetheart of three years' standing has grown tired of him. She does not seem as pleased to see him as she used, nor does she take as much interest in his doings. Besides, her letters have grown cold and uninteresting. What should he do?"

* * * * * *

If you feel there has been a falling off in her affection for you, you should candidly ask her if she still wishes to keep to your engagement. Possibly she has really grown tired of you. You seem to describe the usual symptoms of weariness. Offer to release her, if she wishes, and make that the test of her feelings towards you.

Are Handsome Men Humbugs?

"QUEENIE" is receiving attentions from a very handsome young man, who is greatly admired by other girls, and does not seem to mind the admiration. What "QUEENIE" wants to know is, "are men of that kind usually sincere, and should she allow matters to go any further?"

* * * * * *

I don't see why a handsome man should be any less sincere than anybody else. The fact that, with so many would-be admirers, he has selected yourself, seems to show that his sincerity is unusually genuine. As to the attentions of other girls, that is his misfortune, poor fellow. Make every allowance for it. That he "does not seem to mind it," may be just his good nature, and does not mean insincerity.

London for Honeymooners.

"I AM a country girl, and shall be married to a neighbouring farmer next month," writes "MAGGIE." "We very much want to spend our honeymoon in London. Do you think this advisable at this time of year?"

* * * * * *

I think London a very nice place for a young married couple at any time of year, provided they do not foolishly overdo their programme of amusements. Do not wear yourself out by too much sight-seeing or theatre-going. A young married couple of my acquaintance spent a week in London lately, for their honeymoon, and found that they enjoyed themselves as much by riding on 'buses, and walking about the quaint old streets, looking at shops and dropping into funny little restaurants and tea-shops, as they would have done had they visited all the show places. I dare say you would find it the same. As to expense, if your means allow, there are plenty of quiet hotels in the Strand district, where you would be comfortable at very moderate cost, and would save the railway fares and fatigue of a stay in the suburbs.

Breaking it to the Other Girl.

"H. J." is engaged. He has announced the affair privately to one or two friends. There is another, however, who should know of it—a girl to whom he has been recently paying attentions—and "H. J." is perplexed to know how to acquaint her with the fact that all must now cease between them. He did not really love this girl, but found her society very agreeable, and corresponded with her. He thinks, however, that she is fond of him, and would be hurt at the news of his engagement.

* * * * * *

"H. J." will gain nothing by deceptive methods. Evidently he has not behaved very openly with the girl in question, or he would have given her clearly to understand that his feelings for her were merely those of friendship. I advise him to write to her and tell her the whole truth. Her disappointment may be great, but she would be very hurt indeed if she thought he was ashamed to tell her the truth.

Trouble Over a Trousseau.

"I HAVE a very economical parent," writes "MILLIE." "He disbelieves in wedding expenses, and has even refused to pay for my trousseau. I am to be married next Spring, but my father gets angry every time I mention the subject, and meanwhile I am in a horrid position about the whole matter."

* * * * * *

Probably your father wants educating, so don't get impatient. Wait until after Christmas, before you press him on the matter. I take it you have no mother, but surely you have an aunt, or a cousin, or a married sister, who would not mind taking your case in hand. If your father actually refuses, after this pressure, to grant you the necessary allowance, then tell your lover the plain, straightforward truth, and if he is really fond of you, he will not be particular about the trousseau. After all, there is a good deal of sham about the preparations many people make for weddings. A marriage without a trousseau would be a bit of a novelty, and no doubt later on in life, you and your husband will have a good laugh over the silly affair.

The Suicidal Sweetheart.

THE young man who makes love to "ETHEL" is very morbid and depressing. She likes him fairly well, but doubts if she really loves him. He, however, professes passionate attachment for her. When she talks of other people, or on general subjects, he persists in telling her he does not believe in her love. He also is always threatening to make away with himself. What is the best thing for "ETHEL" to do?

* * * * * *

If you do not love him, "ETHEL," do not deceive him about it, no matter how much you fear hurting his feelings. The morbid young man, who always threatens to make away with himself on small pretexts, is probably not serious. A good many people talk like that, but very rarely carry out their threats. I knew a young man who was notorious for this kind of thing. He had paid attentions to some dozens of girls in his time, and with every one of them he had talked in this gloomy fashion. He is still living, and is, I believe, treating yet another sweetheart to the same dismal programme. Very little is gained by encouraging such men. Straightforward talk is the best tonic.

Cynthia

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ON BEING SHY.

Jerome says, "A shy man's lot is not a happy one. The men dislike him, the women despise him, and he dislikes and despises himself." So "being shy" must be a sore evil under the sun. To be rich, or great, or good, or ambitious, on healthy lines is commendable, but to be shy seems to bring down on yourself universal contempt and pity, and the worst of it is you feel you don't deserve it. Of course Jerome refers to *men*, for you seldom meet a shy girl. Girls are merrie, and coy, and blushing, and nice (some of them exceptionally nice), but shy girls are as scarce as bank notes. One writer advertises a cure for shyness in men. He says, "Adopt an easy and pleasing manner, especially towards ladies." Easier said than done. Very seldom *married* men are shy. It would do some of them a lot of good if they were. But can you imagine a man or a woman either being too shy to go and purchase a box of Page Woodcock's Wind Pills, the finest remedy for the cure of Indigestion, Wind on the Stomach, Liver Complaints, Sick Headache, Costiveness, Nervous Debility, Palpitation of the Heart, Biliousness? No, I really can't.

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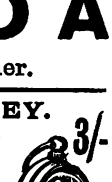

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19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in sadd er-made case; approval.

21/- Fine Old Violin, by Pietro Antorious; magnificent rich solo tone; in perfect condition, with fully mounted bow and case; approval.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 sating stops, including Tremolo and Diapa on action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Locket with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

Any of the above articles sent on approval willingly.

R. H. DAVIS, Pawnbroker and Jeweller, 284 Brixton Road, London, S.W.

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(No. 516)

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Of all Bookstalls and Newsagents.

PRICE ONE PENNY

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For 1s. Mr. WILDE will send a Reading of the Stars W. T. STEAD, Esq., and many other prominent gentlemen have testified to the accuracy of their forecasts. Send the exact or approximate hour of your birth, if possible, date, year, &c., together with P.O. 1s. and stamp. Satisfaction will be guaranteed.

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MOTHER, SON AND DAUGHTER

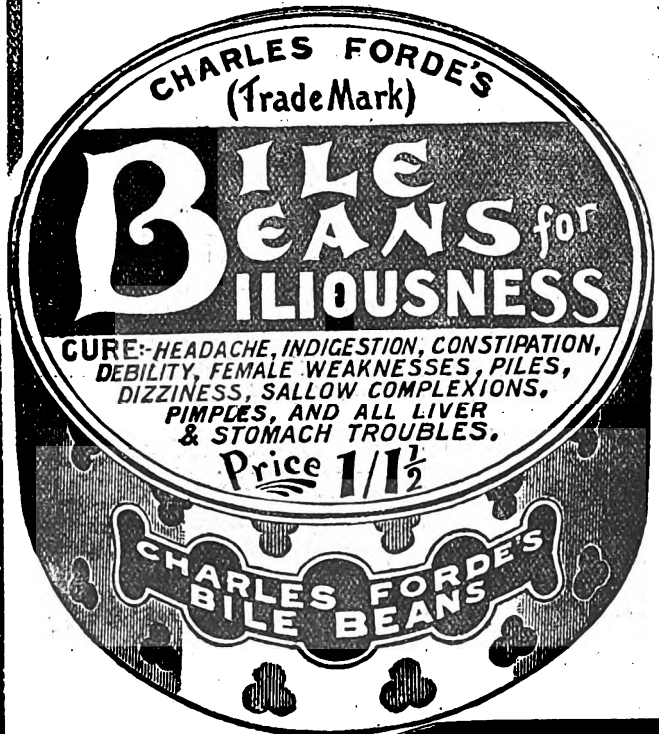
CURED OF INDIGESTION, DEBILITY, AND DIZZINESS.

"FOR a long time I suffered so from Indigestion, Weakness, and Debility that it was with difficulty I moved about," said Mrs. Turner, of Moorgate, Retford, in the course of an interview with a *Retford and Gainsboro' Times'* reporter. "I had a constant feeling of heaviness at the stomach, and, do what I would, I could not get rid of it. My breathing was laboured and caused great pain. Many a time, when outside, I had actually to stand still in order to get my breath, so bad had I become. One day a neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans to see if they would do me any good. I thought they did. I purchased some and from the time I began to take them I have gradually improved, until now I am quite well again." Mrs. Turner's daughter who had also suffered from nervous debility said:

"My strength left me, I became depressed, and lost all interest in everything. So dreadfully low did I get that I could hardly move about, and I felt as if I should like to go to bed and not get up again. My mother said it was dreadful to see me so ill, and gave me some of the Bile Beans, so I determined to give them a fair trial. Although only a short time has elapsed since I began to take them, my weakness and depression are gone, and my strength has returned. Bile Beans are certainly a wonderful medicine."

"A neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans."

Before the reporter left, Mrs. Turner said: "A short time ago my son could not go about his work in consequence of sick headache and dizziness. I gave him some of the Beans, and gradually his ailments ceased to trouble him. The Beans have done him worlds of good, and he is not slow to tell it. I myself am now well and strong, and can go about my work with gladness, and am the healthy, happy mother of a healthy family, thanks entirely to the marvellous efficacy of Bile Beans.



Bile Beans do not merely purge, giving temporary relief only, like the old-fashioned so-called remedies of forty or fifty years ago. They act directly on the liver and digestive organs, strengthening and stimulating those organs to perform their natural duties. They produce a gentle action on the bowels, curing or preventing constipation, cleansing the stomach, and ridding the system of all impurities. Do not be misled by claims of half a hundred pills in the box, where probably four to six constitute a dose, and the doses cannot be discontinued. ONE BILE BEAN is ONE DOSE. They can be discontinued after the cure is effected; they are purely vegetable; they contain no harmful drugs, and they are the SAFEST FAMILY MEDICINE.

FREE TEST FOR ALL.

The above remarkable cure of Mrs. Turner and family is no isolated instance, but only one of the many thousands of cases where Bile Beans have been successful in relieving the sufferer, and the Proprietors have so much faith in the efficacy of their remedy that they will forward you a Sample Box Free, and a book on Liver and Digestive Ailments, if you cut out accompanying Coupon, and send it with your name and address and a penny stamp (to cover return postage) to the Bile Bean Co., Leeds.

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Short Stories.
Dec. 5th, 1903

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SHORT STORIES

No. 780.] Week ending December 12, 1903. [Price One Penny.

THE BURGLAR HAD LOCKED HER TRESSES 'TWIXT THE WARDROBE DOORS. WOULD SHE ESCAPE IN TIME?

(A Thrilling Incident from the Powerful Story, "A Modern Burnt-offering." See inside.)

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The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
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Produces its most brilliant effect in Chronic Bronchitis and Asthma. It effects astonishing cures in the worst and most persistent cases.

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Mrs. ADA S. BALLIN, 5, Agar Street, London, Editor "Womanhood," and a great authority upon children's diseases, writes:—"Veno's Lightning Cough Cure is an exceedingly successful remedy; it is very pleasant to take and the relief it gives is very rapid. The preparation is perfectly safe for children."

W. LASCELLES-SCOTT, F.R.M.S., in his Certificate of Analysis among other things says:—"I have pleasure in certifying that in my opinion VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH COUGH is an exceptionally pure, safe, and effective preparation

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CURES IN TEN MINUTES

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Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1½;

Samples 1d. each.

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Keyless or Keywind, will be sent to your address for free test and examination on receipt of a deposit of only 6/- and your promise to complete the purchase in six more monthly payments of 6/-. *Five Years Warranty.*

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Finest quality and flavour.

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The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

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Short Stories

No. 780.] [One Penny.

Week Ending December 12th, 1903.

A MODERN BURNT-OFFERING.

Telling of the Heroic Deed of a Brave Girl.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

It was morning, and the golden sun streamed in through the open windows of the pretty breakfast-room and fell upon silver and glass and snowy table-linen.

The morning post had just been delivered, and Arthur Garth and his sister Minnie were dividing their attention between breakfast and their respective correspondence. There was another and much more bulky letter-box downstairs, for the apartments were immediately over the great East India Bank, of which Arthur Garth was resident manager, but these could wait till business hours began and the bank threw open its heavy swing-doors for the day. To judge from the unruffled expression of Arthur Garth's face, there was nothing either important or remarkable in his correspondence. But his sister Minnie was more fortunate, and, strangely enough, the pleasure she evinced over the perusal of one dainty little note seemed, when its purport became known to him, to communicate its influence to him also.

"Arthur," she said, looking up from the letter with a sly little twinkle in her blue eyes—"Arthur, what do you think? I have asked an old school friend to come and stay with me for a week or two, and she is coming."

Arthur looked across at his sister and a flush mounted to his brow as he asked:

"Not Faith—I mean Miss Allardyce?"

Minnie laughed—a silvery, rippling laugh that appeared to add to her brother's embarrassment. But he was forced to laugh too—her mirth was so infectious.

"You poor old boy," she said banteringly, "you can't hide anything from me. Well, dear"—and her voice softened and dropped to a tone of infinite tenderness and affection—"I knew you would be pleased, so I thought I would give you a little surprise.

"You know, Arthur"—and the voice grew still more soft—"there is simply nothing so dear to me as your happiness. You have been father and mother and brother to me ever since our dear ones were taken from us, and the life that might otherwise have been solitary and sad, has been joyous and happy, because of the love and care you have always given me.

"And now—now that your own happiness depends on the winning of dear little Faith Allardyce—for, though you have not confided in me, I know this to be so—it is my turn to help you in the attainment of that wish."

Arthur Garth left his seat and went round the breakfast-table towards his sister. The latter rose as he approached, and he put his arms about her slender figure.

"Minnie," he said as he drew her face to his and kissed it; "I am lucky in having such a sweet sister as you. You have guessed rightly, dear.

"I love Faith Allardyce very dearly—more dearly than I can tell, even to you.

"I am very, very glad that you have asked her to visit you here, and I hope before she goes back home, that I shall hear from her own lips the answer I so ardently desire. But"—and he kissed her again—"my sister will be none the less dear to me, or important to my happiness, when a wife shall claim my first love. Our mother's dying trust to me to care for you—my friend as well as sister—shall never be forgotten, even if this happiest dream of my life be realised. Nor can I ever regard that sacred trust in the light of a duty—though duty it undoubtedly is—since its fulfilment affords me too much pleasure to be viewed in any other light than that as an honour, a privilege, and a real and lasting happiness."

There were tears in Minnie's eyes as she lifted them to her brother's face.

"Dear old boy," she said lovingly, "your assurances are very sweet to me, though I do not need them. I cannot think of you other than as the best and kindest of men."

Arthur pinched her cheek.

"Such views change," he said banteringly. "Your turn may come some day."

Minnie laughed, and then blushed prettily, as she disengaged herself from her brother's embrace.

"By the way," she said, "shall I put Faith in the room next mine?"

Arthur considered for a moment.

"No," he said at last. "My room is by far the most comfortable. Cannot you make the necessary transfers and put her there? And I could have the room next yours."

Minnie nodded.

"Just the thing," she said. "I'll see to it to-day. She is coming to-morrow, you know." And, breakfast being over, she went out to superintend the transfer at once, while Arthur Garth went down the broad stairs to the bank below to commence the business of the day.

That day and the next seemed long to ardent Arthur Garth. But at last they drew to an end, and, mounting the stairs from the bank at the close of the second day, he found his sister and their fair visitor chatting pleasantly together over old associations.

Faith Allardyce rose as he entered, and a soft pink blush heightened the colour of her cheek as he greeted her and gave her cordial welcome to their home.

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She was exquisitely lovely, with large hazel eyes and delicate complexion.

Tall and slender, and with that graceful ease of carriage that lends both dignity and distinction to the figure, Faith Allardyce was as sweet and perfect a type of womanhood as one could wish to see. But the greatest attraction of all was her hair. No one could see her without remarking both its beauty and abundance. Indeed, so luxuriant was it, that she had allowed her adherence to transitory fashion to lapse altogether, and habitually wound it, coil upon coil, above her gracefully poised head. Its hue was chestnut, but, whenever the sun caught it, it glowed and glistened like threads of fine-spun gold. It had a trick, too, of clustering in coy little curls above her low brow and about her small, shell-like ears in a manner which Arthur Garth thought positively bewitching. Nor was he at all prejudiced, for if ever that old saying was true, it assuredly was in the case of Faith Allardyce: "A woman's crowning glory is her hair." And Faith was not ignorant of the fact.

"Well, Mr. Garth," she said, "have you unburdened yourself of the business of the day?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, "and the process of 'unburdening' has been associated with more pleasure than I ever remember to have been the case before."

For a moment Faith was oblivious to the compliment implied.

"Does that mean that the day's business has been satisfactory or otherwise?" she asked. "The inference is a little vague."

Arthur smiled and looked out of the window.

"I am afraid it is," he said, with a humorous twinkle in his dark eyes. "And explanations are tiresome. But, really, Miss Allardyce, the day's business has been eminently satisfactory."

Faith looked into his face. And then the implied compliment in his first remark came home to her, and she blushed prettily, and turned away her eyes. Minnie, with true feminine perception, noticed her embarrassment and changed the conversation.

"Any of the directors been in to-day?" she asked.

Arthur nodded.

"They seem very satisfied," he said. "But there is to be one slight alteration—only a temporary one—for which there is a good and substantial reason."

"What is that?" asked Minnie.

"Mr. Dixon is to sleep on the premises for the next week or so," he replied gravely. And then, as Minnie still looked inquisitive, he added: "I am not at liberty to explain, dear. All I need say is that my present responsibilities are greatly augmented, and that the arrangement I have just referred to is the outcome of my own personal request."

Minnie sighed. She understood now. The bank strong-room had need of a second protector. The same thing had happened before, and Minnie always felt nervous at such times. But she made no further remark and allowed the subject to drop.

"I suppose you are likely to remain here for some time to come, Mr. Garth?" said Faith interrogatively.

"Yes, I expect so," was the reply. "There will be a vacancy in the head office a few months hence, owing to the present manager's intended retirement. But the post is too far removed from that which I now occupy to warrant even the hope of my appointment to it. There is some difference between seven hundred and fifty and fifteen hundred a year!"

Faith nodded.

"Rather!" she said. "But I thought you were ambitious, Mr. Garth?"

Arthur laughed.

"So I believe I am," he said.

Faith opened her eyes wide in affected surprise.

"An ambitious man—with no hope!" she said. "Isn't that something of a paradox?"

But Arthur was not easy to put down.

"I think not," he said smiling. "It is often the best policy for an ambitious man to realise the *present* hopelessness of some achievements, in order that he may devote all his energies to the attainment of lesser and humbler eminences, from which the ultimate height may be more easy to reach. In crossing the river, it is always unwise, in our desire to set foot on the opposite shore, to forget the next stepping-stone."

There was an admiring light in Faith's hazel eyes, to which she endeavoured to give the lie.

"Oh, you plodder!" she said with assumed impatience. "Well, I am more sanguine than you. My name is Faith, you know, and I believe you will get that appointment."

"Can't you make me believe it, too?" Arthur asked, a light dancing in his eyes. "I might do lots of things if that came true." And he looked ardently into the bright animated face of the girl before him.

Faith caught the glance and turned her head away.

"You should try," she said. "'All things are possible,' you know."

Arthur's heart beat fast as he listened to the words. "All things are possible!" Well, he would put one possibility to the test before the week was out. Of that he was determined.

* * * * *

It was three days later.

They had sat late over supper, and it was midnight when Faith Allardyce retired to the pretty little room which Minnie had assigned to her. But, late as it was, she did not go to bed. The day had been damp and chilly, and Minnie had ordered a fire to be lit in their visitor's room, before which Faith sat in idle meditation. She had disrobed herself ready for the night, and, attiring herself in a dainty dressing-gown, sat herself down in a deep-seated easy-chair before the grateful glow of the fire. There were many things to think about. Her holiday in the great Metropolis, the sights she saw, so strangely unfamiliar to her provincial eyes, the gaiety and bustle of the great city, the pleasant renewal of old-time friendship with her school-mate, Minnie, and, last, but not least, the evident admiration of her handsome brother Arthur.

The very thought of him caused Faith Allardyce to blush. She was not a simpering school-girl, affecting what she did not feel, or denying what she did. She had read her heart in these last few days, and knew, without question or concealment, that she loved this Arthur Garth as she would love no other man.

And she knew, too, that he loved her. The thought was pregnant with sweetness, and she sat there before the red fire, dwelling on the realisation, too happy to break the spell which that realisation had woven about her. How long she sat there she did not know, but, thinking her happy thoughts, she fell asleep.

She started into consciousness with the sound of someone moving about the room. Springing from her chair, she faced round, and, at the sight she saw, put her hand quickly to her heart with a convulsive catch at her throat. The electric light was still turned on, and by its light she saw the tall figure of a masked man close behind her, with the barrel of a grim revolver pointed at her breast. She could feel the night wind coming in through the open window, and knew instinctively that it was there the man had entered. She reeled, and would have cried out, but the voice of the armed man stopped her.

"If you utter a sound" he said, in a low, threatening tone, "I will shoot you as I would a bird!"

She cowered down in the chair and tried to think.

"I've made a little mistake, that's all," went on the man under his breath. "I thought this was Mr. Garth's room. The fact is"—and the mouth broadened into a cruel grin beneath the mask—"the fact is, I want to have a word or two with Mr. Garth on—er—important business."

Faith shivered. She understood now. Arthur's hint about augmented responsibilities recurred to her. Oh, what was she to do?

"Well," resumed the man, "I can't waste my time here, and it's equally evident I can't leave you without first taking some little precaution to insure your silence."

He looked down at her, and she, with terrified, startled eyes looked back at him.

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"The best way of doing that would be to—well, you know well enough what that is," he said calmly. "But you're awfully pretty, and I can't do it. Sentiment should never interfere with business, I know, but a man's a man, and a pretty woman makes a man a fool. But what can I do?"

Again he looked at her, and she, frightened, shrinking, terror-stricken, dropped her head upon her hands and hid her face from him. As she did so, the beautiful, long chestnut hair falling almost to her knees, attracted his attention.

"Ah!" he said, and looked about the room. Presently his eye fell on the big glass-panelled doors of a fine old wardrobe at one end of the room.

"The very thing!" he said. "Now then, miss, I am afraid I must trouble you to come with me. Do so without noise or resistance, and no harm shall come to you. But if you disobey my instructions or make the least sound, you must take the consequences."

He took her by the arm, and, lifting her up, led her over to the wardrobe. Reaching it, he took the long chestnut tresses in his hands and knotted it again and again at the end till it hung in a great clumsy knot some eighteen inches from her head. Then, opening one of the heavy doors of the wardrobe, he put the knot of hair within and shut the door to with a sharp thrust and turned the key in the lock.

"You can't follow me now," he said grimly, "and I'm going to take the key away with me. I might gag you if I wished, but I think you understand me well enough to know that, upon the slightest outcry, I would return, whatever the risk to myself, and take quick and summary vengeance on you for so doing. Don't forget!" And, with a cruel gleam in his dark, sinister eyes, he once more took out his revolver, picked up a dark lantern which lay on the table, and noiselessly left the room, closing the door behind him.

Faith Allardyce was alone.

Trembling with dread and apprehension, she tried to collect her scattered senses and think what she could do to save the man she loved. That he was in danger of his life, she knew now only too well.

She thought of him sleeping so soundly and peacefully, little dreaming of the terrible awakening that was soon to come. She pictured him opening his eyes to see the gleaming muzzle of that hideous revolver pressed against his temple and hearing that stern, peremptory demand for the keys of the bank strong-room. He would not yield, she knew, and then—then—oh, he would be murdered—murdered there in his bed.

The thought drove her almost frantic.

What could she do? She must do something! If nothing else occurred to her, she would scream for help, even though she paid the penalty with her own life. But was there no other way?

Her beautiful hair—the hair she, as well as others, had always admired so much—was holding her a prisoner and keeping her back from the man she loved. With starting eyes she looked about her for knife or scissors to cut through the lovely hair that bound her, but she could see neither, and her heart sank.

Then her eye fell on a long wax taper that lay within reach of her hand. A box of matches stood beside it, and a new idea flashed into her mind. Would there be time? She would try!

Snatching up the taper, she lit it, and, holding it behind her head, let the flame play among the strands of hair just where they were held by the doors of the wardrobe.

Her poor hair! Its beauty was being sacrificed now.

She could hear the hiss of singeing hair as the flame burnt its way steadily through the thick coil above it. But she gave no thought to the loss. Arthur Garth was in peril of his life, and that was all she could think of. And so the work of destruction went on, and at last she was free.

Springing to the door she opened it and looked along the dark passage. She thought she could see dimly in the distance, the figure of a man stooping to the lock of Arthur's door. A wide circle of light shone for an instant on the door, and she knew her sight had not deceived her.

The man had not heard her and she went stealthily down a transverse passage to the door of the room in which she knew Mr. Dixon had been put. Noiselessly she turned the handle, and, to her infinite relief, found the door unlocked. In she went, and, bending over the sleeping man, she silently roused him, and acquainted him with what was happening. Then, while Dixon leapt out of bed and hastily slipped on a few clothes, she stepped stealthily down the broad staircase of the bank, and, unshuttering a window, opened it and peered out into the dark, deserted street. Two or three moments and she heard the footstep of a passing police-constable. A stifled cry, and he was at her side. Another minute and he was through the open window and bounding up the stairs, while a great shout came from above, together with the sound of a desperate hand to hand encounter. It was Dixon and the burglar, and, just as the constable reached them, the burglar pointed the revolver full at his adversary's head. But the constable was too quick. With a blow from his truncheon, he knocked the weapon from his hand and it fell clattering to the floor.

At that moment the door of Arthur Garth's room was thrown open, and he stood amongst them, just aroused from sleep by the noise of the combat outside. A glance told him all, and the burglar was quickly under arrest. Dixon soon acquainted his chief with the manner in which he had been aroused, and Arthur Garth, looking down the dark passage, saw a slim white figure disappear within the doorway of her room.

"God bless her!" he murmured. "She has saved our lives, Dixon!"

Faith Allardyce did not appear at breakfast the following morning. Minnie had it conveyed to her room, and, soon after, went herself to see how her friend fared. She was closeted with her for a long time, and, when she came out, there was a suspicion of tears in her blue eyes. Her brother, waiting in vain for the appearance of the girl to whom he owed so much, was at last compelled to go downstairs to his office and begin the business of the day. There was a good deal of additional work for him that day—police investigations to satisfy, his presence in court, where his evidence, together with that of his subordinate, Dixon, was sworn to, and, finally, a full report of the proceedings to be drawn up and forwarded to the directors. But at last the day wore away to an end, and he went upstairs to his own quarters.

Somewhat to his surprise he found his sister absent. Faith was sitting on the couch, looking out of the window, and his heart beat fast as he approached her. She looked round as he entered, and a soft pink blush crept into her cheek.

"Minnie has run over to Mrs. Needham's," she said. "I expected her back before now, but I suppose something has detained her."

She wondered, as she said it, whether sly little Minnie had purposely delayed her return to allow for the *tête-à-tête* which was now impending. Arthur Garth sat down uninvited on the couch beside her.

"Miss Allardyce," he said in a low, earnest voice, "before I say anything else I must thank you most heartily and sin-

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cerely, for the very great service you rendered both myself and the directors of the bank last night."

"Bother the directors!" said Faith, attempting to hide the tell-tale light in her hazel eyes. "*They* needn't congratulate themselves. I never even thought of them."

Arthur flushed and looked deeper into the eyes of the girl at his side.

"Then I am to infer," he said quietly, "that your thoughts were confined to one individual?"

This was very embarrassing. The hands that lay in her lap trembled a little.

"Yes," she said, affecting to misunderstand. "I thought a good deal about—the burglar."

Arthur smiled.

"Ah!" he said. "That estimable gentleman has made a clean breast of it. He says he'll never let sentiment interfere with his business plans again. But, seriously, Miss Allardyce, how did you free yourself from the imprisonment to which he condemned you? I thought——" And he glanced curiously at her beautiful hair, now coiled in its former fashion above her head.

Faith coloured.

"Ah," she said, "that is the advantage of art! With a little dexterous manipulation I have made it look very much as it used to do. But in reality, it is more than half gone."

"Gone?" said Arthur.

"Yes," replied Faith, lowering her eyes, "I—I burnt it."

She took a packet from her writing-case, which lay at her side, and, unfolding it, disclosed a knotted mass of soft chestnut hair, with the ends all singed and burnt by the relentless taper. Arthur's hand trembled visibly as he touched it reverently. Then he took the girl's two hands in his and looked deep into her eyes.

"Faith," he whispered, "I have loved you from the very first day I saw you, two years ago. And, during the past few days, that love has increased until I can keep silent no longer. Faith, my own darling, will you share the home of a poor man? You may have more brilliant opportunities, dear, but you will not find a more loving and devoted husband than I. Will you—will you be my wife?"

"Yes," she whispered, resting her head upon his shoulder, "and—and—the love is not all—one-sided, Arthur."

With a cry of joy he caught her to his breast and kissed her passionately. A step sounded outside the door, and they released each other. There was a glad light in Arthur's eyes, and a self-conscious confusion about Faith's manner as Minnie entered, that was as legible to that understanding young lady as the type in an American headline. She sat down on a chair and laughed softly and triumphantly.

"That burglar wasn't such a bad lot after all," she said mysteriously. "Oh, dear, and I shall have to play gooseberry now!"

There was no misunderstanding the latter remark, and Faith, with flaming cheeks, went swiftly over to Minnie's side, and, kneeling down, hid her face in her friend's dress. Minnie put her soft hand on the artistically arranged hair and smoothed it lovingly.

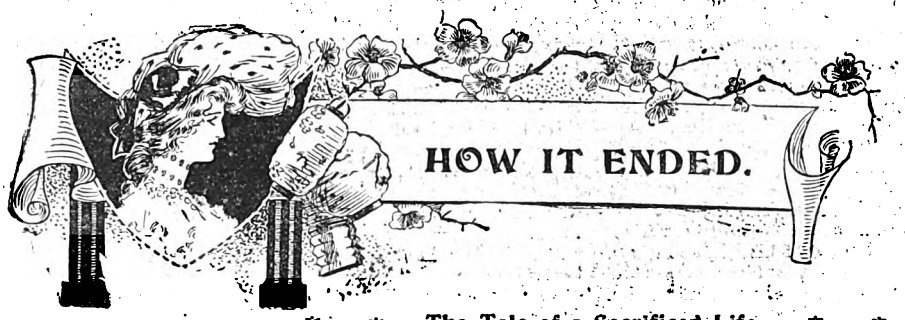
"What about the appointment and the fifteen hundred a year?" she whispered, banteringly. "It isn't quite a certainty, you know."

Faith lifted her face and looked across at her lover.

"Never mind!" she said confidently. "I am sure he will get it!"

And he did.

W. J. Mowbray.



The Tale of a Sacrificed Life.

"You cur! If ever you insult this lady in this manner again, I'll thrash your miserable life out of you."

The speaker's blue eyes were blazing with fury, and his grasp on the other's throat went near to choking out what little breath there was left in him.

"Oh, don't hurt him," said a girl's soft voice, as she put a restraining hand on to Norman Silverwood's arm. "He doesn't really know what he is doing."

"Then he ought to be taught," said the man furiously; but a second glance at the other's white, vacant face, with its tangled mass of reddish hair, seemed to tell him something of the truth, and he realised that it was scarcely a fair fight, for God's brightest gift of intelligence had been denied to the pitiful object he had almost shaken the life out of. Flinging him on to the soft grass, Norman said a little more gently:

"Remember what I say; if this occurs again you shall not escape so lightly as you have done to-day. Now go!"

Casting a malignant glance, full of hatred, at Norman, and muttering something about "paying him out for this," the poor half-witted creature rose to his feet and was soon lost sight of down the winding path which led to the village. As he disappeared through the trees Norman, drawing a small flask of brandy out of his pocket, said:

"What a lucky thing I had some left. Do take it, you look quite white and shaken."

Drawing her towards the stump of an old tree, he made her sit down, and in a few minutes—after one or two sips from Norman's flask—the pretty colour began to return to the girl's face, and looking up at him, she said:

"Thank you so much for your help. I am so glad you happened to be passing just at that moment. Although I don't think Stephen would have hurt me, I didn't want him to kiss me."

"I should think not, indeed," said Norman, throwing himself on to the grass by the girl's side. "Does he belong to the village?"

"Yes, he and his mother settled here about four years ago, soon after my father was made Vicar."

"Ah, that explains it," said Norman. "Then you are Miss Fairfax? I remember hearing of poor old Grantley's death soon after I went away, and my aunt has often spoken of you to me since I returned." Then, seeing the girl's look of bewilderment, he rose, and laughingly taking off his hat, bowed low to the ground as he said, "Norman Silverwood, at your service, madam."

"Why I know you quite well," said the girl naively; "at least"—correcting herself—"I mean Miss Silverwood has told me all about you. You're not a bit like what I thought you would be," she went on, "and I'm so glad."

"Why, what in the world did you expect to find?" asked the man, amused by the girl's frank outspokenness.

"Well, Miss Silverwood said you were so awfully handsome, and clever, and good, that I felt quite afraid of meeting you, and after all you are——"

But here the girl stopped, for Norman was laughing un-

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restrainedly at the absolute relief plainly written on her expressive face.

"'Wad some fay the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as ithers see us,'" quoth he. "I am glad Kismet put it into my way to remove such an awful impression from your mind. Handsome—clever—good; what a fearful thing to have to live up to all that, Miss Fairfax. I couldn't possibly do it."

"Well, you know," looking at him critically, "you are rather good looking after all." But another roar of laughter stopped Miss Fairfax's flow of eloquence, and she rose, saying with a blush, "I'm afraid I'm getting tied into a knot, Mr. Silverwood, I'd better go home."

"May I see you to the Vicarage?" he asked, picking up his fishing tackle, which had laid all this time where he flung it as he sprang to the girl's assistance. "What did you call him? Stephen may be loafing about somewhere in the glen, and you wouldn't like another encounter to-day, I'm sure."

"No," said the girl, as she thanked him for his escort. "A little of 'Mr. Stephen' goes a long way."

"Yes, he's not altogether an acquisition to the village, Miss Fairfax. Poor beggar! I'm sorry I handled him so roughly. After all, as you say, he would not know what he was doing."

When they arrived at the Vicarage gate they chanced upon Freda's father, a cheery, white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman, who, when he heard of the service Norman had done his daughter, who was the very apple of his eye, could not make enough of the young fellow.

"Come in, my boy, and dine with us," he said heartily; "that is, if you have nothing better to do, and Freda shall sing to us." As Norman looked down at his rough tweed suit, in a half-hearted sort of apology, the old man went on genially, "Oh, never mind your clothes, we are not smart people. Far from it, eh, Freda?"

She reached the pistol just in time to save the shot.

"No, father; and I think I can arrange for a wash and a brush-down for Mr. Silverwood, if that will ease his conscience at all." Norman agreed with ready alacrity, for he was in no great haste to part from his newly-made friends. Freda came down from her room looking very fresh and dainty in her clinging white gown, with her shining hair piled loosely on the top of her small head. Such pretty hair it was—Norman thought he had never seen any quite so pretty before—and then her eyes! They had a curious way of dilating when she was pleased or excited, which made Norman think how he could best rouse her interest and gain a look from those lustrous depths. As dinner proceeded, the talk turned to Freda's recent adventure, and Mr. Fairfax quite agreed with Norman when he suggested that it might be as well if the man were put under restraint.

"Oh, no, father," said Freda. "Stephen is really perfectly harmless, and it would almost break his mother's heart if she had to part with him. She has nobody else, you know."

"Yes, I am aware of that, Freda," said the old man, "but he is gradually getting worse, I am sure, and it will end in that eventually."

The conversation soon strayed to pleasanter topics, however, and Stephen was soon forgotten by the three he had helped so strangely to bring together. After dinner Freda kept her promise of singing to them, and as Norman listened to the clear, sympathetic voice, the charm of the girl's personality crept over him very strongly. When the old gentleman dropped into a light dose in his easy chair the two wandered out into the pleasant, old-fashioned garden, with its wealth of flowers, for it was just the time of the roses, and they were blooming, here, there, and everywhere, in luxurious profusion. To the two lingering there—although they scarcely realised it yet—it was the beginning of the "old, old story" which to young hearts is ever new, and when the "Good-nights" were said, and Mr. Fairfax gave Norman a hearty invitation for "any time," it was Freda's eyes which his own sought as he said:

"If I shall not be in your way? If I shall be welcome?"

"Yes, come in any time, Mr. Silverwood," she said, with a shy glance up at him. "We shall always be so pleased to see you."

And so the summer crept on apace, and soon it became a regular thing for Miss Fairfax and the "young Master," as the villagers called Norman, to be seen about together, and the old women, gossiping over their cups of tea, drew their own conclusions, which, to tell the truth, were not very wide of the mark.

"They be a fine couple, and she'll make a bonny mistress up at the old place." So ran the story, and great was the interest taken in the doings of the two.

One day just before Christmas, as Freda and Norman were sitting in the cosy drawing-room at the Vicarage, Norman, in an absent-minded manner, whistled a few bars of one of the dreamy waltzes Freda would at times play for him.

"How I should love a waltz," said the girl, a little wistfully.

"Yes, I shouldn't mind one myself," said Norman, "a downright good dance would be fine, wouldn't it?"

"Rather! I should say so," said the girl, "although I have never been to a proper dance—a ball, I mean—in my life."

"Never been to a ball!" repeated Norman. "Good gracious! How's that?"

"Well, they don't grow on trees about here," said the girl quaintly. Norman said nothing, but about ten days later Freda found an envelope with the Silverwood crest on her plate when she came down to breakfast, and opening it, gave a little shriek of delight when she saw the inclosure.

"Oh, father—listen," she cried; then reading from the thick, gilt-edged card, "Mr. Norman Silverwood presents his

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compliments to Miss Freda Fairfax, and requests the pleasure of her company at Silverwood Hall, Tuesday, Jan. 25th," then in one corner, "Dancing nine o'clock." "Oh, father, isn't it perfectly lovely?"

"Yes, my darling, I am very glad," he said, beaming at her over his gold-rimmed spectacles. Anything which gave pleasure to Freda was sure to please the old man. When the great day arrived, and Freda went down into the study to show herself in all her bravery to her father just before starting for the Hall, a very soft look came into the old man's eyes as he kissed her and bade her go and enjoy herself.

"You are your mother over again to-night," he said, and indeed Freda's resemblance to the lovely woman whose photograph always looked down from the old man's study walls was very great. "Good night, my pet," he went on, "be back in good time to-morrow."

Miss Silverwood had thoughtfully sent the girl word she should expect her to stay overnight, for Norman had made no secret of the fact that it was Freda, and Freda's enjoyment alone, which guided all his thoughts, as he and the old lady planned out this dance, to which half the countryside had been invited. She was prepared, therefore, to help Norman with all her heart, for Freda was a great favourite of the old lady.

What a fairyland it all seemed to Freda! Norman was amply repaid for all his thoughts and trouble by the sight of the girl's happy face. Her first ball—and with Norman close at hand to anticipate her every wish. What more could the heart of girlhood want?

"Are you enjoying it, Miss Fairfax?" he said as he led her towards the conservatory after one of their many dances together.

"Ah—more than I can say!" she answered, with eyes shining like twin stars. "And I owe it all to you!"

Looking down at her in all her loveliness, Norman felt more than ever how altogether desirable she was, and, instead of going into the conservatory, turned into the library—a cosy little room at the side of the house—unlighted for the time being by anything but the firelight, which was casting quaint shadows on to the walls.

"Freda, come in here," he said in a low, unsteady voice, "I want to speak to you." Closing the door behind him, he stood gazing at the girl, all his heart in his eyes, dumb, where he would fain said so much.

"What do you want?" she asked, half frightened by the intentness of his gaze.

"You," he answered, holding out his arms towards her. "Oh, Freda—darling—can't you see how much I want you—how much I love you——"

No need to ask if she loved him. As the soft white arms found their way round his neck, a whisper, light as a summer breeze, caught his ear.

"Norman—I love you with all my heart and soul."

As his arms closed round the slender figure, Norman felt that earth could hold no fairer thing for him than this one woman's love, given to him, as he felt, fresh and pure as a child's.

"When will you come to me, Freda?" he whispered. "There is nothing to keep my little wife away. We will be married in the Spring?" raising the sweet, shy face that he might read his answer there.

Just then they were both startled by a slight sound in the direction of the window, which opened straight on to the lawn, and as they turned, caught a glimpse, for a moment, of a white, vacant face, with its tangled reddish hair hanging almost to the eyes.

"It's Stephen," said Freda, grasping Norman's arm nervously, for the look on the man's face was not good to see and she felt that it boded evil for them.

"Yes," said Norman, as he rushed to the window, and out on to the lawn, but not a trace could he find of the poor, half-witted creature, who had evidently been attracted to the house by the lights. "Poor chap," said Norman, as he gave up the search and closed the window again. "He has never forgiven me for the shaking I gave him the day I met you in the glen. Freda, I think sometimes he would like to return the compliment, he glares at me so ferociously whenever I meet him."

"Oh, Norman, you don't think he will ever do you any harm, do you!" said Freda nervously, for the evil look on the man's face had upset her, and for the first time she found herself wishing that he was under restraint.

"Harm?" laughed Norman. "What harm could he do me, little one?" drawing up his six feet two inches of manly strength with conscious power written all over it. "But come, darling, little as I want to go, we must not desert Aunt Maggie too long, she will wonder whatever has become of us."

But Aunt Maggie had a shrewd idea as to the state of affairs, as she saw the two faces when they entered the ball-room together a few minutes later, and was quite prepared for Norman's announcement, after the guests had left, that Freda had promised to marry him in the Spring "if it was all right to father."

The old lady took the girl to her room herself, and left a very happy, if wakeful Freda, tucked comfortably amongst the white pillows. Ah! Life was so sweet, and love was so beautiful. The daylight had made its way broadly into the room, before Freda fell asleep, to dream it all over again.

* * * * *

It was the day before the wedding-day, and Norman had just left the Vicarage—purposely early—for there were many things to see to, and one or two letters to write, as he told Freda.

"Rest well, my darling," he said tenderly. "My little sweetheart must look her best to-morrow," and he had left her, with many a good-night kiss, more than usually unwilling to go. For half an hour, the girl sat lost in a happy dream, and then she caught sight of Norman's pocket-book, which he had evidently forgotten to replace, after looking at the letters he had said wanted answering.

"How annoyed he will be," she thought, and then, "I will slip across to the Hall with it myself, it is not late, and the maids are so busy with their preparations for to-morrow." Leaving word with Hannah—the old housekeeper—that she would be back in half an hour, she slipped on her cloak, pulling the hood over her bright hair as she went down the garden path. She met nobody as she quickly made her way to the Hall, and then, seeing lights coming from the library window, was just crossing the lawn to look in and see if Norman were there, when she was startled to see the figure of a man who was peering through the window, totally oblivious of her presence. Something in the uncouth figure struck her as strangely familiar, and as she crept softly towards him over the grass, she saw with a sickening feeling at her heart that it was Stephen.

"What could he want there again?" Looking into the brilliantly-lighted room she could distinctly see Norman, bending over his desk with his back to the window, engrossed in his writing. Paralysed with fear, the girl kept her eyes fixed on that hateful figure, fearing to move or to call out. Just then Stephen raised his right hand, and she saw with a horror which seemed to freeze the very blood in her veins that he was grasping a pistol. As he half turned with it in the moonlight his face was terrible to look upon. Always repulsive, his eyes had a wild, determined look in them now, which almost told the girl what his intention was. Creeping with heavily-beating heart and a wild prayer for help on her lips, she just reached him, as he raised his hand again, and pointed the deadly weapon towards the window.

With a heart-rending cry of "Norman! Norman!" she grasped the pistol, turning it, in her agony, as she did so, full upon herself, and when Norman rushed, half-maddened, to the window, it was to find Freda laid with the hood fallen from her sunny hair, the blood from that cruel wound staining her white gown, while Stephen stood looking on with the horrible laughter of madness on his face.

"There—will—be—no—to-morrow—for—us—Norman," gasped the girl. "Thank—God—I—was—in—time—to—save—you——"

But did he?

Biddy Lamb.

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A HIDEOUS MISTAKE.

A Tale of Love and Avarice.

THE day was done. André and Marie Anquetin were eating their simple evening meal. The little kitchen in which they sat was such a room as one may see in almost any of the farming districts of Normandy; small and neat.

The furniture was plain, but the white muslin curtains at the windows and a shelf filled with geraniums in bloom gave it an air of comfort. André and his wife were old. The deep wrinkles and hard lines of their faces, their bent figures and halting gait, told a tale of trouble and hard work.

"I do wish Jean would come home," said the woman, as she rose from the table and began clearing away the dishes. "It's fifteen years since he went away, and it does seem as if he might come back to see his old mother. If he had only been content like Lus Mignot and stayed at home, how happy we should have been."

"I told you," replied the old man, "that you should let well alone. The lad was a fine boy, and would have done as well here as in England. I firmly believe if you can't get your porridge among your own folks, strangers won't give it to you. It was your high notions that did it, and now we must bear it as best we can."

Marie was silenced, and without saying any more André went out and sat on the low wooden seat beside the door, while his wife washed the dishes and tidied up the room. When she had made the house neat she went and stood beside her husband. The sun was setting, making the rows of bright-coloured flowers in the little garden glow in the rich light. The apple trees were white with their snowy promises of harvest. In the distance the poppy-besprinkled grain waved in the gentle breeze.

"Ah, Marie," he said, taking her hard and wrinkled hand in his, "Normandy is beautiful in May."

She did not heed his remark. Drawing her hand away, she said, "I am going to mind Dame Robbe, and may not come home until late. The old woman is in a very bad state, and isn't long for this world. Don't sit up for me."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, the old man slowly rose and faced his wife.

"I don't like this," he said. "Before the lad went away you were always a-working and a-saving to set him up when he got big. He went and left us. You made him. He has been away for fifteen years, and ever since he left us you have been a-working and a-saving for him when he comes back. What good are we getting out of life? Not any. I think it is time to stop!"

"Why, André, you wouldn't have the old woman suffer for want of care, would you?"

"No," he continued; "but it is not Dame Robbe that you care for, it's her money that you want to save for the boy."

Without replying, Marie Anquetin moved up the street as fast as her bent form and halting steps would let her, and was soon lost to view in the gathering gloom.

Her husband watched her retreating figure, not without feelings of sorrow. When she could no longer be seen, he relit his pipe, which had gone out during the discussion, and resumed his place on the settle.

More than thirty years before he and Marie had married and moved into the little cottage. She was a beauty then. On market days, when they stood in the great square of Rouen selling their vegetables and flowers, many a passer-by would stop to look at the pretty flower vendor and her handsome husband. Those were happy days. When their child was born they called him Jean. His winning ways gained for him the goodwill of all the village people. André and Marie were justly proud of him. "I don't want him like we are," his mother would often say, as she and her husband talked about his prospects and planned for the future. "He must be like the fine folks that used to come to the château when you were under-butler and I was ladies' maid, André."

"Perhaps so, but it takes money, and piles of it, to be like them," the father would reply.

"I know that, dearie, but we can earn and save, and when he grows up he will have enough to start on. It will be a fine thing to have our Jean a great man."

Marie Anquetin was one of those people who could love intensely; yet such was her nature that many passions, many hopes, could not find a place in her heart at one time. Gradually the motherly instinct gained the ascendency, and while she yet loved her husband, she did not feel towards him as she had before the child was born. Her ruling passion was love for her boy. For him she lived, toiled, and hoarded the fruits of her labours. Year after year she gave her life to him.

One morning, coming from confession in St. Ouen's, before she took her place beside the little cart in the great square, she heard a man say to his companion that England was the best place on earth for a young man to become rich and prosperous. Her ideas of England were vague, but she at once resolved that Jean should go to that place, wherever it was. A dozen times she repeated the word to herself, that she might not forget it. An hour later, when the man stopped before the little cart, she made bold to ask him about this England of which he had spoken. On their way home she talked incessantly about that strange country and Jean, until André, wearied with her prattle, got down and walked far in advance of the cart.

From that day she never wavered in her determination that Jean should go to the land of riches. Sometimes she did

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think to herself, "Jean might stay here to help about the place," yet her motherly ambition kept her to her resolve.

When the boy was sixteen she had saved enough to pay his passage and start him in life, and, in spite of André's protests, Jean was sent across the sea to make his fortune.

"It almost breaks my heart to let him go," she said, when the neighbours came to bid him good-bye, "but a mother must not stand in the way of her child. He can love me as well away from me as here under my nose."

She saw him go down the road and across the fields, then she went into the house and shut herself away, in her boy's room, from her neighbours and husband.

The little cottage seemed very lonely after Jean had gone. In all those years of living and caring for the boy the wife had grown blind to the needs of the husband. Now that her idol had left her, he who remained behind neither cared for nor would receive the little kindnesses and tokens of affection that were resumed after many years of neglect. Not that they lived unhappily together—hundreds of families have the same existence—but the poetry of their early married life had become prose.

They both kept to their work—André that he might support himself and wife, and Marie that she might save for Jean. Every penny that she got was carefully hidden away along with the letters that came from over the sea from her boy.

When she had nothing else to do, which was seldom, or when a moment could be stolen from work, she would take from its hiding place the shining hoard, thinking, as she touched each piece, of her Jean and the good it would do him. When she could she would take from her husband's money a few centimes to add to her own store.

The years passed, the pile grew slowly but steadily, while old age crept on with relentless pace. She was no longer young and her beauty had gone. When she stood in the market place of Rouen no one noticed.

"Joan must go with us to market to-day," she said to her husband one morning. Her voice trembled, and a great tear rolled down her deep-wrinkled face. Joan was her niece. "I have ceased to be attractive. Joan is beautiful, and must take my place. If she succeeds, I will stay at home to work in the fields, and care for the sick. I shall be just as useful, and Jean's pile will grow."

Joan took her aunt's place, and Marie never went to market again. Mornings when Marie saw Joan leave for Rouen the tears would come to her eyes as she thought of the days when she was young and beautiful.

Even the dullest of us have times of reflection when the past comes back with startling clearness. As old André Anquetin sat there in the twilight the years seemed to roll by in a long, dismal procession. The light of his pipe went out, his head rested against the casement of the door; he had fallen asleep. A slight noise made by opening and shutting the gate aroused the sleeper. Before him stood a man. He was well dressed, wore a full beard, and carried in his hand a small bundle.

"My good man," he said, "can you direct me to the inn in this village?"

"There is no inn here. Strangers don't come this way. You will find an inn at the next place across the fields or at Rouen."

"I have travelled a long way, and am tired. Can't you give me lodging?" said the intruder.

André hesitated a moment. "No, I don't think I can," he said. "You see, Dame Anquetin is away, and might not like it. I don't think I can."

"Did you say your name was Anquetin?" said the stranger.

"Yes," replied the old man, "I am André Anquetin. My wife's name is Marie."

"I know a Jean Anquetin in England," continued the young man.

"You know Jean, you? Why, Heaven bless you, come in, and if Marie don't like it—well, well, she won't mind if you tell her of her Jean."

The old man seized the stranger and led him into the kitchen. "Well, well, you know our Jean! Sit down while I make a light. It's a blessing you came this way."

He bustled about to light a candle, and quickly set before the stranger the best he could find in the little cupboard, then he seated himself near his guest.

"Now tell me all about my son," he said. "Is he well? Is he rich? Will he soon come home? Tell me all."

"Yes," answered the stranger, "he is well, and in the years since he left home he has grown from a big boy into a strong, thoughtful man."

"Just like me," interrupted the old man, "just like me; but go on."

"He speaks of you often, and never ceases to think of you and his mother. He loves you both."

"Of course, and we both love him," said André, "while his mother works night and day to save money for him."

The young man laughed, yet had the candle given more light, old André might have seen the look of pain that came to the face of the young man.

"Works to save money for him! Why, he is rich, richer than anyone in this village, so he tells me," said the guest.

"But why doesn't he come home and let us share his fortune?" asked André. "We have worked and saved for him. He is a thoughtless, wicked lad not to help us in our old age. I told Marie she was silly and now I know it."

"Do not say that, he is working for you. Soon he hopes to come home and make you rich and happy all your life."

"If he don't come soon it will be too late; we sha'n't want his help."

In his excitement the old man moved the candle, which at best gave but a dim light, near his guest. As he did so, his eyes caught the flash of the ring upon the stranger's finger. It was one of those silver bands such as the peasants of Normandy wear, of no value, yet peculiar to themselves. He gazed at it for some time, then, reaching across the table, took the stranger's hand in his, and examined the bauble more closely.

"My son used to wear a ring like that," he said. "His mother gave it to him when he left home."

"And my mother gave me this," replied the stranger.

The old man looked up, the smiling eyes of the guest told their story, and in an instant they held each other in a close embrace.

"Heaven be praised for this. Come near the light, my boy, my eyes are dim; let me look at you. Your mother will be wild with delight. I will go to tell her at once."

"No, father," said the son; "let her continue her good work. Do not let her know until morning. She will be tired when she comes home, and seeing me may be too much for her. Let her know in the morning, and to-morrow we will have a holiday. Neither you nor she shall ever work again. But come, father, let us go into the garden; it is warm here."

The two men left the room, and, arm-in-arm, wandered through the garden and out into the fields. The moonlight shone upon them as they talked. The clock in the village struck ten.

"We must go in now," said the son; "we are both tired."

"Your room is ready for you," said old André. "Ever

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since you went away your mother has had it in readiness for you when you came back. Good night. Heaven bless you, as it has us all. Good night."

Taking the candle, the young man climbed the short flight of stairs and entered the little room. It was just as he had left it years before. There were his kite, his top, and all the playthings that he used to love so well, while on the table was a bunch of fresh flowers. The perfume came to him like a breath from Heaven.

As Jean was very tired, he was soon asleep, dreaming of childhood scenes. With the father it was different. His son's coming home gave him so much happiness that he could not sleep; besides, he must tell Marie, when she came back, that a stranger was upstairs. He laughed softly as he thought how curious she would be, and how surprised in the morning when she should find out that it was Jean.

Sometime after midnight the wife returned. Old Dame Robbe was dead. Marie had seen the work of the Great Destroyer so many times that his awful presence did not disturb her. She was droning a song of the people. She had hardly entered the house, when André arose to tell her the news.

"What, you up?" she said. "Get to bed."

"Hist, don't make so much noise. There is a visitor upstairs in the boy's room," said André.

The old woman stood glaring at her husband, surprised into a silence which gave him a chance to offer an apology for his offence. "He came here," he continued, "and begged me to take him in. He was tired out with walking, and so I let him sleep in the boy's room."

The old woman turned livid with rage.

"Beast!" she hissed, "a stranger in my boy's room! I won't have it. I will go and pull him out," and she moved towards the door which led to the stairs.

André caught her and held her fast. "Marie," he said, "have a care. The man has money, heaps of it. He will pay us well, more for his night's lodging than we can earn in weeks."

At mention of the money the woman became calmer, but she did not cease talking about it until after they were in bed.

"We must charge him a good price," she said. "It's no small thing to have a stranger in one's house. He ought to bless Heaven that he has a place to lay his head, instead of having to tramp across the fields. If he is rich, he can pay well, and our boy's pile grows so slowly."

"Come, come, Marie, enough of this. I want to sleep, so say no more about it. I will settle with him in the morning."

"You—you settle with him! No, not you. Why, you would let him go without paying a sou, and our boy's pile be no larger."

André Anquetin was soon asleep; not so his wife. The thought of the gold set her brain on fire; she could not sleep. A dozen times she asked herself how much she should charge the stranger for his night's lodging. Surely a shining gold piece would not be too much. He had been saved a long walk; perhaps he would give her two.

If she told him how she was saving that her boy might come home, no doubt he would be generous. A fever seized her. She clutched her hands together as if she already had the coins in her possession. Supposing he refused to pay her more than a few silver pieces. No, no, he would not do that, and yet he might.

Why should she not take just a few bits while he slept? She would be sure of them then, and very likely he would never miss them. Jean needed them more than this man. But if she should be found out, the gendarme would arrest her, and she would be sent to prison. The thought overpowered her, and she lay quite still. How loud and terrible seemed to her the heavy, regular breathing of her husband. She could endure it no longer. The darkness and the stillness affected her, and her great desire to possess the money took complete possession of her.

Rising from the bed, she put on an old short skirt and a heavy blouse. Her heart beat fast, and its throbs sounded so loud to her that she felt as if it must awaken her husband. She looked at him, but he was fast asleep. With stealthy tread she climbed the stairs. At the open door she stopped to listen. The breathing of the sleeper came to her distinct and clear, yet it was almost lost in the beating of her own heart. For a moment she hesitated, a thousand thoughts of other days surged through her brain as she stood there, but the one great desire that had brought her there urged her on.

The moonlight filled the room with a mellow glow. She could see the form of the stranger; the upper part of the face was hidden by his arm, thrown over the forehead, his clothes folded and laid over a chair, and on the table beside the flowers she had put there in the morning was a pile of shining gold.

She could see nothing else. The gold pieces fairly glowed before her excited vision. They seemed to burn great holes in her brain, and fill her whole soul with a wild delirium.

She thought only of that beautiful yellow pile and of her boy Jean. She felt like screaming with delight, but her parched lips gave no sound. Silently and carefully she tiptoed her way into the room like a cat approaching a mouse, and stood before the table and the golden treasure. The man slept. She took a few of the gold pieces and put them in her pocket, then she reached for more.

A slight noise stopped her. The man moved in his sleep. In her excited fancy she thought he was awake and had discovered her taking the gold. Her agitation knew no bounds, the blood coursed through her veins with quickened speed; the strength of fury and despair came to her.

She turned, and with a spring seized the sleeper by the throat, while her knees struck him upon the chest. The shock awoke him, and he tried to free himself, but the bedclothes hampered him. He could not speak, for she held him with a grasp of iron. The frenzy was on her, and to all his efforts she opposed an irresistible pressure. For an instant he looked into the face that bent over him, and, like one in an evil dream, knew it for the face of his mother, but, still like one in a dream, struggled vainly to speak.

Little by little his convulsive writhings lessened. In a few moments he ceased to struggle and was still. He was dead.

Relaxing her grip, for her strength was gone, she got down from the bed, catching her foot in the coverings as she did so. For a moment she thought that the man had seized her, and she turned pale with fear. Giving a fierce pull at her clothes, she loosened the coverings of the bed, and the hand of the man was exposed. The ring upon the finger glistened in the moonlight and attracted her attention. Raising the hand fearfully in hers, she turned the ring upon the finger. A sickening fear overcame her, for the little silver band had a strange, familiar look.

"No, no," she muttered to herself. Her heart almost stopped beating. With a terrible despair she seized the head of the man and dragged it into the strong moonlight.

Then she understood.

In the morning while dressing himself, André Anquetin softly hummed a tune such as long years ago he used to sing when he wished to send little Jean into the land of dreams. "Marie has awakened before me," he thought, "but I will have my little surprise. I will go to wake Jean." He smiled at the thought of the meeting. Slowly he climbed the stairs and stood at the door of Jean's room. He saw his son upon the bed, and, kneeling beside him, the mother, singing her gentle lullaby, the lullaby of a mother and a woman bereft of reason. It was only for an instant; the next moment the disease, that of the heart, which for so many years he had feared, mercifully smote him. He was again with his son.

Years have passed since then, yet the peasants, when they go by the deserted house and the barren fields, still cross themselves and utter a prayer.

Leonard Burbank.

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For the Sake of His Love.

How Eric Rayburn Bravely Sacrificed His Prospects.

ERIC RAYBURN, private secretary to Sir Arthur Mostyn, K.C.B., M.P., and Cabinet Minister, stood with a disconsolate expression on his face in the study at Mostyn House.

He was of an average type, but there was something striking in his frank, clear-cut features and honest. blue eyes. A firm chin added strength to an already strong face.

"Slowcoach!" he muttered. "Well, I suppose I am; but I wish I had not heard her say so."

The previous evening he had strolled out into the grounds to enjoy a pipe, and, whilst he stood leaning against a tree and watching the last crimson streaks of fire fade from the western sky, he suddenly became conscious of voices.

The speakers, who were Sir Arthur Mostyn and Freda, his daughter, were on the other side of the thick hedge which separates the lawns from the orchard.

"I think I shall get in again," Sir Arthur was saying—he referred to the forthcoming elections. "Rayburn is a very good man for helping me."

"Yes, father," Freda had replied. "But don't you think he is rather a slowcoach?"

Then their voices had died away.

So he paced up and down the study floor, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and a thoughtful frown puckering up his face.

Eric Rayburn was quite alone in the world. His father, who had been Sir Arthur Mostyn's dearest friend, had died when Eric was about sixteen years old. He gave his boy into Sir Arthur's keeping, and received a promise from him that he would look after Eric for old times' sake; ill-fortune had left Mr. Rayburn with little to leave in the shape of money.

Eric had gone to Cambridge, and there had done exceedingly well. Sir Arthur's idea was to start him in a political career, and for that reason had taken him as his Parliamentary secretary.

Hardly had Eric made the acquaintance of Freda Mostyn ere he had fallen deeply in love with her.

But he was but a private secretary with his way to make in the world. She was the heiress to all the Mostyn estates, and the daughter of a Cabinet Minister. Again, he was a slowcoach—how that word rankled!

Perhaps he was a slowcoach in comparison with the Honourable Gordon Knevytt, who was first favourite with Freda Mostyn.

Gordon Knevytt was evidently created for the express purpose of winning women's hearts. He was as handsome a man as there was in the county, a first-rate shot and whip, and as much at home in the saddle as on foot. In addition he had a splendid voice and charming manners.

But this was all on the surface. For as long as it suited him, Gordon Knevytt could win and keep a woman's heart; but when her charms began to bore him, as they very often did, he tossed her aside without the slightest compunction; but still they loved him.

Beneath the surface there was a hard, selfish, callous nature which would kill the respect of any woman after a time.

However, his shortcomings were only known to the several women whose lives he had wrecked, and they were too proud to speak to the world of him.

But many men knew him for what he was. A man sees many things in another man which would not be apparent to a woman. So Eric Rayburn read Gordon Knevytt and knew him, and his heart was heavy with the knowledge that the woman he would give his life for was rapidly falling under the fascinations of this heartless schemer, who would feed on her sweetness until it tired him, and then—then he would seek fresh prey.

But what could Eric do? What right had he to say to Freda that Knevytt was only passing the time with her? He could bring no absolute proofs. Besides, whom would she believe—the man who fascinated her, or the man whom she designated as "Slowcoach"?

Gordon Knevytt had been staying at Mostyn House for over a month, and showed no signs whatever of curtailing his visit.

A merry laugh rang out; it was Freda's laugh. Eric walked to the window and looked out upon the terrace. There, in a little secluded alcove, were Knevytt and Freda. A pang of jealousy passed through his already torn heart. Why should he, who loved Freda with all the pure love of an honest man, have to stand by and watch this scoundrel throw his coils around her.

Now he stood and watched her sweet, expressive face

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lighting up with pleasure one moment, and then scarlet with blushes as Knevytt utilised his fascinating wiles.

What was that! Heavens above! Knevytt was kissing her, and she lay in his arms without resistance.

Then it was all over. He choked back the great sob that seemed to fill his throat, and blindly strove to continue his work.

But it was impossible, the vision of Freda in Knevytt's arms rose between him and his manuscript.

He felt he would go mad if he stayed where he was; so, hastily clearing up his papers, he sought relief in a ten mile tramp.

Some time passed by until one day Freda appeared to Eric to be worried. She hardly laughed, and when she spoke it appeared that she forced herself to it.

Eric intently watched Knevytt, but he seemed in no way different. Light-hearted and good-humoured, he appeared to be as ever. But, once or twice, Eric fancied he saw a slightly worried expression cross his face.

The engagement had not occasioned much surprise, but, from one or two remarks his chief had dropped, Eric was of the opinion that Sir Arthur was not greatly pleased. This gave him a certain amount of comfort, for he had determined to show Knevytt up; better a little sharp pang for Freda now, than a life-long misery.

He sat up late that night endeavouring to concoct a plan of action whereby he might save Freda from Knevytt.

What was that!

He jumped to his feet and went towards the door. Surely he heard footsteps. Cautiously he opened the door, but all was still as death. He stood for a few seconds listening. Surely he could hear something now.

There it was again, very muffled and slight, certainly, but it was the sound of some person moving about downstairs.

He crept out into the corridor, and stole to the head of the stairs. Then he looked over, down into the entrance-hall.

There was a light in the dining-room.

In that particular room was Sir Arthur Mostyn's safe, cleverly disguised with a wooden front as a bookcase. It was an idea of his own to outwit burglars, and in the study was another safe with nothing of any importance in it.

Cautiously he proceeded down the stairs, taking every precaution. He crept across the hall, and peeped into the room. What he saw caused his heart to almost stop beating, and it was only by a superhuman effort that he prevented himself from crying out.

Freda Mostyn was standing before the open safe, and in her hands was a bundle of bank-notes!

Freda a thief! What could it mean? Then he hesitated no longer, but went boldly into the room.

The girl swung round as she heard him, and gazed at him with terror-stricken eyes. Her face assumed the hue of death, and she swayed to and fro as though she would fall.

Then she recovered and tried to speak. But all she could do was to give utterance to a dry choking gasp.

At last speech came to her, and in trembling accents she whispered to her silent accuser.

"Don't tell father! For God's sake, don't tell father!"

"What does all this mean?" inquired Eric in a low tone, whilst he longed to take the trembling girl in his arms and comfort her.

She did not reply. A battle was going on within her; one voice urged her to confide in him, but an equally strong one told her to keep her secret. So she stood before him in an agony of dread, not knowing what to do.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Mostyn; I will do all I can to help you."

His kind, though gravely spoken, words did much to strengthen her; so that she decided to tell him all.

"You'll keep my secret?" she whispered.

"Yes, it will be safe with me."

"Gordon——"

"Ah!" he muttered, "as I thought!"

"Gordon," she went on with a mute appeal in her eyes, "has got deeply into debt, and he asked me if I could help him."

"Cad!" whispered Eric, but to Freda it sounded only like a swift intake of breath.

"He said he must have £200 by to-morrow, otherwise he would be arrested, and this was the only means I could think of getting it. I managed to obtain father's keys during the evening.

"What does this mean?" cried Sir Arthur. "What are you doing with those bank-notes?"

"Oh, don't be too hard!" she half sobbed. "I was going to put it back by selling some of my diamonds."

"Did Mr. Knevytt know how you were going to obtain the money?"

"No."

"Did he not ask what means you would use?"

"No; he only left it for me to do."

"The blackguard!" was Eric's unspoken thought, whilst aloud he said:

"If you will allow me, I will advance you the money." It just about represented his whole savings, but he was quite willing to do anything he could to help this poor helpless girl.

He took the banknotes from her trembling fingers as he spoke. She made a feeble show of resistance, whilst she watched him still with those soft, frightened eyes.

"You shall have my cheque in the morning, Miss Mostyn."

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"Oh, Mr. Rayburn, how——"

"*Hush!*" he whispered quickly.

In wild affright she clutched his arm until he almost winced.

There was someone coming down the stairs!

"Get behind these curtains, quick!" Eric whispered, as he pushed her into the shelter, and then he turned back to the safe.

"Why, what does this mean?" exclaimed Sir Arthur Mostyn as he entered the room.

Eric made no reply, but simply stood facing his chief.

"One o'clock in the morning, and you down here with the safe door open. And, as I live, banknotes?"

"Tell me, Rayburn," he continued quickly, "what does it mean? Quick, man, I'm waiting for your explanation."

"I have no explanation," said Eric, in a hard, dry voice which he hardly recognised as his own.

"Good Heavens! You must have an explanation. You don't mean that you were——" Sir Arthur paused, unable to frame the word.

Eric was silent.

"Eric, lad, speak up!" cried Sir Arthur. "If you're in want of money you have only to tell me. Come, give me your explanation, and let us go to bed."

"I have no explanation," again said Eric.

"I cannot believe that you were going to take the money. Will you not tell me?" intreated Sir Arthur.

Eric simply shook his head.

Sir Arthur Mostyn thrust back the notes, and locked the safe door. Then he turned to Eric.

"I will see that you are placed on the St. Petersburg Embassy immediately," he said. "Were I not certain that you are not morally guilty of the crime you were going to commit, I would wash my hands of you entirely. To-morrow, however, you will see about getting your things together."

"You are very good, Sir Arthur."

"I am sorry this has occurred, Eric. But you must carve your own way, now. Paris would have been your destination but for this, and I would have remained at your back, lad, but I cannot now."

Eric simply bowed his head.

Then Sir Arthur motioned him to go upstairs, standing and watching him as he went. And there were tears in his eyes, for Eric had held a great place in his heart.

Half an hour later, when all was still, Freda, pale and trembling, stole to her room and threw herself on the bed in an agony of grief.

Presently she got up, and restlessly walked up and down the room. Then she faced herself in the mirror, and saw her dead-white countenance, and great staring eyes.

"Oh, you little coward!" she muttered. "You little coward, why did you not speak? You have ruined a good man this night."

For some moments she stood surveying herself, and then she broke out in her condemnations again.

"Ugh! How could you? How could you? You despicable little coward! But it was for Gordon, for his sake."

And not for one moment did she blame Gordon Knevytt. Herself she despised, but not him.

Then the room seemed to spin round her, and, with a sobbing cry, she staggered to her bed, and, falling on it, fainted.

In the morning at the breakfast-table she appeared with pale face, and great black rings under her eyes. She explained that she had passed a sleepless night.

Both Sir Arthur Mostyn and Eric also showed traces of not having slept, but Eric wore a determined look, whereas there was a sad expression on Sir Arthur's countenance.

"I shall be going to town to-day, you had better pack your trunk, for I shall arrange for your departure in two days' time. There is a vacant third secretaryship which you will be appointed to," said Sir Arthur later on.

"Won't you take me into your confidence, lad?" he continued, with a winning smile.

"I cannot, Sir Arthur," Eric replied.

His chief's face resumed its stern, set look, and he departed for London.

A servant took a note to Freda from Eric, it contained his cheque for £200, and read as follows—

"Dear Miss Mostyn,—*I inclose you the cheque as promised. Please do not trouble to see me, as I am leaving here to-day for London, and I go to St. Petersburg on Friday. Wishing you all happiness in the future.—Believe me, your devoted servant,*

"Arthur Rayburn."

Freda shed tears over this pathetic little note, whilst she murmured, "For Gordon's sake."

And that afternoon Arthur Rayburn left Mostyn House, having previously addressed a letter to Sir Arthur giving him his address.

"So you've got it, Freda?" said Gordon Knevytt. "Rayburn's cheque! What does this mean?"

Then she told him, in faltering accents, the history of the previous night.

"Well, he's a pretty fair specimen of a fool!" was all the thanks that Knevytt offered for the two hundred pounds.

The callousness of it caused Freda to shudder, and she saw her lover for a moment in a very different light. She shrank from him as he strove to put his arms around her.

"Why," he said roughly, "what's the matter?"

"You are hardly grateful to Mr. Rayburn," she said in low tones.

"Grateful to that fool—why should I be?" he replied. "He hasn't done it out of any love for me, rather for you, I should say."

"For me?" she said. "What do you mean?"

"You are not going to tell me that you have not seen that this poor fool is madly in love with you?"

Freda gazed at him in astonishment, and then a great light dawned on her.

"For my sake?" she whispered.

"Oh, come, drop the melodrama! Let us talk about ourselves, when can we be married?"

Another time this question would have aroused very different feelings in Freda, but now the idea seemed almost repellent to her.

"I do not know," she murmured slowly. "I would rather not talk about it."

In London that night Eric Rayburn sat in a tawdry room in a Bloomsbury hotel, and his heart was well-nigh broken.

* * * * *

"There's a man to see Miss Freda," said a servant to Sir Arthur on the next day. "She has gone to Trowport, sir."

Trowport was the nearest town to Mostyn House.

"Show him up," said Sir Arthur. "I will see him."

The man was ushered in, he had come from the Bank.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Well, sir, this cheque made out to Miss Mostyn has been presented, but it is wrongly indorsed, and we want her proper signature."

Sir Arthur took the cheque and looked at it.

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"Two hundred pounds, Eric Rayburn," he muttered wonderingly. "Whatever is this?"

He gazed at it for some moments, and then dismissed the man, saying that the cheque would be sent on.

"What does it mean?" he said again and again. "Is this—why——" he paused, unable to go on.

For some time he sat gazing at the cheque, whilst his amazement grew more and more profound.

When Freda came in she was told that Sir Arthur desired to see her, and, accordingly made her way to his study.

"How did you come by this?" was Sir Arthur's stern greeting.

She gazed at the cheque, then turned white as marble, but made no reply.

By dint of questioning, Sir Arthur got all the details from her in tearful accents.

"So," he said grimly, "Mr. Gordon Knevytt is at the bottom of this, is he?

"I am glad I made some inquiries about this gentleman; except that he was a son of Lord Ventnor we knew nothing of him. My invitation to him at the Conservative was purely a matter of form, I did not expect him to accept," continued Sir Arthur. "Do you love him, Freda?"

The directness of the question completely nonplussed her, and she could only reply brokenly.

"I—er—think so."

"Well, my dear girl," he went on, "as far as I can make out, Gordon Knevytt is a precious scoundrel, and the sooner you think differently the better. I will have more to say to you on the subject later."

The next development that arose was that Gordon Knevytt had been arrested by a firm of Jews, for Sir Arthur had intimated to the Trowport Bank that the cheque for two hundred pounds would not be cashed.

Meanwhile, Eric's departure had been postponed awaiting the result of Sir Arthur's investigations through the medium of a private detective agency. Eric had no conception of the real state of affairs.

The detective agency had only a sorry tale to tell. It was to the effect that Gordon Knevytt was deeply in debt everywhere, and was staving off his creditors with the prospects of his father's death, and also his marriage with Miss Mostyn. Further, Knevytt had married a woman in London in 1899, but she had disappeared, and was supposed to be in America.

This was the final blow, and now Freda realised that what she mistook for love was but an evil fascination. Now she saw clearly all the many bad traits which before she had glossed over.

The horror of it all completely unnerved her, and she took to her bed, wrecked in mind and body.

Brain fever followed, and for three weeks she hung between life and death. When she recovered consciousness her first question was of Eric.

She was told that he had not gone to Russia, but had been reinstated, and that things were as ever between him and Sir Arthur.

As she lay there through her slow recovery, she thought of him, day in, day out, until she was almost ashamed at the manner in which he occupied her thoughts.

"I wonder," she murmured aloud. "Did he really love me—poor Eric?" A vivid blush suffused her face as she heard herself repeat his name, and it deepened as a voice alongside her said:

"He did, my child." She glanced up in wonder, to see Sir Arthur standing by her bedside. He had come in quietly, and unnoticed.

"Oh, father, I am so miserable!" she cried, and then the tears came.

"Get well quickly, my dear," muttered Sir Arthur brokenly, "and come and comfort the boy, for he is more miserable than you."

When she was alone she gave herself up to her thoughts, and the wonderful new feeling that she experienced.

"I never knew it," she murmured. "Will he forgive me?"

Soon she was allowed to sit up in her room, and then she was strong enough to come downstairs.

She sat before a big fire in the drawing-room wrapped up in the depths of a great armchair. The door opened and Eric entered.

"Welcome downstairs, Miss Mostyn!" he exclaimed.

"And you," she replied, "you are very welcome, for I owe much to you which I can never repay."

Her fragile beauty filled him with a wondrous pity, and he knelt by her side and murmured:

"You can, Freda. Only give yourself to me, and you will far more than repay."

"I am not worthy," she whispered brokenly.

"Worthy?" he whispered back. "Why, dear, you are far more worthy of happiness than I. Freda, darling, I love you."

Her downcast eyes looked up for a moment into his, and in that brief space he read all that he desired. Tenderly he placed his arms round her and kissed her on the lips.

E. Newton Bungey.

Your Editor Chats.

Mr. H. Peacock, of 149, Sefton Street, Southport, carries off the guinea offered for what I considered the best solution of the second Unsolved Love Problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard." Judging by the number of replies received, I gather that these problems are a great success, and I am sure you will all be glad to hear that another one, making the fifth of the series, will appear next week. In the same number I shall announce the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret."

And now a few words as to our Christmas Number. I hope nobody will accuse me of blowing my own trumpet when I state that it is the finest Christmas number that I have ever helped to produce. This I may say without exaggeration, for I have, in company with my staff, spent many hours in its preparation, with the result that I have got together as excellent a production as I possibly could. All your favourite writers will contribute to it, as well as W. Pett Ridge, John K. Prothero, and others. There will be competitions with valuable prizes offered, and there will be the first instalment of a grand new serial.

This will be from the pen of Blanche Eardley, whom readers will remember as the author of "The Bond Between." The title of the serial will be "Dupes of Destiny," and it is a most striking romance. The authoress has exerted her best powers in this story, and it is destined to be one of the finest romances that *Short Stories* has ever had. I should recommend everyone to read "Dupes of Destiny," for exciting episodes follow each other in rapid succession, and the plot of the story is an exceptionally strong one.

A lady reader, who writes in praise of our Tartan covers, wishes to know if the name of Dickson is connected with any Scottish clan. I am afraid that I cannot answer her question off hand, but perhaps some of my readers North of the Tweed might be able to volunteer information.

Your Editor.

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THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

MY LAST JOURNEY.

I DID not waste time in argument, but deliberately ignoring Shackell, turned abruptly to the detective.

"I am glad you are here," I said, much to his surprise; "I believe you want to see me about an accident that occurred in the quarry up Tuttle Hill? If you will lead the way I will follow you; it is impossible to talk here."

He moved away with a puzzled look. I followed him. Shackell went into the office and wrote out a lengthy telegram. Thank goodness, the wire would not reach Templeton until he arrived at his destination. The train was an express and did not stop until it reached the Central Station, Manchester.

"Now," I said quietly to the detective; "how do we stand?"

"You're wanted in regard to what happened this morning, miss. If you'll come with me quietly, it will make things easier for both of us."

"Have you a warrant for my arrest?" I returned; "if so I should like to see it."

"You're only making matters worse for yourself by talking. It's my duty to warn you that anything you say will be used——"

I interrupted him unceremoniously.

"It is your duty, first of all, to read the warrant; without that warrant you'll be committing an illegal act in trying to detain me."

"The warrant will be shown in good time," he said sullenly.

"That means you haven't it," I said triumphantly, "so you can do nothing."

"I can follow you, miss; also," he grinned maliciously, "I can have you detained at the police-station, as a suspicious character."

"You need not do that," I answered quickly. "I prefer your first proposal; you can follow me; I shall be glad of your protection. In fact"—Shackell's figure showed at the top of the steps leading from the signal box—"in fact, I claim it. That man"—I pointed to Harrington—"has threatened to murder me, as he has murdered others. Ask him how Sir Herbert Masterman met with his death, ask him——"

Harrington, gathering something of the conversation, interposed:

"I give this girl in charge," he said, "for the attempted murder of Rigby Starr."

"And I demand that you shall take this man in custody for the attempted murder of Sidney Ilford, who, not an hour ago was brutally attacked by him in my presence, on the Coventry Road. At this moment Ilford lies there, suffering—perhaps dying—you must send help to him, if necessary, I will go myself to the police station and demand that he shall be fetched. His evidence will bear out mine."

The detective seemed nonplussed. I guessed Shackell had employed him in the hope that his appearance on the scene would insure my collapse. Remembering the terror a limb of the law usually inspires in the feminine breast, he had judged I should be ready to make terms, under the threat of arrest. My present attitude was quite unlooked for. The detective—his name was Alfred Smithers—realising that the affair was a more complicated one than he had at first supposed, assumed an official air.

"The two of you had better come with me to the station. The inspector can sift your charges and act upon them as he thinks best."

"Meantime Sidney Ilford is to be left to die? For shame," I turned on Smithers fiercely, "while you are arguing over red tape and official procedure, he is suffering. At any rate send someone to help him. There"—I pointed to a cab just arrived at the station to wait for the next train—"send that man to the spot I describe, with instructions to find Ilford and bring him back to the police-station."

For a moment the detective hesitated, he was not a man of quick thought or prompt action; the next, he whistled to the driver and gave him his instructions.

"Drive to the police-station and tell the inspector to send a man with you to the plantation just past the canal bridge, on the Coventry Road. By all accounts there's been a fight there and a man has been hurt. Now then, please"—he turned to me—"we'll get on to the station ourselves."

"It's absurd to bring me along," protested Shackell; "the girl's telling a cock and bull story; it's a mere quibble on her part to gain time. I've an appointment I must keep. I'll call in at the station later."

"The appointment must wait, Mr. Shackell. You must come with me to the station. If the girl is telling lies, all the easier for you to prove the truth of what you say. Come along, sir, sharp's the word."

He laid his hand on the other's arm as he spoke. In the dim light of the station lamps I saw Harrington Shackell wince at the touch. His face paled, his square jaw relaxed. For a second a glint almost of terror flickered in his eyes. Then he regained his self-control.

"I'm ready," he said; "but you're making the biggest mistake of your life all the same."

"I'm prepared to abide by the consequences, sir," returned Smithers drily, and directed our steps from the station into the road beyond.

The lights of the town shone faintly through the darkness; the road loomed black as night before us. There was not a soul to be seen; not a sound to be heard. The wheels of the station cab had passed into the distance; we three—strange trio—seemed enveloped in a stillness deep and profound. Suddenly Shackell lagged behind.

"My bootlace has come unfastened," he said, and stooped down as if to do it up.

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The next moment Smithers was staggering under the weight of a heavy blow, aimed from the back, and Shackell running swiftly down the road, was passing rapidly out of sight.

Smithers recovered himself fairly quickly, but not soon enough to overtake his assailant.

"He might have killed me," he muttered savagely; "I'll be even with him for it, I'll swear. Now then"—he turned to me sharply—"you say you saw him assault this man, Ilford. Are you prepared to swear to it?"

"Yes, but not now. Listen a minute"—I leant towards him in the darkness and spoke with all the earnestness, all the eloquence I could command. "You've made one mistake to-night, if you're not careful you'll make another. Shackell is one of a gang of swindlers; and I have interfered with their schemes. I have prevented them, so far, from carrying out a plot, far reaching in its consequences. They planned, first to ruin, then to murder Sir Noel Masterman, as they murdered his cousin, the late Sir Herbert; I heard Shackell confess to the murder, and when the time comes, I shall be ready to swear to the truth of what I say. Shackell has for the time being escaped you, but, follow my advice and you will be able to put your hand on him when you choose.

"To-night the head of the gang, the cleverest scoundrel of them all, is arriving at Manchester, with Sir Noel Masterman. Come with me and I will prove the truth of what I say. Come, and you will hold in the hollow of your hand the whole gang. Rigby Starr, who is here, dangerously ill, Templeton, whom you will meet at Manchester, and Shackell, whom you will eventually trace, by watching the others."

"And who are you to know so much of the business of the gang?" he asked.

"I was engaged as typine in their office at Great St. Helen's. They were apparently a most respectable firm, and I had no suspicions until I overheard a conversation in which Shackell confessed to the murder of Sir Herbert Masterman. The plot against his heir, Sir Noel—the man to whom I am engaged—was arranged. They had induced Sir Noel to sign a paper, by means of which, while he was abroad, they could administer his estate. I rushed from my hiding-place and snatched the paper from them. Since then they have persecuted me, tracking me from place to place, striving to entrap, to imprison me—even to take my life. But I have defeated them; I have defied them; in spite of everything I kept, and I still keep, the papers safe."

I took the precious document from its resting-place, close to my heart, and held it for Smithers to examine. He struck a match and peered at it suspiciously.

"In the meantime what has become of Sir Noel himself?"

"It was some time before I could get in communication with him," I answered. "My letters and telegrams were intercepted; at last, however, he received a letter from me stating what had happened, and telling him where I was. A meeting was arranged between us, and then, *then* at the last moment things went wrong. I fell into the hands of one of Templeton's agents—this very Sidney Ilford that Shackell attacked—and he, my lover, was decoyed by Templeton himself. Since then they have dragged him from place to place, drugging him until he lost his reason, disguised him until even I—the woman he loves—could not recognise him. Yesterday they brought him here, to the house on the hill above the quarry."

"You know this as a fact?"

"I can prove it. Ilford will substantiate all I say." Then without pausing, I told him all I had seen, all I had discovered. How Noel had escaped from the house into the quarry and how Shackell, pursuing him, had induced him to return.

"And now, to-night, Templeton has taken my lover to Manchester, there to hand him over to the safe keeping of another of the gang. Ilford told me so himself. Shackell overhearing us, attacked him in revenge."

"What brought you here?" asked the detective. "Why did you not go straight to the police-station?"

"I wanted to stop Shackell from warning Templeton that his plans were discovered. This station is the nearest place from which to send a wire—after the post office is shut. The train left Birmingham at 8.40, if I could reach the signal box before Shackell I could prevent him warning Templeton before the train left Birmingham. It was a race for life almost, a race I won. I held the wires until the train had left—the train that took Templeton and the man I love to Manchester."

"To whom did you telegraph?" persisted Smithers.

"To friends in Northampton, instructing them to wire to the police at Manchester, to meet the express and shadow Templeton and his companion until further orders."

The detective eyed me keenly.

"What do you propose doing next?" he asked. "Supposing I dropped the charge against you for the present."

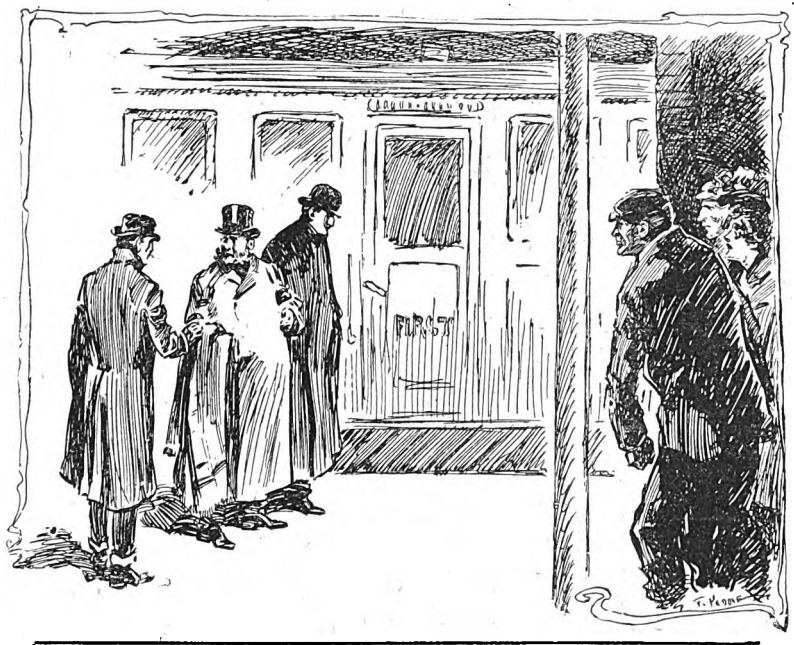
"I shall take a special trian," I replied, "and go with you to Manchester, in time to save my sweetheart and arrest Templeton.

"Come," I urged, "why should you hesitate? You lose nothing by coming, and stand to gain a great deal. On my own responsibility I will promise you a hundred pounds. Sir Noel is wealthy, and not likely to grudge any money to the man who helps me."

"And who's to pay for the special?" he asked, half persuaded.

"I will. I have notes here that will more than meet the expense." He still hesitated, and, losing patience, I pushed my last argument.

"If you take me to the inspector you'll have to confess that



Templeton and Noel, pale and haggard, came up the platform together. The detective touched the former on the arm, saying, "A partner of Harrington Shackell, I believe?"

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Shackell has escaped. I shall tell him the whole story and insist he sends someone down to Manchester. As likely as not he'll choose another man, and you'll lose all the reputation of a clever capture. Don't be a fool."—I shook him in my impatience—"can't you see the sense of what I say?"

He allowed himself to be persuaded, influenced, perhaps by the seductive crackle of the packet of bank notes, which, like the document, I had withdrawn from hiding. We hurried to the station, where, backed up by Smithers' influence, the station-master was induced to let me have a "special." I handed him the two halves of a £100 note, and, reading surprise in his face, stopped all controversy as to change, by telling him to hold the balance until the next day, when I or Mr. Smithers, the detective, would call.

"We're bound to reach Manchester just behind the Birmingham express," said Smithers, when the engine was under weigh. He was roused to action by the general excitement. "Can you do it?" he asked the engine driver.

"It will be a near thing," replied the man, "but, saving accidents and stoppages, if we get a clear line, I'll just be able to get her in, but only just."

Close on the words I jumped into the carriage, followed by Smithers. The whistle sounded, screaming wildly through the night, the engine, slowly at first, with conscious dignity, steamed ahead. We had started on the journey, a journey that might end the chapter of my troubles or prove the beginning of another and a sadder one.

Now that he was committed to a definite course of action, the detective grew alternately enthusiastic and pessimistic as to the wisdom of the step he had taken. I had once more to recount the story of my engagement to Noel, my employment at the office in Great St. Helens, my discovery of the true nature of the business transacted therein.

The astute reader will have noticed I made several omissions in my first account of the matter.

I did not mention that I had taken a packet of banknotes, as well as the document, from Templeton's table, and for very sufficient reasons. I could explain much and gain credence for much of my story from Smithers, but once include the fact that I had taken the notes—no matter for what motive—and all hope of his assistance would have ended. Theft is theft in the eyes of the police; justification of the act may be proved later, before a magistrate or judge, but it does not come within their province.

I had also departed from the strict letter of the word, when I said I had told my friends in Northampton to wire the Manchester Police. The same difficulty would have arisen with them, as might even now arise with Smithers. Templeton would accuse me of stealing the notes and my case against him for the time being would collapse. As a matter of fact I had wired to Jim Goodman, begging him to telegraph to a reliable man—I knew he had friends in Manchester—to meet the express at the Central Station. Failing to see me on the platform, they were to follow Templeton and wire results to Jim, who would telegraph back to me at the post office. I felt sure the little groom would help me; for Maggie's sake, if not for mine, he would do his best to save me and Noel.

As the train rushed through the darkness, I decided on my plan of action. I would tell Smithers to keep an eye on Templeton while I, with the help of Jim's friends, would make a dash for Noel. As we neared our destination Smithers grew restive and perturbed.

"You are prepared to swear that this man, Templeton, connived at the murder of Sir Herbert?"

"I am."

"Then," said the detective slowly, "I shall take Templeton to the station on suspicion, founded on your information. You will have to repeat what you say to the inspector."

I nodded a readiness I was far from feeling.

No one could play a better game of bluff than the senior partner. Once let Smithers mention my name—and the case was lost. It was useless to hope that Noel would recognise me and substantiate my statement. If he were sufficiently himself to do that, he would have refused to go with Templeton at all

I should have to rely on Jim's friends and my own audacity.

"Whatever happens," I said, "don't lose sight of Templeton. He's a clever man and will have a dozen explanations on the tip of his tongue. Believe them or not as you like, *but don't lose sight of him.*"

"No fear of that," said Smithers; "I've no fondness for a wild goose chase, I assure you. Someone's got to be nabbed this journey, I can tell you that!" and he glanced viciously towards me.

About twenty miles from Manchester we put on speed, flashing along the lines, that gleamed like silver in the clear, cold night, rushing past hedges, fields, homesteads, and orchards with frightful velocity.

"He's sighted the express," said Smithers, and craned anxiously out of the window.

A shrill whistle sounded from the distance, trumpeting defiance. Our engine answered the challenge with a triumphant call, and dashed on through the night. I clung to the slings at the window, and my heart, my soul, my whole being concentrated in the cry upon my lips.

"Make haste! Make haste! Make haste!"

As we neared the station we slackened our pace, our imagination, tortured beyond control, saw the express draw up ahead of us by minutes; pictured the sleek figure of the senior partner, leading my lover from the station to some place, secret and remote, a place where, bereft of health, he would slowly, surely die. I stretched out longing arms to clasp him, impotent hands to draw him back.

"Noel! Noel! my darling, I am coming." The words broke from my lips, as for an instant I seemed to see my lover's face, feel the regard of his dear eyes. Then it passed from me—I was staring at Smithers' stolid countenance!

With a last defiant shriek the engine ran into the station. Barely waiting till we had stopped, I jumped to the platform, and, rushing to an official, asked if the express had come in.

He pointed to the opposite platform; the train had been in a minute, at least, the crowd of passengers already lessening. Signing to Smithers to follow, I hastened across the bridge and down the stairs. As I gained the platform, two men advanced, glancing at me observantly. They seemed hurriedly to compare notes, then came close to where I stood, as if waiting for me to speak.

"You were sent here by Jim Goodman?" I asked.

"That's so, miss," answered the elder of the two, a square-shouldered, brawny-looking person, who suggested a professional pugilist.

"Tell me what you want done, and me and my mate will carry it through."

I nodded comprehension, and searched the platform eagerly for Noel and the senior partner.

Smithers, at my elbow, looked apprehensive, almost suspicious, as the time went by without a sign or token that I had found them. At last, just as doubt had changed to fear, Templeton, benevolent as ever, came into view.

His arm linked in Noel's, he accommodated his steps to the other's dragging pace, regarding him with a perfect simulation of sympathy.

Noel, no longer with the disguising beard and moustache, but, his face pale and haggard, was strangely altered, and his eyes wore a vacant, stupid look.

I called the more sturdy of my assistants to attention.

"You see that man," I pointed to Noel, "leaning on the stout person's arm? When I give the signal, I want you and your friend to seize hold of him, and take him outside the station, put him in a cab, and wait till I join you. There will be a row, I have no doubt, but you mustn't mind that. Follow my instruction, and I'll see you don't lose, whatever happens."

"What about the stout party, miss?"

"Take no notice of him, my friend"—I pointed to the detective—"will see to him. He belongs to the police," I added softly, "and he thinks you do, too, don't forget." The big man smiled, and chuckled understanding, repeating the message to his comrade.

"Now then, Mr. Smithers," I cried excitedly, "there's your man. "Look—coming towards us, with Sir Noel—

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that is Sir Noel—leaning on his arm. Templeton? Of course it's Templeton, the head of the gang, who murdered Herbert Masterman; now's your time"—and I gave the renowned Smithers a gentle push.

"Richard Templeton, of Great St. Helen's? I think," said the detective, touching the senior partner lightly on the arm.

"That's my name," was the quiet reply. "Who are you, and what is your business?"

For answer, the detective handed him a card, bearing his name—and describing his calling.

"I believe you are a partner of Mr. Harrington Shackell?"

"Yes." Templeton's face whitened, but his self-control remained unshaken.

"Doubtless you can furnish us with certain information respecting Mr. Shackell. An attempt has been made on the life of a man named Sidney Ilford, in which your partner is concerned."

"Does Ilford himself accuse my partner?"

Smithers paused. "He is not yet in a condition to be examined," he replied slowly. "This lady"—he motioned towards me, hiding behind the substantial figure of Jim's friend—"this lady was an eye-witness of the affair. Miss Gillespie, please come forward."

This of course let the cat out of the bag, with a vengeance. I did not wait for Templeton's reply, "That lady is a thief, who stole money when in my employment," but gave my friends the signal to join in.

The platform was empty—save for our little group—not even an official was in sight, the place for the moment deserted.

"Now," I whispered, "quick!" and, darting like a flash across the platform, and out of the station, left Jim's friends to follow on with Noel.

They managed the business in a masterly fashion. The brawny gentleman, I afterwards heard, occupied himself with Templeton, rolling the senior partner over, much as a big dog serves an impertinent puppy, while his young friend collared poor Noel and half-led, half-carried him to where in a frenzy of impatience I waited with a cab.

"Get in quick," he cried, bundling first me, then my lover, into the vehicle, "my pal's having a row with the 'tec, it will mean a night's lodging for him in a cell, I'm thinking. However, you can see to that to-morrow; where shall he drive to, miss?"

"To some hotel," I answered. "I don't mind which. Tell him to hurry, he must get away before the others see us."

With a nod, he gave the man the necessary directions, "Blank's Hotel will suit you," he said. "I shall look you up to-morrow, and tell you about Sam. Good-night, miss," and he walked off.

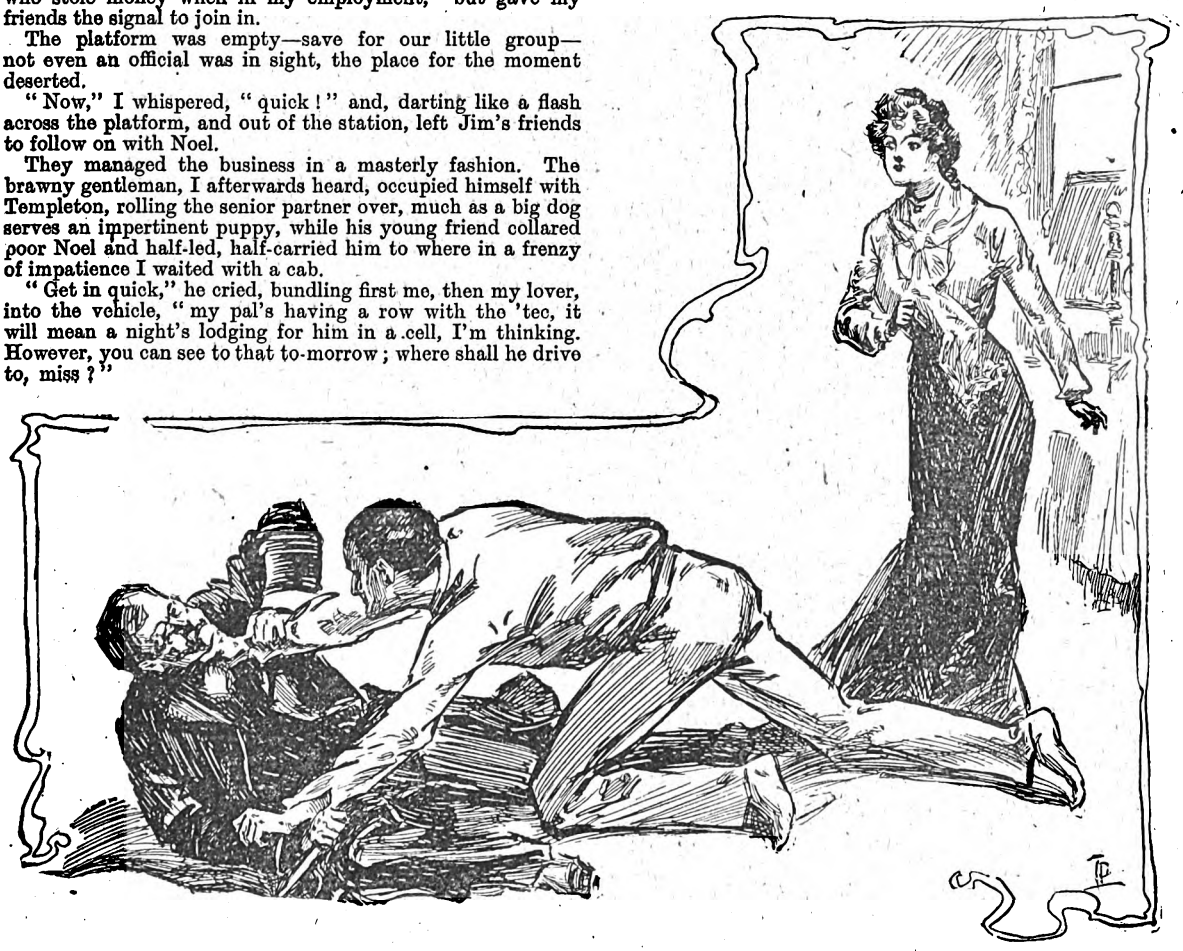
For a moment I felt I could not let him go, I had risen to call him back, to appeal to him to stay, but he had disappeared already from sight. I was left to make my last fight for life and liberty, alone! Noel, dull and impassive, drugged into a state of indifference, strange and pitiable to witness, could take no part in what ensued. It rested with me to hold our enemies at bay until—until—he became once more the Noel I knew and loved.

The cab drove rapidly along the road, and turning round a side street, drew up at a quiet-looking place, bearing the legend, "Blank's Hotel."

I paid cabby his fare, and induced Noel to accompany me up the steps. He was in a state of semi-stupor, and I had difficulty to make him realise what I wanted him to do.

The hotel people regarded both of us with surprise, not to say suspicion. I got over that, however, by announcing Noel's name and station.

"Sir Noel Masterman is recovering from an illness," I explained, "and is going abroad. We should have gone on



Noel grappled with Harrington Shackell, and hurled him to the ground.

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to Liverpool to-night but he could not stand the fatigue, so we decided to break the journey here."

We were shown to a comfortable suite of rooms, and, having established Noel in an arm-chair by the fire, I summoned a messenger and sent him for the nearest doctor.

It was some little time before the medico made his appearance, and Noel had shown signs of feverish excitement, infinitely more alarming than his previous insensibility. I told the doctor briefly what had occurred.

"Sir Noel has been stopping with some people whom I suspect of foul play. In my belief they have administered some strong opiate to him. That is the only way I can account for his appearance."

The doctor made a close and careful scrutiny, and at last gave it as his opinion that Noel was suffering from the action of a powerful drug, well-known in Eastern countries, but little used in England.

"Its effects are very marked, but the action is not lasting. The patient becomes alternately excited and morose, his mind, for the time being, is disordered, and is incapable of connected thought."

"He seems to have lost the power of recognition," I said, with a catch in my voice. "Will his memory come back?"

"As the drug wears off, his memory will return. There will be, I hope, some slight improvement by to-morrow morning if he has a good night's rest. I will send round a draught that should insure some hours of healthy sleep, but"—the doctor spoke impressively—"on no account must he be disturbed. If he is suddenly roused, the result might be disastrous to his mental health."

"Nothing shall wake him," I answered earnestly. "I will sit up with him all night."

The doctor suggested I might like a nurse, but I had learnt by bitter experience, the risk I ran from trusting strangers, and gave a decided negative to the proposal.

By the time the draught arrived, and Noel, dozing on the sofa, had been induced to swallow it, it was close on two o'clock. I made up the fire, and, drawing a chair close to the couch, commenced my vigil.

In his sleep Noel's face had regained something of its wonted expression. The mouth had fallen into the tender lines I knew so well, the brow was smooth, the cheeks had lost their ashen pallor. The tears sprang to my eyes as I watched him. How greatly he had suffered since that day—how long ago—when he bade me farewell in the office at Great St. Helen's.

What strange and terrible things had happened! All the sorrow of the past weeks came back to me. But—the thought gave me courage to endure what ever else might come upon me—at last we were together—my sweetheart and I! Changed he was, so changed from the tender lover I had known, that it was pain to hear him speak; but that would pass away. Soon, very soon, the cloud would lift from his dear eyes. To-morrow—did not the doctor say—to-morrow?—he would know me once again. I dare not face the thought that the insensibility might still continue. To-morrow, if not to-night, we should be traced, and spurred on by the enmity of Templeton, Smithers might arrest me. No use for me to plead I was defending Noel's rights, when I took the notes, if Noel could not substantiate my story. I set my teeth, and vowed, that come what might, nothing should separate me from my lover, and yet what chance had I against them all? How could I hope to hold my own against them? I rested my head beside his on the cushion, and the tears, unchecked, fell from my tired eyes. I had so longed for Noel—for a touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. I had so hungered for his help and his protection, and now, now—I had found him, he did not know the woman who had dared so greatly for his sake.

After awhile, the tears stopped, I felt weak and tired, too tired to lift my head. Against my will, against my inclination, my eyes closed. Sleep, catching me unawares, threw her cloak of silence round about me. I slipped into a slumber, sound and deep.

I woke with a sense of apprehension and alarm. The fire had lost its ruddy glow, and smouldered, a dull, black heap in the grate. The lamp burnt dimly, the air felt raw and chill. Suddenly I remembered with a thrill of self-reproach, that I had forgotten to lock the door. It stood ajar, doubtless that accounted for the draught. I rose from my seat to cross the room, and shut and bolt the door.

As I stood drowsy, and with eyes yet dim from sleep, a heavy hand clasped me by the arm; I was pushed, slowly but surely back into the chair.

I did not cry out, the doctor's warning against rousing Noel suddenly from his sleep, set a seal upon my lips. Looking up I gazed at the face of my assailant, silent and grim he stood before me, his grip tightening upon my arm, his eyes met mine.

"Shackell!" The name broke from me in a hoarse whisper.

"The notes," he said slowly, and bent nearer, "the notes, or——" He raised his right arm, and I caught the flash of steel. I pointed to a table by the window, and signed that he would find them in the drawer. I reckoned on his falling into the trap, and leaving me, to seek the money. In which case I could have rung the bell and summoned the night porter.

"And the document," he asked again, "the power of attorney?"

I motioned once more towards the table. For a moment he hesitated, then with a sudden jerk pulled me up on to my feet.

"Come and find them," he said, and dragged me to the table. Noel gave a slight stir, as if rousing. Instinctively I put my finger to my lip.

"Don't wake him," I whispered; "for Heaven's sake don't wake him."

"Give me the notes and the paper, then," was the reply.

Thus urged, I ransacked the table drawer, turning over the contents in order to gain time. The paper and the notes for once had left my possession. I had slipped them under Noel's pillow, that he might find them there when he woke—to consciousness and understanding.

Had I still retained them, I doubt not I should have yielded them to Shackell. Weighed against Noel's recovery they sank into insignificance. He could recall the paper so soon as he recovered, and his recovery—partially at least—was hoped for the next morning. As things were, however, it was impossible for me to give them up, I dare not run the risk of waking Noel; the penalty of disturbing him would be too great.

"They are gone," I said at last, "someone must have taken them."

"Who could have taken them?" he jeered, and tightened his hold upon my arm.

"You came in without rousing me; someone else may have done the same thing. Perhaps Templeton himself has been here."

"Drop that," he said impatiently, "Templeton's not been within a yard of the place. You have the papers somewhere, and you've got to give them up, or——" He glanced significantly at the couch.

"Wake him if you choose," I said defiantly, for all my fear; "but you'll be the first to regret it if you do. If he's disturbed he'll be like a madman; there'll be no quieting him. The place will be roused, and you'll be discovered."

He knew as well as I the truth of what I said, and the reflection goaded him to fury.

"Give them up," he said, still speaking in a low, hoarse whisper, "or I'll take them from you."

"They are not on me," I replied.

"That's a lie, you always carry them about with you. Give them to me——" Maddened at my resistance, he seized me by the throat, forcing me against the wall. His eyes blazed into mine, his mouth tightened into the line of hate I knew so well. Into his face there crept the look of murder I had seen it wear on the day he had killed Sir Herbert.

He raised his right hand, and the flash of steel came between me and the light. He would kill me, and then, blind fool, he would discover it was all in vain. I tried to stop him, tried to clutch at his wrist, strove to speak, to scream, but the iron

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grip of his fingers at my throat choked me; my feeble strength was powerless against his.

Was I to die? Was this to be the end of all my struggles? My eyes turned despairingly toward Noel; I would have waked him without compunction, if I could. But I was powerless—and he slept on.

Throwing myself forward, I managed to drop upon my knees, but the alteration in my attitude did little for me. With a muttered execration, Shackell swore that he would finish matters once and for all. His arm shot up, another moment and the knife—the pitiless, cruel knife, would descend—another moment——

Sudden as a flash of light a tall figure launched itself between us, and, grappling with Shackell, hurled him to the ground.

"Noel! Noel!" I screamed, half in anguish, half in triumph—and flying to the bell, pealed it again and yet again.

The room filled as in an instant with strange faces. A babel of cries and screams rang through the place. The floor seemed to give way beneath me, I was falling, falling—and then two strong arms caught and held me, and a voice, my lover's voice, bade me look up.

And I knew as his eyes met mine that my journey was over—the pursuit of Sara had ended at last!

* * * *

I always have to add a sort of postscript when telling my adventures, and now when, for the first time they are in print, I suppose I must do the same. Noel did not soon regain his normal health, the sudden spurt of strength, physical and mental—which my danger had called forth, left him in a terrible state of nervous depression. He was haunted by the fear that we should again be separated, and nothing would satisfy him but an immediate marriage.

I conceded the point, and, waiving my trousseau, became his wife—with Maggie and Jim at my wedding to wish us joy.

The last named faithful couple soon followed our example, and set up housekeeping on Noel's wedding gift.

The firm of Templeton & Co., long since dissolved, met with a portion, at least, of their deserts. Shackell was sent to prison for seven years, as a result of his attack on me, but in regard to the murder of Sir Herbert, he escaped all penalty.

The evidence, in the opinion of experts, was not strong enough to convict! There were, these clever lawyers said, no proofs of his guilt.

As if his own words were not sufficient to hang a man twice over!

The senior partner escaped to the Continent where he continued his nefarious schemes, until recently, when he was arrested by the French police and sent to prison.

Sidney Ilford, quite recovered from Shackell's brutal attack, has returned to a more reputable way of living since the break-up of the gang. Noel gave him the £100 I had promised at Nuneaton, and another £50 besides.

Rigby Starr has, for the present, disappeared from view; one day he will doubtless reappear—in the annals of the police court.

Lesbia Moran and her faithful Arthur reaped the reward of their constancy. Careful nursing restored to her some measure of health, though she will never be strong again. They still live in Birmingham, and Arthur is the manager of a flourishing business. He obtained his wife's fortune with very little trouble from his uncle, Truscot being too clever a man not to know when he was beaten. He wrote me a charming letter of congratulation on my marriage.

For the rest, I am the happiest woman imaginable and—a last word—I am even reconciled to my red hair—for Noel admires it!

The End.

NEXT WEEK—

. . In Our Grand Xmas Number . .

STARTS—

"DUPES OF DESTINY."

By BLANCHE EARDLEY. Author of "THE BOND BETWEEN."

The Sad Tale of Two Lives Made Wretched.

"DID she really love him?" He had just finished reading her letter, and there was a numb feeling about his heart as he asked himself the question. She expressed herself in such precise, formal terms, that to his ardent temperament her love—if love it were—seemed a mean thing, pale and cold.

"You say you have at last won a position, and ask me to join you at once. Are you quite sure that you truly want me; or is it only that you desire to remain true to the words you spoke when we parted one year ago? Am I still necessary to your happiness? Reflect well before you answer. To form a life partnership is a serious thing, and should not be done without much consideration."

These words concluded her letter. For a year he had lived a lonely life in a strange land, and in that time, by dint of hard work, had become a leading young solicitor in a rising town. How he had loved the girl who had remained, and who had written him so unsatisfactory a letter! But it was all over now. He could never think of linking himself for life to an icicle.

The girl waited in vain. She never received an answer to her letter; but no one ever knew her anguish, for she suffered in silence. Unlike him, she sought no consolation.

Years afterwards, she saw him again, and he told her a story; sad indeed, but scarcely strange. It was a common tale enough, for a wrecked life is by no means unusual.

He had quarrelled with the other woman. He had prospered, and he intended to pass the remainder of his days in comfort, in the country of his youth. All these things he told the girl, and then he dared to speak to her of a vague hope which he had for some time cherished. He spoke passionately, without careful choice of words, as men do when swayed by strong emotions. He told her how he had loved her all the long years, and that without her his "life would be lonely beyond endurance. Would she come to him even now?" In the past her seeming coldness had chilled him and driven him to do a foolish thing. But he had bitterly repented, and he realised now how blind he had been. "Take me to your heart again," he cried.

And as the girl listened her soul became filled with a great tenderness, and her eyes were moist as she thought of what might have been. But in justice to herself she felt that she could not consent to pass her life with a man so little fitted to understand her. He had thought her cold and selfish when her every thought had been for him. Something of the old-time love revived as she talked with him, but her better judgment warned her against acceding to his wishes.

Gently, with a woman's softness, she told him that the past was dead for ever, and begged him to put an end to his pleading. "Leave me," she said, "for what you ask me to do would surely make you unhappy. You are lonely now, and you think that you love me; but your love would not endure. It would die again as it died before."

And when he heard her he ceased to recall painful memories. His pride was hurt, and he was very angry. With him vanity was ever dominant, and once more he failed to appreciate the depth of her nature. He only understood that he had been refused. The woman he had desired so strongly had had the power to resist him. Deeply mortified he turned and left her. As he walked away with head erect and eyes flashing with rage, the woman was well-nigh overcome with a great yearning to call him back and clasp him in her arms. But she remained alone.

And so they parted for all time.

Oliver Fiske.

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It was Safer Not to.

She: "Now let me play you the 'Moonlight Sonata.'" He: "I beg of you don't. That thing is responsible for my having twice become engaged—inadvertently, as it were. I prefer to do it deliberately the next time."

Jealous Creature!

Kitty: "Fred called me a dream last evening." Bertha: "How funny! It was only last week Fred was telling me what awful dreams he had."

A Natural Question.

"Has that young man who wants to marry you any money?" "Money! He gave me this cluster diamond brooch studded with pearls." "Yes, I know. Has he any money left?"

He Mistook her Meaning.

Clara: "Oh, John, what lovely flowers! They look as if they had just been gathered. Why, there's a little dew upon them!" John (somewhat embarrassed): "Due upon them! Not a penny, Clara, I assure you, not a penny!"

He Knew How to Do it.

Mrs. C.: "Doctor, you were at the last illness of my eldest boy?" Doctor: "Yes." Mrs. C.: "You also tended professionally to my first husband, who died?" Doctor: "Yes." Mrs. C.: "Well, my second husband is ill and I would like you to see him through, too."

She Had No Right to Publish the Banns.

"But I can't marry you, Charlie," she said sadly. "Don't say that, darling! Oh, don't say that!" Why can't you?" "Because, Charlie, I am neither a minister nor a registrar, and have no authority." Then the soul of Charlie was quieted and a great light shone round about him.

A Very Hard World.

"Mamma," asked six-year-old Flossie one day, "if I get married will I have to have a husband like pa?" "Yes," replied the mother, with an amused smile. "And if I don't get married will I have to be an old maid like Aunt Kate?" "Yes." "Mamma"—after a pause—"it's a hard world for us women, isn't it?"

She was Disappointed.

Mr. Allstyle (gazing out of the window): "Well, I declare! If there doesn't go Brown with the woman to whom he was engaged long before his marriage. They used to say he loved——" Mrs. Allstyle (rushing to the window): "Where! Where! Let me see!" Mr. Allstyle: "There, see?" Mrs. Allstyle: (reaching the window) "Ah—pshaw—why, that's his wife!" Mr. Allstyle: "Exactly."

That Settled it.

They were fond of each other, very, and had been engaged. But they quarrelled, and were too proud to make it up. He called a few days ago at her father's house—to see the old gentleman on business, of course. She answered his ring at the door bell. Said he: "Ah, Miss Jones, I believe? Is your father within?" "No, sir," she replied; "father is not in at present. Do you wish to see him personally?" "Yes, miss," was his bluff response, feeling that she was yielding, "on very particular personal business," and he proudly turned to go away. "I beg your pardon," she called after him as he reached the lowest step, "but who shall I say called?" He never smiled again.

Couldn't Scare her.

"You are sure you won't be nervous at the altar?" said he before the wedding. "I never have been yet," replied the widow with touching modesty.

A Businesslike Suggestion.

He was looking for a rich wife and thought he was on the trail. "I love you," he said in rich, warm tones, "more than I can tell you in words." "You'd better try figures," she replied coldly, for she was not so green as she looked.

He Had Good Cause.

Stranger: "You are the only gentleman in the room." Guest: "What do you mean, sir?" Stranger: "When I tripped in the dance and went sprawling on the floor, tearing my fair partner's dress, you were the only one in the room who did not laugh." Guest: "The lady is my wife, and I paid for the dress."

She Thought they were Marriage Knots.

Pretty Passenger: "Captain, did the ship really make twenty knots every hour last night?" The Captain: "Yes, miss." Pretty Passenger: "And what do you do with so many knots?" The Captain (gruffly): "Toss 'em overboard." Pretty Passenger: "Oh, how queer! I thought the sailors had to untie them during the day."

A Wicked Confession.

"Do you mean to say you never loved any man in all your life?" asked an impertinent friend who had led Miss Oldmayde into some indiscreet confessions. "Not a single one!" replied Miss Oldmayde, emphatically. "Gracious!" exclaimed the caller, excitedly. "You don't mean to imply that you have ever loved any married men, I hope?"

Diplomacy.

"Anything wrong with the coffee this morning, John?" "No, it's good enough." "Porridge all right?" "I haven't any fault to find with the porridge." "Bacon cooked all right?" "I don't see anything wrong with the bacon." "No complaint to be made about anything?" "No." "John, I wish you would let me have a sovereign to buy some ribbons."

Did Not Love him that Much.

"Miss Gladys," said old Moneybags, "if my suit is not agreeable to you, say so frankly, but do not. I beg of you, tell me that old, old story that you will always look upon me as a brother." "Sir," replied the lovely maiden, as her eye lit up with the deathless flame of a pure young heart's deep devotion. "I do not love you well enough for a brother, but I have no objection to taking you as a husband."

Where Hubby Laughed.

Husband (kindly): "My dear, you have nothing decent to wear, have you?" Wife (with alacrity): "No, indeed, I haven't; not a thing. I'd be ashamed to be seen anywhere. My very newest party dress has been worn three times already." Husband: "Yes, that's what I told Bliffkins when he offered me two tickets for the theatre to-night. I knew if I took them they'd be wasted, so I just got one. You won't mind if I hurry off?"

A Woman's Way.

She: "Oh, don't you think Miss Browne is the nicest girl in the world?" He: "Why, yes, of course, if you think so." She: "And her eyes; oh, don't you think they are splendid?" He: "Very." She: "And hasn't she the prettiest little mouth, and the kindest, dearest face?" He: "Yes, indeed." She: "And then, isn't she graceful, and doesn't she waltz divinely?" He: "Of course she does." She: "And isn't she the sweetest, sweetest girl?" He: "Yes, indeed." She: "And don't you think she knows an awful lot; and don't you—oo-ooo-ooo t-hi-n-k—— ?" He: "Why, what's the matter, Mabel?" She: "O-h! I t-h-o-u-g-h-t y-o-u l-o-v-e-d me, Tom?" He: "Why, so I do." She: "W-e-l-l, then, how can you bear to talk so a-b-o-u-t t-h-a-t h-o-r-r-i-b-l-e o-l-d, u-g-l-y Browne girl?'

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RED TULIPS.

A Pretty Tale of Charity and Love.

"PLEASE, ma'am, will you give me one of them red tulips?"

The eager voice woke Helen from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw a little girl holding on to the iron railing with one hand, while the other pointed to a bed of red and yellow tulips waving in the sunshine.

"I can't give you one, child, for they don't belong to me," answered Helen, looking at the wistful face, over which her words brought a shadow of disappointment.

"I thought perhaps you lived in this house, or knew those who did; and I *do* want one of them flowers dreadful bad," said the girl, regarding the gay tulips with a look of intense desire.

"I wish I could give you one; but it would be stealing, you know. Perhaps, if you go and ask the owner he may let you have one—there are so many."

And having offered all the consolation in her power, Helen went on, busy with a certain disappointment of her own, which just then weighed very heavily on her girlish heart.

Half-an-hour later, as she came down the street on the opposite side, she saw the same girl sitting on a doorstep, still gazing at the tulips with hopeless admiration.

The child looked up as she approached, and recognising the pretty young lady who had spoken kindly to her, smiled and nodded so confidingly, that Helen could not resist stopping to say:

"Did you ask over there?"

"Yes, ma'am; but the girl said 'No,' and told me to clear out; so I came over here to sit and look at the flowers since I can't have none," she answered, with a patient sigh.

"You shall have some!" cried Helen, remembering how easily she could gratify the innocent longing of the poor child, and feeling a curious sympathy with all disappointed people. "Come with me, dear; there is a flower-shop round the corner, and you shall have a nosegay of some sort."

Such wonder, gratitude, and delight shone in Betty's face that Helen felt rejoiced for her small kindness.

As they walked, she questioned her about herself, and quite won her heart by the friendly interest expressed in Betty's mother, Betty's kitten, and Betty's affairs generally.

When they came to the flower-shop, little Bet felt as if she had got into a fairy tale; and when Helen gave her a pot with a blue hyacinth and a rosy tulip blooming prettily together, she felt as if a lovely fairy had granted all her wishes in the good old way.

"It's lovely! and I don't know how to thank you, miss. But mother takes in washing, and she'll love to do yours specially well, 'cause you done this for me!" cried Betty, embracing the flower-pot in one hand, and squeezing Miss Helen's with the other.

Helen promised to come and see her new friend, and, when they parted, kept turning round to watch the little figure trotting up the hill, often pausing to turn and show her a beaming face, all smiles and delight, as Betty threw her kisses, and hugged the tulip like a treasure of great price.

When she vanished, Helen said to herself, with a smile and a sigh:

"There, I feel better for that little job, and it is a comfort to know that someone has got what she wants, though it's not I."

Some weeks later, when Helen was preparing to go into the country for the summer, and wanted certain dresses cleaned, she remembered what Betty had said about her mother, and had a fancy to see how the child and her flowers prospered.

She found them in a small, poor room, hot and close, and full of washtubs and flat-irons. The mother was busy at her work, and Betty sat by the one window.

When she saw the face at the door she jumped up and clapped her hands, crying delightedly:

"Oh, mammy, it's my lady! my dear, pretty lady truly come at last!"

Such a welcome made friends of the three at once, and Mrs. Simms gladly undertook the work Helen offered.

"And how are the flowers?" asked the young lady, as she rose to go.

"Only leaves now, miss; but I take good care of 'em, and mammy says they will bloom again next Spring," answered Betty, showing her poor little garden, which consisted of the hyacinth, tulip, and one stout dandelion, blooming bravely in an old tea-pot.

"That will be a long time to wait, won't it?"

"Yes'm; but I go and take peeps at them flowers in the shop, and once the man gave me a pink that hadn't no stem. Maybe he will again, and so I'll get along," said Betty, softly touching her cheerful dandelion as if it were a friend.

"I wish you would come and see my garden, little Betty. You should pick as many flowers as you liked and play there all day long. I suppose your mother couldn't spare you for a visit, could she?"

Betty's face shone at the blissful thought; then the smile faded, and she shook her head, saying steadily:

"No, miss, I don't think she could; for she gets so tired, I like to help her by carrying home the clothes. Some other day maybe I can come."

Something in the patient little face touched Helen, and made her feel as if she had been too busy thinking of her own burden to help others bear theirs.

She longed to do something, but did not know how till Mrs. Simms showed her the way by saying, as she stroked the frizzly little head that leant against her:

"Betty thinks a heap of flowers, and seems to get lots of comfort out of 'em. She's a good child, and some day we are going to see the country—soon as ever we can afford it."

"Meantime the country must come to you," said Helen, with a happy thought shining in her face. "If you are willing, I will make a nice little plan with Betty, so she can

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have a nosegay all the time. I shall come to town twice a week, and if Betty will be at the corner of the park every Wednesday and Saturday morning at ten o'clock, I'll have a nice nosegay for her."

If she had proposed to present the child with all the sweets of a confectioner's shop, it would not have given her greater joy.

Betty could only dance a jig of rapture among the wash-tubs, and Mrs. Simms thanked Helen with tears in her eyes.

"Ain't she just like a good fairy, mammy?" said Betty, settling down in an empty clothes-basket to brood over the joyful prospect.

"No, she's an angel," answered mammy, folding her tired hands for a moment's rest when her guest had gone.

Helen heard both question and answer, and sighed to herself:

"I wish somebody else thought so."

When the first Wednesday came, Betty was at the meeting-place half-an-hour too soon.

That meeting was a pretty sight, though only an old apple-woman saw it.

Helen was half-hidden behind a great nosegay of June roses, lilies-of-the-valley, sweet jonquils and narcissus, sprays of tender green and white lilac plumes.

Betty gave one cry of rapture as she clutched it in both hands, trembling with delight, for never had she dreamt of owning such a treasure as this.

"All for me! All for me!" she said, as if it were hard to believe. "Oh, what will mammy say?"

"Run home and see. Never mind thanks. Get your posy into water as soon as you can, and come again Saturday," said Helen, as she went on, with a nod and a smile, while Betty raced home to fill every cup and plate they owned, and make a garden of the poor little room where mamma worked all day.

All through the summer, rain or shine, these two friends kept tryst, and though Helen seemed no nearer getting *her* wish, this little flower mission of hers helped her to wait.

Strangers watched the pretty girl with her nosegays, and felt refreshed by the winsome sight. Friends joked her about her little Flora, and would-be lovers pleaded in vain for one bud from her bouquets.

She found real happiness in this small duty, and did it faithfully for its own sake, little dreaming that someone was tracking her by the flowers she left behind her in the highways of her life.

For, seeing how much these fragrant messengers were to Betty and her mother, Helen fell into the way of taking flowers to others also, and never went to town without a handful to leave here and there. By some sick-bed, in a child's hand, or on a needle-woman's table.

And all unconsciously these glimpses of poverty, pain, neglect and loneliness taught her a lesson she never learnt before. For the gay girl was discovering that life was not a summer day, and she was something better than a butterfly.

When autumn came, and she returned to her home, her young friends discovered that Helen's quiet season had improved her wonderfully, for behind the belle they found a tender-hearted woman.

She took up her old life where she laid it down apparently; but to those who knew her best there was a difference now, for, in many unsuspected ways, pretty Helen was unconsciously fitting herself for the happiness that was coming to her very soon.

Betty helped to bring it, though she never guessed that her measles was a blessing to her dear lady. When Dr. Strong, finding a hot-house bouquet beside her bed, very naturally asked where it came from, Betty told all about Miss Helen, from the time of her red tulips to the fine tea-roses in her hand.

"She has lots of bunches like these sent to her, and she gives 'em to us poor folks. This one was for her to take to a splendid ball, but she kept it fresh, and came herself to give it to me. Isn't she kind?"

"Very, to you, but rather cruel to the gentlemen who hope to see her wear their gifts, for one evening at least," answered the doctor, examining the bouquet with an odd smile

"Oh, she does keep some, when they are from folks she likes. I was there one day when some violets came in with a book, and she wouldn't give me one. But I didn't care at all, for I had two great posies, all red geranium and pinks, instead.

"She likes violets, then?" and the doctor gently patted Betty's head, as if he had grown suddenly fond of her.

"I think she does, for when I went the next week, that very bunch was in the vase on her table all dead and yellow, and she wouldn't let me fling it away when I wanted to put in a rose from the bunch she gave me."

"You are a grateful little girl, my dear, and a very observing child. Now keep warm and quiet, and we'll have you again trotting off to Miss Helen in a week or so."

The doctor stole a sprig of rose geranium out of Betty's last bouquet, and went away looking as if he had found something even sweeter than that in the dingy room where his patient lay.

Next day Miss Helen had fresh violets in the vase on her table, and fresh roses blooming on her cheeks. Dr. Strong advised her not to visit Betty, as there was fever in the neighbourhood, but kindly called every day or two to let Helen know how her little friend was getting on.

After one of these calls the doctor went away, saying to himself, with an air of tender pride and satisfaction:

"I was mistaken, and judged too hastily last year. Helen is not what I thought her, a frivolous, fashionable beauty, but a sweet, sensible girl, who is tired of that empty life, and quietly tries to make it beautiful and useful in the best and truest way. I hope I read the blue eyes right, and I think I may venture to say now what I dared not say last year."

After that same visit Helen sat thinking to herself, with a face full of happiness and humility:

"He finds me improved, so I have not waited in vain; and I believe I shall not be disappointed after all."

It is evident that the doctor did venture and that Helen was not disappointed, for on the first day of June, Betty and her mother, all in their best, went to a certain church and were shown to the best seat in the gallery, where several other humble friends were gathered to see their dear Miss Helen married.

Betty was in high spirits, with yellow ribbons in her hat, and lighted up the seat like an animated rainbow.

Full of delight and importance was Miss Betty, for she had been in the midst of the festive preparations, and told glowing tales to her interested listeners while they waited for the bride.

When the music sounded, Betty held her breath and rolled up her eyes in a pious rapture.

When a general stir announced the grand arrival, she leant so far over the gallery that she would have gone head first, if her mother had not caught her legs; and when the misty white figure passed up the aisle, Betty audibly remarked:

"If she had wings, she'd look just like an angel, wouldn't she, mammy?"

She sat like a little statue all through the service; but she had something on her mind, and the moment the bridal couple turned to go, Betty was off, scrambling downstairs, dodging under people's arms, hopping over ladies' skirts, and steadily making her way to the carriage in waiting for the happy pair.

The door had just closed, when a little face, with a yellow hat surrounding it like a glory, appeared at the window.

An arm was thrust in, offering a bunch of flowers, and a breathless voice cried resolutely:

"Oh, please do let me give 'em to my lady! They bloomed a-purpose for her, and she *must* have 'em!"

Those outside saw a sweet face bend to kiss the little one, but they did not see what happened afterwards, for Helen, remembering a year ago, said, smiling:

"Patient waiters are no losers. The poor child has red tulips all her own at last."

"And I have mine," answered the happy doctor, gently kissing his young wife as the carriage rolled away, leaving Betty to retire in triumph.

Louise M. Alcott.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY:

Isolo Staunton, a criminal millionaire, who was once a convict on the Chincha Islands. He is the ruler of a kingdom under the sea, of the existence of which nobody knows. Here he forges in great number coins of every rationality. With the wealth he is amassing he intends to form a United States of South America and to make himself President.

Mercedes Staunton, his beautiful daughter, who falls in love with

Wilfrid Ellerton, a young man of whom Isolo Staunton is greatly afraid because he holds it in his power to send the millionaire back as a convict to the Chincha Islands. So Staunton secures Ellerton on board the *Isola*, his magnificent yacht, and consigns him to the Underworld. It is then given out that the young man has fallen overboard and been drowned.

Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.—The right-hand friend and confidant of Staunton. He carries out the kidnapping of Ellerton.

M. Herarra.—The viceroy of Staunton in the Underworld.

Stanislaus Smith.—A detective, who is endeavouring to find the perpetrators of the colossal coin frauds. He lives a double life as Herr de Ronski, the famous musician, but only his wife and daughter, Paula, and Arthur Dennison, a Treasury solicitor, know of this.

Derrick Kesteven.—The partner of Staunton in all his great schemes. He has a beautiful daughter, named Cora.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.—Two engaged persons who have suspicions about the unscrupulousness of Staunton.

Janet Yuill.—A nurse who is taken on board the *Isola* to tend Mercedes, who falls ill when she hears of the alleged death of Ellerton. She there meets her husband, Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and her suspicions are aroused.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

A Luncheon Party.

MERCEDES had now so completely recovered her physical health that the second nurse had been sent home, and Janet Yuill only remained in attendance on her by her own particular request.

During her convalescence she had formed an intensely strong attachment for the grave, yet gentle and beautiful, woman, whom she had first seen leaning over her bed when the light of reason dawned once more in her eyes, and it was Janet's soft voice, with its musical undertones of Scottish accent, which had welcomed her back to the world of real things.

But Janet, in addition to her affection for her lovely patient, to say nothing of the splendid terms with which Staunton had tempted her to remain, had other and deeper reasons for not leaving the *Isola*, at any rate for the time being.

Hers was one of those deep, strong woman-natures which, having once loved, can forgive anything, even dishonour, for the sake of love.

Since that terrible night on the confines of the Arctic Sea, when she had seen the snow-cap of Mount Hekla floating high up in the moon-lit sky, she had only spoken to her husband two or three times, and only once on the subject that lay nearest to their hearts.

Then, in answer to his despairing appeal, she had raised him, for the moment at least, back into the heaven which he had once shared with her by telling him that she had already forgiven him, and that, in spite of everything, she was his true wife still.

And then he had said

"I have been guilty, Janet dear, but I had repented of my crime, and I had paid bitterly for it before, it may be, the mercy of heaven brought you on board this ship; but I am in the grip of a man who never loosed his hold on what he wanted until he had done with it, and when he has done that with a man he takes good care that he shall be of no use to anyone else. Many a time I have longed to give myself up to justice and take my punishment, for it couldn't be worse than slavery like this."

"Then, why not do it, Arthur?" she had asked, "and when you are a free man again, you shall come back to me, and we will forget everything, except that we are man and wife."

"I daren't, Janet," he had answered in a frightened whisper. "I'm a prisoner for life.

"Like the others, I have more money than I can spend, and everything that man can want except honour and liberty, but to desert is death. The Señor, as they call him, never forgives. One of the officers, our second, tried to desert once, but in twelve hours he was brought back. He was kept in irons in a dark cell down below there till we got up north yonder, and then, well, I can't tell you the rest—but we never saw him again."

The conversation had been interrupted at this point by the appearance of Doctor Billaud, who, after a suspicious glance at them, had told Janet that her presence was wanted below. The next time they had met her husband had passed her a piece of twisted paper, on which she found written:

"Never be seen speaking to me alone!"

She had obeyed him, but the secret had been a heavy one for her to carry, and now that they had returned to civilisation, she had determined with all the strength of her

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resolute nature, to remain on the yacht and at any risk clear up the mystery which surrounded the beautiful and luxurious craft. It was for this reason that she had, as it were, drawn a bow at a venture, and told Captain Iddison about seeing the snowcap of Hekla during the supposed voyage from Leith to the Riviera. It was indeed a very important piece of news.

The lunch on board the yacht the day following the holding of the council of war, was a very different function from that at which the "Señor President" had entertained the South American delegates.

That, it must be confessed, had degenerated into something of the nature of an orgie, at least on the part of two or three of the eminent diplomatists.

This was as dainty and brilliant as money and taste could make it, and, moreover, it was graced by the presence of semi-royalty in the presence of the Grand Duke of Warschaua, whom Kesteven had met in the course of a mutual plunge at the tables in which his Highness had lost rather more than he could afford; while Kesteven, playing with the sublime confidence inspired by the possession of superfluous millions, had twice broken the bank.

They had met before in Paris, Vienna, and Venice, and half the smartest pleasure resorts in Europe, with the result that Miss Cora had taken a very understandable liking to him, since he was everything that the ideal Grand Duke in the later twenties might be expected to be—clean, healthy, fairly good-looking, a well-bred gentleman, and a thorough sportsman.

On his part his Highness had found very little difficulty in persuading himself that, of all the maidens whose mammas would have so gladly given them to share his name and dignity, this bright and beautiful American girl was distinctly the most desirable.

Her prospective millions may have had something to do with the preference, but that was only in grand-ducal human nature.

Be that as it may, his Highness Eugene Alexis of Warschaua formed one of the principal reasons for what Kesteven had said to Staunton after the council meeting the day before.

After the presentation had taken place before lunch, Staunton could not resist taking his partner aside and saying:

"Well, my dear fellow, I must confess that I admire your taste and judgment. Still, one can hardly help seeing the grim humour of the situation—a grand-ducal coronet, gilded by our own manufacture of the necessary article! I wonder what he would think of the millions which, of course, Cora will take him, if he knew where they came from?"

"It would be a mighty cold day for anyone who told him," replied Kesteven carelessly, as he turned away towards the little group of which his Highness and Lady Medcalf-Mears formed the centre.

Shortly afterwards the Duke began to compliment Staunton on the beauty of the *Isola*. He was a keen yachtsman himself, and owned the fastest and smartest schooner in the Bay, and, like all good sailors, looked upon this floating palace rather as a luxurious means of transit than as a real ship. Still, for what she was, he could not help admiring her, and he expressed his admiration very frankly.

"Now isn't he just good," whispered Cora to Mercedes, as she put her arm through hers and drew her away from the others. "Until I met him I had no idea they raised men like that at the other end of this effete old Europe."

"Good?" echoed Mercedes, looking up and laughing. "He seems delightful. I think I shall have to ask papa to find a nice Grand Duke for me, and then, when its all settled, you and I can be Grand Duchesses together. Don't you think we should make a very creditable pair?"

"Yes, dear, why, of course we should," replied Cora softly, "but I don't think I'd quite like to go in front of you at a Court presentation. Still, it'll be time enough to talk about coronets when they're offered us. The Grand Duke hasn't *exactly* laid his at my feet, you know. And now, tell me how you liked the concert. Isn't Paula de Ronski just too lovely for anything?"

She changed the subject from the one that interested her most for a very good reason. She was a good, honest, tender-hearted girl, utterly innocent of the nefarious fashion in which the millions which were to be hers had been won, and it hurt her sorely to hear poor Mercedes speak with such careless ignorance of the fate which had overtaken her own lover.

"Yes," replied Mercedes, looking up at the blue hills beyond the town, "do you know, Cora, that when she was singing that love-song I found myself thinking of something, I don't know what it could have been, that seemed to have been in my life once and then gone out of it again.

"Of course it can only have been a fancy of mine, and, after all, if we cannot dream while we are listening to such exquisite music as that there can't be very much of it in our souls.

"Did I tell you, Cora, that papa is going to try and get the de Ronskis to come and play and sing for us on board?"

"No," exclaimed Cora, "now that is a gorgeous idea! But do you think they'll come? They've only just begun their season here and——"

"Oh, I hope so," Mercedes interrupted. "That nice Mr. Dennison, Captain Iddison's friend, who seems to know everybody, confided to me this morning that he knows the great musician very well, and so I took him at once to papa and made him promise that he would do everything he could to help us. Wasn't that lucky?

"And if they do come we are going to have dinner in the Bay and then, as soon as the moon has got up, we shall steam out to sea and have our concert on deck. What do you think of that?"

"Think?" cried Cora, stopping short in her walk, "I guess you'll have to give me time for that, dear. The idea's quite too splendid to get a grip of all at once. Ah, Mr. Dennison, we were just talking about you. Mercedes has been telling me about the concert plan, and how you so kindly said you'd help with the Professor. Now, do—won't you?"

"Everything I can, I assure you, Miss Kesteven," he replied, and then, as he looked at Mercedes and her lovely eyes met his, joining Cora's in pleading the cause of the concert, for the first time in his professional career a thrill, not of remorse, but of keen regret passed through his soul.

This innocent, exquisitely beautiful girl, radiant with youth and health and happiness, believing herself the heiress of honestly-won millions—this was the daughter of the man he and Mr. Smith already suspected of being, not only the greatest swindler of the age, but, if that were true, the man who must be responsible for a score of deliberate murders as well.

The idea seemed hideous to him. Then he seemed to see Paula standing in her place. It was too horrible for thought.

He dismissed it and went on:

"But may I make a suggestion?"

"Why certainly you can," exclaimed Cora impetuously. And then apologetically: "I beg your pardon, Mercedes, but I'm so struck on this concert that I'm forgetting my manners."

"Nonsense!" laughed Mercedes—and, save one, he thought he had never heard so sweet a laugh. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, please do."

"Then it is this. My friend de Ronski, like most great musicians, has his little feelings, as they say. Both he and his wife are of very good old Polish stock and so I need hardly say that he is as proud as Lucifer. He is a rich man and, if he took it into his head to say 'no' a million down would not tempt him to say 'yes.' Wherefore, if Mr. Staunton would allow you, as hostess of the *Isola*, to make his personal acquaintance first——"

"Of course I should be only too delighted," replied Mercedes with a radiant smile, "I see exactly what you mean. I must prevent papa from making what one might call a business offer to him, and just invite him and his wife and daughter in a social sort of way——"

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"To meet the Grand Duke, for instance," whispered Cora, as his Highness approached them after a brief search for her charming self.

"Duke, what do you think of this?" she went on as he joined the group.

"Of what, Miss Cora?" he inquired with a bow. "It must be something of a delightful nature if it has originated on board this floating paradise. Truthfully I have been in very like a dream since I have been on board."

His English was almost perfect, but his accent made him seem so delightfully boyish that Cora would not even have had him speak American.

Then she began to rattle off the scheme of the concert, enlarging on its splendid possibilities with such an exquisite vivacity of voice, manner, and gesture that his Highness was completely dazzled and entranced long before she had finished.

"There, now," she ended with an inimitable gesture of her hands towards him which made him want to take hold of them and kiss them, "what does your Highness think of that for an improvement on the Arabian Nights Entertainment?"

The simile was not particularly exact, but it was the only one she thought of at the moment, and, as she would have put it, "it went."

"It is almost too charming a prospect to be truthful," replied the Duke, looking at her with grave, dark brown eyes in which she saw two sparks, possibly kindled by her own. "But I have taken the liberty to come to ask you if you would take what I think you call the constitutional before lunch?" he went on with a slight motion of his arm towards her.

"Why, certainly, Duke," she laughed, taking his arm, "you'll excuse me, won't you. Mercedes?"

"Of course," smiled her hostess as they walked away. "And now, Mr. Dennison," she went on, "there is only one little difficulty that I see about this very kind offer of yours. You see, papa has got some of the old South American, in fact, the Spanish ideas, and I am half Spanish. You understand me? The difficulty is one of chaperonage, and in this hideously wicked place—ah, there is my question answered at once! Here comes my beloved Janet. She nursed me, you know, when I was so ill—though I never could find out what made me ill. She has come to tell me lunch is ready, I suppose. She is just like a mother to me. I couldn't have a better chaperon, could I, Mr. Dennison?"

"Under the circumstances, certainly not," he replied, holding out his hand as Janet approached.

"Oh, you know my Janet, do you?" exclaimed Mercedes, as they shook hands.

"Yes, Iddison introduced me. Miss Yuill was out at the Front and she nursed a lot of his men until the Company stopped calling her 'Sister' and called her 'Angel' so he tells me."

"Oh, you wicked Janet!" cried Mercedes to her blushing nurse, "and you never told me a word about all that! And so you are a heroine as well as the sweetest dear that ever was.

"Now listen, I want you to do something for me; Mr. Dennison, will you kindly tell Janet all about it? I see papa beckoning to me over there."

It did not take him very long to persuade Janet to do what Mercedes had suggested, for she, too, had begun to be troubled with fears for the safety of her darling on board this mysterious craft, and when Dennison assured her that it was entirely in her interest that he desired her to make the acquaintance of the de Ronskis she consented at once.

OUR XMAS NUMBER, ready next week, will be full of seasonable fiction.

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Treason!

The de Ronskis gave another concert that night, and, of course, everyone who could resist the fatal fascinations of the Casino went to it.

When it was over Dennison managed to get away from the party and join his friend and colleague in his private room behind the stage. As he went in de Ronski was just putting his violin tenderly to rest in its case. He looked up and said:

"Ah, my friend, is it you! I saw you and your party, and also the Señor Staunton in front. I hope you all enjoyed yourselves?"

"That goes without saying," laughed Dennison as he closed the door. "If I could say so with truth I should say that you and Madame and Mademoiselle had excelled yourselves, but not even you could do that."

"That's all right," said the other, in the voice of Mr. Smith, "but I don't suppose you came here to flatter us. Any news? I know, of course, that you have been lunching and having a general good time on board the *Isola* to-day. By the way, what a lovely girl our friend Staunton's daughter is! Francesca and Paula have both fallen in love with her, and I—well, I must confess, she appeals strongly to my artistic sense. I suppose, granted that we are on the right track, that she knows nothing."

"Good heavens, man, no!" exclaimed Dennison, almost angrily. "As you know, I am not a particularly sentimental or credulous person, but I'd stake all I have or hope for in the world on her absolute innocence. The thing's inconceivable!"

"I'm glad you think so. No one would accuse me of that sort of weakness, I think, but, although I have had some queer experiences of pretty women in the criminal line, I should want very strong proof before I believe that a girl with an angel face like hers could be the accomplice of a criminal, even though he happened to be her own father."

"That is exactly the thing that I called to see you about," replied Dennison. "Have you half an hour to spare?"

"An hour, if you like. My wife and Paula have gone back with my manager to the hotel already. I shall be in town all night. And that reminds me, if you have nothing better to do when we have had our talk you might as well come with me and make the acquaintance of my colleague Trapané."

"What, Trapané of Paris? What's he doing here? Also down for a holiday?"

The other laughed in reply.

"Well," said Dennison, after a long pull at his cigar, "things seem to be getting into a bit of a tangle; more tangle than I like, in fact."

"My dear fellow, did you ever know a case worth having that wasn't tangled up? That's just what makes ours the most interesting profession on earth."

"I wasn't speaking professionally," said Dennison, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. "You see it's this way. It is absolutely certain, I take it, that Miss Staunton knows nothing, allowing that we are right——"

"Which we are," interrupted Mr. Smith quietly.

Dennison looked hard at him and nodded.

"I thought so," he went on, "and from one point of view that makes it as bad as possible. As I told you, Staunton wants you to go and dine on the *Isola* some evening, and take part in a sort of al-fresco sea concert, and, for other professional reasons, you said you would.

"Now, Miss Staunton is enraptured with the idea, and I suggested to her this morning that, as it wouldn't be much

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use approaching Stanislas de Ronski on the business plane, she would allow me, as a friend of the family, to introduce her to your wife as hostess of the *Isola*, and invite you to dinner in a social way."

"That would be much better in every way. Of course, under the circumstances, my friend de Ronski couldn't think of charging a fee to a man whom *I* hope to lock up. Well?"

"The natural difficulty of a chaperone arose," Dennison resumed, "and it solved itself very happily by the appearance just at that moment of Miss Janet Yuill, the Sister who nursed Miss Staunton through her illness. It appears that she has formed an intense attachment for her, and she is now, I suppose, permanently installed as her companion."

"Ah," said Mr. Smith, looking up, "that is the young lady who saw the ice-cap of Hekla on the voyage from Leith to the Riviera?"

"Yes, and from what she told me later on, she is getting still more suspicious of the true nature of the *Isola*. For instance, it is a rather curious thing that she has been some days in port now and no one has seen her captain. Of course, you understand, it isn't possible for guests to make inquiries on a matter of that sort, except in quite a casual way. I asked Miss Yuill, and she told me, rather clumsily for a straightforward woman like her, that he was supposed to be confined to his room with sickness of some sort, but she looked so awkward over it that I really didn't care to press the point."

"Quite right, my dear Dennison," said Mr. Smith. "Never press a point too far. One often learns a good deal more from silence than from speech. And now as to Miss Staunton. I presume that in the first place you wish us to make her personal acquaintance, so that we may satisfy ourselves, I mean, of course, my wife and daughter, as to her innocence, so that if the crash comes there can be no question of her being involved."

"Yes, that is the first point," said Dennison, "and the second is this. Given the crash, she will, of course, be friendless. Those who would scheme and almost fight for her invitations now will turn their backs on her then.

"She will be the daughter of a convict, probably of a murderer, and she will want friends who know that she is innocent. In other words, I don't want the sins of the father to fall upon the child. It isn't fair!"

"Dennison," exclaimed Mr. Smith, getting up and filling the glasses, "you're a brick! You can rest assured that when Miss Staunton wants friends she'll find them in my house. And now it's about time we were off."

He put on his soft hat, rang the bell, and instantly became Stanislas de Ronski once more. The attendant appeared, and he ordered his brougham.

When it came round he gave an address to the driver, and as he sat down beside Dennison and the carriage rolled away smoothly on its rubber tyres, he laid his hand on his knee and said:

"For the present I should like you to hear what you are going to hear to-night as my friend and not as a Treasury official. You see, the French police work differently from the English, and at present we are the guests of the French police. Afterwards, when the time comes to act, you shall have your full share, if only for the sake of the very valuable clue you have given to us in the person of Miss Yuill. You take me, of course."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," replied Dennison. "You needn't have any fear of that. To-night I have neither official eyes nor ears. I am here on leave, and the office has nothing to do with it."

"Very well, that is quite enough," was the reply, and Mr. Smith relapsed into silence until the brougham, after a somewhat winding, up-hill course, entered a gate flanked by two dwarf palms and pulled up before the steps of a white, two-storied, verandahed house, half smothered by the luxuriant sub-tropical vegetation.

Mr. Smith opened the door and got out.

A servant standing at the bottom of the steps came forward, and said in French, with a gesture of deference:

"Monsieur Justin awaits you, sir."

"Good. Kindly tell him that I have brought a friend with me."

"*Bien, monsieur.*"

And the man led the way up the steps.

"Come along," said de Ronski, as he was now, in French, and he added in a whisper, "Don't forget that our friend Trapané is not known here."

Dennison nodded, and they entered.

The man led them upstairs, and knocked softly at a door. A voice within said "*Entrez*," and the door opened.

De Ronski went in first, and as the door closed behind him Dennison found himself in the presence of an amiable-looking old gentleman with thin, curly grey hair and straggly white beard and moustache—and, to his utter amazement, Doctor Eymar Billaud, to whom he had been introduced at lunch that day as Isolo Staunton's physician-in-ordinary on the yacht!

"Monsieur Justin," said de Ronski, after they had shaken hands, "permit me to present to you a great friend of mine, Monsieur Dennison, for whom I have taken the liberty of asking a share of your hospitality. But pardon," he continued, looking round at the doctor, who was staring hard at Dennison and looking as though he would very much rather be on the other side of the door. "I see you have another guest."

"Yes, yes," said Monsieur Justin. "This is Doctor Billaud, physician of the *Isolo*, the wonderful yacht of the great millionaire, Monsieur Staunton. Doctor Billaud, you, of course, know who this is?"

"Who does not?" replied Billaud, in a not over steady voice, his eyes still turning towards Dennison. He bowed, and de Ronski said:

"Mr. Dennison, of course, you know the Doctor? I believe you have already met on board the yacht?"

Dennison returned Billaud's bow and said:

"Oh, yes. I had the pleasure of meeting the Doctor at lunch to-day."

"Well, now, gentlemen," said Monsieur Justin, moving his hand towards the table, "there you have cognac and whisky, syphons and cigars; help yourselves and sit down, and we will talk."

Before they were settled Doctor Billaud turned to his host and said, with manifest nervousness:

"I wish to give no offence, Monsieur Justin, but I must remind you that I was not aware that I was to have the pleasure of meeting Monsieur Dennison to-night."

"My dear Doctor," replied his host, "any friend of Monsieur de Ronski is a friend of mine, and therefore, as long as our present satisfactory relations continue, a friend of yours."

"Then, of course, I am perfectly content," replied Billaud, sitting down and taking a gulp at the fairly stiff brandy and soda that he had mixed for himself.

"And now, doctor," continued the host, "as I have told you, you are among friends who, under certain conditions can be trusted implicitly, and, therefore, I am able to ask you to speak with perfect plainness.

"Be good enough, then, to fulfil the promise which you made to me a short time ago, and repeat in the presence of these gentlemen the very interesting narrative with which you have been kind enough to favour myself."

And then, to Dennison's utter amazement, Billaud began from the moment at which Wilfrid Ellerton was supposed to have fallen overboard from the *Isola* and told the whole story, which is already in the reader's possession, down to the moment at which he lost sight of him, and was compelled to return by the lift into the Council Chamber.

There was a little silence after he had finished, during which, with trembling hand, he raised another glass of brandy and soda which his host had poured out for him, to his pale, quivering lips, and drained it in convulsive gulps. He set the glass down with a bang and threw himself back in his

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chair, breathing hard like a man recovering himself after some intense exertion.

"Interesting, most marvellously interesting!" said de Ronski, between the puffs of his cigar. "What do you think, my dear Monsieur Dennison? Have you ever heard such a romance of tragedy as that before?"

"Never," he replied. "In fact, if I had not heard it from a gentleman of Doctor Billaud's undoubted veracity and under these particular circumstances, I should have found it quite impossible of belief."

"You will, of course, understand, gentlemen," said Billaud, pulling himself upright by the arms of his chair, and turning towards them, "that by saying what I have done to-night, I have put my life in your hands. A man's life is as nothing in the eyes of Isolo Staunton.

"I have been his slave for nearly five years now, and I have seen him send men, yes, and women, too, to instant death with a word, even for the suspicion of treason, and sometimes, to my shame and misery I say it, I have myself been compelled to execute the sentence—to make the victim ill with one drug, and, while pretending to cure, kill him with another.

"It has been horrible, and I can endure it no longer.

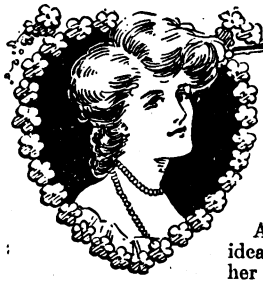
"But now that I have confessed all that I know, you will protect me, good Monsieur Justin, will you not?"

"I have promised," replied his host. "Keep faith and continue in what you justly call your slavery, and it shall not be long before the yoke shall be broken, and you shall be free—pardoned of everything."

"Now, how on earth was that brought about?" said Dennison to Mr. Smith as they were driving away in the brougham half an hour later. "It looks at first sight incomprehensible."

"And yet, like most seeming miracles, very easy of explanation when you know all the circumstances. When I was playing the other night I recognised Billaud as a very clever physician who got into trouble in a particularly unpleasant case in Paris about seven years ago. I was working on the case with Trapané, and when he was caught I saw him measured, on the Bertillon system. He was condemned to fifteen years, and, at the last moment by some means—a bribed official, I suppose, bought by our friend Staunton, no doubt,—he slipped through our fingers.

"He has passed the age when a man's head or features alter. He made the mistake of showing himself in the concert room clean shaven—and there you are. I sent my friend Trapané a note. He sent another to the physician of the *Isola*, making an appointment for to-night, and Billaud had either to accept it or be arrested."



TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Social Interlude.

As soon as Mercedes mentioned the idea of her visit to the de Ronskis to her father he at once fell in with it, saying:

"I am very glad, dearest, that you hit upon the idea of taking Miss Yuill with you to-morrow, because I happen to be very busy just now with these everlasting financial matters, and I shall have to go over to Mentone for two or three days. Indeed I was just going to tell you that I shall have to start by the first train in the morning."

"But you will not be away long, papa, will you? You

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know Lady Medcalf-Mears is only staying about a week longer, and we must have the concert before she and her party go."

"Oh, of course! Let me see. To-day is Thursday. I shall certainly be back early on Monday, and so, if it will suit the de Ronskis and everybody else that you want to ask, arrange it for Tuesday. The best thing to do will be for you and her ladyship and Cora to put your heads together and work the whole matter out. Women can arrange these things infinitely better than men, and really, as I say, I have so many business concerns to attend to that I really haven't the time to spare. Give Dinaud *carte blanche* as to the feeding and decorations and all that, and you arrange all the rest. And you know, dearest," he went on, putting his hand under her chin and turning her sweet face up to his, "the more money you spend the better I shall be pleased.'

"You need not tell me that, dearest and most generous of papas!" she laughed when she had returned his kiss. "When you come back you shall find that I have been as wickedly extravagant as even you could wish, my splendid spendthrift."

The next morning she went ashore with Cora to see him off, and when they got back to the Promenade des Anglais, almost the first people they met were Madame de Ronski and Paula, escorted by the Grand Duke and Dennison.

Mercedes noticed the quick flush which rose for an instant to Cora's cheeks as she exclaimed:

"Why, there they are! Now, isn't that good! We can have the introductions right away. Heavens, how lovely that girl is. It's hardly right to let her around loose."

"Perhaps she is not the only one," laughed Mercedes softly, as they approached the party.

"Excellently well met!' exclaimed Dennison, raising his panama. The Grand Duke did the same, looking the while at Cora with eyes so full of honest admiration and something more that the momentary twinge, not of jealousy, but of half-misgiving of which her conscience accused her, instantly gave place to a mental glow of supreme content.

Dennison, as a common friend, made the introductions, and when they were completed, his Highness of Warschaua said:

"We were about going to my launch yonder to go to the yacht and beg the honour of your company at lunch at one o'clock at the London House. May I hope that you have not any other engagement?"

"No, your Highness," replied Mercedes, "we have just seen papa off to Mentone by the train. He has gone to see about some of these eternal financial matters—just as if he hadn't a great deal too much money as it is—and so I am quite free until Monday. And I don't think you have any very pressing engagements, Cora, have you?"

"Now, Miss Mercedes, you just know I haven't," laughed Cora, "and I think lunch at the London would be just delightful."

"Then that arranges itself perfectly," said the Duke, stealing another look at Cora, "and, since there is no concert to-night, and it happens to be my birthday, if Madame will continue to give us her countenance, why should we not go up afterwards to Monte Carlo, dine with Maître François, and lose a few francs at the tables by way of diversion? Ah, see who comes! It is Mr. Kesteven himself. Truly this is a morning of fortunate meetings."

"Good morning, your Highness, and——"

He stopped with his hat uplifted, looking at Paula and her mother.

"Let me have the honour, my dear Kesteven," resumed the Duke, "of presenting you to Madame and Mademoiselle de Ronski, already not unknown to you."

"I guess the honour is mostly to me, Duke," answered Kesteven, as he bowed again to the two ladies. "And now," he went on, "I want to say that I found it a trifle dull on board, and so I came ashore to see if I could find someone who would be kind enough to come and have lunch with m."

"You're just two minutes behind the procession for once in your life, poppa," laughed Cora. "It's all fixed. The Duke has just invited us to London House——"

"Then, in that case I reckon I'd better invite myself in sheer self defence," laughed her father. "Will you have me, Duke?"

"I should be obliged to send a friend to visit you, my dear Kesteven, if you had the effrontery to lunch anywhere else. It would be unheard of!" replied his Highness with mock gravity.

"Then, since that is all settled," said Madame de Ronski, "I think, Paula, that we had better go and do our shopping."

"And if we may come, too," said Mercedes, "that is just what Cora and I were going to do."

Kesteven, who was feeling on very good terms with himself and the world since he had convinced Staunton of his resolve to end the partnership, and "swindle respectably," as he put it, willingly fell in with the Duke's proposal to dine with François and spend the evening in the "gilded Gehenna," to use Miss Cora's euphemism, and so the whole party was in excellent humour when it assembled for lunch, with the sole exception of Dennison, who every time he heard Mercedes laugh felt a pang of heart-ache for pity of her sweetness and innocence.

When lunch was over Mercedes said to Cora:

"If we are going to tempt the goddess in her temple to-night I shall have to go on board and get some money or my cheque-book. I am almost penniless after the shopping. Really, the shopkeepers here are simply a set of privileged thieves."

"Don't you worry about that, Mercedes," said Kesteven quickly, "I'll be your banker for to-night. My cheque's good for a million up there, and I reckon you can't lose much more than that, and if you or Cora want any now you can have a couple of thousand francs to go on with."

He spoke carelessly, but Dennison's trained ear caught an undernote of anxiety in his voice. He thought of the thousand-franc note that Valdez had changed on the night of the first concert. He looked at Madame de Ronski and Paula, and saw that they also had caught the tone. He waited anxiously for Mercedes to speak.

"Oh, very well!" she laughed, to his intense relief, for he knew how strict a watch was being kept, and the idea of her being caught passing a counterfeit at the tables was too horrible to realise. "That is very kind of you, Uncle Dirk"—which had been her pet name for him since she was a schoolgirl—"that will be better.

"Papa told me to be as extravagant as I could while he was away, and so a few thousand francs won't matter to him. But still, I should like to go on board because I have something to say to Janet. It won't take me an hour."

"Miss Janet is the lady who nursed you during your illness, is she not?" asked Madame de Ronski. "I have heard about her. Mr. Dennison told me that you were going to bring her to call at the hotel. And Captain Iddison told me that she nursed his men during the war, and made them worship her. You will let us know her, will you not?"

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Mercedes, her eyes lighting up. "My Janet is the dearest and noblest woman alive. You will love her the moment you know her. We have nothing to do till the half-past five train, why should you not all come and have afternoon tea with me on the yacht? It will be much nicer and fresher out there than ashore."

"Do say yes, mamma," said Paula. "I am longing to see this floating palace of Mr. Staunton's."

"With the greatest pleasure. It will be delightful," assented her mother. "I am quite as curious as you are, I think."

"Then after that," laughed Mercedes, who had been unfolding the scheme of the concert during lunch, "I shall take no refusal for Tuesday. Will your Highness condescend to join us at tea?" she went on, turning to the Duke.

"Mademoiselle, I am very sorry, but I cannot," he replied

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with a despairing look towards Cora. "It would be Paradise, but I am shut out by a mere business man, a banker, with whom I must talk this afternoon, till I shall want to kill him. But this Miss Janet of whom you have spoken? I have seen her on the yacht, and, as you say, she is adorable. Do you think she would do me the honour and favour to join our party to-night?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mercedes, leaning back in her chair and laughing so musically that some of the other people who were taking their coffee on the verandah looked up towards her. "Just fancy my good angel Janet in that sink of iniquity! Beatrice in the Inferno! I am afraid I cannot promise, your Highness, but if she will come I shall be delighted to bring her."

"You are about as good as human nature will let you be, Mercedes," said Kesteven with an almost inaudible chuckle, "but I guess that shows you are a woman after all."

"Now that's just real mean, poppa," laughed Cora. "Don't you think so, Duke?"

"No, no," he replied, returning her glance with interest, "that is a compliment. Since there is nothing in the world so adorable as woman——"

He hesitated. A swift flush which all her self-control could not command had risen to Cora's cheeks, and his instinct pulled him up short. At the same moment Cora created a happy diversion by exclaiming:

"Ah, there is papa coming! I thought he would soon be looking for his runaways. Now if you will ask him to tea, Miss Staunton, no doubt he will escort us, and then you will have him at your mercy in the matter of the concert."

De Ronski had been lunching with his friend "M. Justin" at one of the clubs. He accepted Mercedes' invitation, and in a few minutes the party broke up to meet again at the station. Kesteven excused himself and went away with his Highness, but Dennison looked at Paula and decided to go to tea.

Somewhat to Mercedes' surprise, Janet Yuill accepted the invitation to Monte Carlo almost eagerly. She had heard so much about the evilly-famous paradise of ruin and shame, and such an opportunity of seeing it would probably never come to her again, so she said. Her real reason for wishing to go would have been incredible to Mercedes, although M. de Ronski would have understood it perfectly.

The dinner at the Grand was as perfect as are all dinners for which the famous M. Francois is responsible. The oft-described Casino, the salons and the tables, with their cosmopolitan crowds of men and women, chained fast in the deadly fascination of the whirling ball and the turning cards, were revelations to Mercedes and Janet. To Madame de Ronski and Paula they were commonplaces, rather wearisome than otherwise.

They did not play. They were quite content to take Janet about the rooms and to show her the wonderful beauty of the gardens in the moonlight. As soon as the others got place Mercedes proceeded to fulfil her threat, and lost five thousand francs in almost record time. Kesteven played his usual "hard-shell game" until he won them back for her, and then stopped, giving up his place to a man behind him who had been playing with very bad luck.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Darfield, is it?" he said as he rose and looked at him. "You've had pretty mean luck. Maybe the chair'll change it. Some of them here would give a thousand francs for it. I've broken the bank twice in it this trip."

As Darfield sat down he looked up and saw Janet standing opposite behind the little crowd on the other side of the table. She made no sign of recognition beyond the slight bow that she would have given to any ordinary acquaintance, but he could read intense anxiety in her eyes. If he could have listened to the conversation which she had just had with Dennison and the de Ronskis in the gardens, he would not only have understood, but he would have stopped playing at once, for then he would have known that, with every stake he made, he was not only playing against the bank for money, but against the Fates themselves for issues of which no amount of money could represent the vital importance.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Casino.

Cora and the Grand Duke had got seats almost opposite to Darfield. She nodded across to him and opened a silver net bag attached to her belt by strong silver chains. The Duke saw that it was stuffed with notes and gold. He put his hand on it and said to her in a whisper:

"Miss Cora, have you the goodness to grant me a great favour?"

"Why, certainly," she replied. "What is it, Duke?"

"It is this," he murmured, his hand still resting on hers over the bag. "In my country we have a superstition that it is unlucky to tempt fortune on one's birthday. This is mine, as I have told you. Please leave your own money for the present and play with mine. I will watch. No doubt you will bring me good luck."

The idea fell in with her humour. She closed her bag with a snap, took the thick roll of notes which he offered her, and said with a flash of her eyes into his:

"With pleasure if you want me to, but don't blame me if the bank gets it all."

"It will be well lost," he replied, looking into her eyes till she dropped her lids, "if it goes through such hands as yours."

Her colour deepened, and he saw her smile as she looked down at the notes he had given her—after which he felt perfectly content to lose them to the last louis.

She picked out a thousand-franc note, saying:

"Suppose we begin with this. This is what I should have done for myself."

She put it on black. Black came up and she left the 2,000 francs on black. It turned again. She took back the original stake. Once more black came up, and now she had 6,000 francs to the good.

"Luck in threes," she whispered, and pushed the notes over to the red compartment. Red turned, and she took 6,000 francs away. Again red came up. "This can't go on," she laughed, as though she were playing with pennies, and moved the 12,000 francs (the maximum allowed at Rouge et Noir) on to the black. It turned. She took away 18,000 francs, leaving 6,000 on the black. Red came up. She put 12,000 on red and it turned again, and twice more she backed it with the maximum and won. Then she shifted to black, and in three turns she cleared 36,000 francs.

Nearly all the players had stopped, as often happens at the tables when there is a phenomenal run of luck towards a player, especially if that player be a woman—young and pretty.

Darfield, however, continued. He had followed her at first, but he went wrong the time she lost on red, and never got back into the run. He plunged again and again with the maximum until both Cora and the Grand Duke wondered how it was possible for a man in his position to sit and lose £480 at a time, as though the louis were so many shillings, but, to Janet's utter distress, it was plain that he had quite lost his head for the time being.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

WHAT HANDWRITING CAN DO.

It can tell you what sort of a person you are as regards disposition and many other points that it is as well to know. If you wish for this information send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. You will receive in return an accurate delineation of your character which will tell you what you wish to know.

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The Symptoms of Catarrh.

The subject of catarrh is becoming of such universal interest, that the following questions have been selected as a guide for those who think they are afflicted:

Is the voice husky?
Is the nose stopped up?
Does the nose discharge?
Is the breath offensive?
Do crusts form in the nose?
Do you have sneezing spells?
Is the sense of smell leaving?
Is there fulness in the throat?
Do you have to clear the throat?
Do you expectorate frequently?
Do you sleep with the mouth open?
Are you nauseated in the morning?
Do you have aching pains in the limbs?
Is there pain in the front of the head?
Is there dropping of phlegm in the throat?

A further explanation of the causes of these symptoms, and a more complete description of the various forms of catarrh, can be found in the last issue of **The Review of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases.** Those who are interested can obtain a free copy of this Medical Publication by addressing The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

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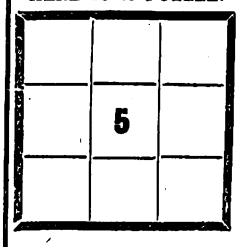
Every person who solves it will be entitled to participate in our Grand MONEY AWARDING SCHEME, in which we are offering £500 in Cash, and we guarantee that NO AWARD WILL BE LESS THAN TEN SHILLINGS. Even if you do not care to try for a Cash Award you will find the puzzle interesting enough to form a valuable addition to your home circle. It is not necessary to use our printed diagram. The diagram can be roughly made out, and the figures filled in on a sheet of notepaper.

HERE IS A PUZZLE.



The diagram shows nine squares, with the figure 5 occupying the centre square. The puzzle is to place a different figure in each of the remaining eight squares, so that on the columns being added the result will be 15 each way. That is to say, each column will add 15 up and down, across each row, and diagonally from corner to corner. You can use the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and can place them exactly as you choose in order to obtain the result, but the figure 5 must not be removed from the centre of the square.

At first sight you may think the puzzle is much simpler than it really is. As a matter of fact, you will find it necessary to think hard and experiment a good deal before you get it correct. But it is very interesting and is surely well-worth trying.

If you succeed in getting the correct answer send on your solution to us, enclosing at the same time Postal Order for 1/6 (and two penny stamps to pay the postage and packing), for one of our beautiful Zambesi Diamond Brooches or Gent's Scarf Pins, on which we make a slight profit, which will help to pay the cost of this advertisement. The Brooches and Pins are fitted with lovely Zambesi Diamonds. These Diamonds are not Nature's productions, but are chemically made by a secret process lately discovered, which you have probably read of in the newspapers, and which have been all the rage in the West End of London.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Marrying a French Girl.

"I AM about to go and live in France for several years," writes "D. U. R.," "and my people are chaffing me and warning me not to fall in love with a French lady and marry her. Of course I don't know what my love affairs may be, but supposing I should fall in love with a French girl, would it be an inadvisable marriage?"

* * * * *

If "D. U. R." falls in love with a French girl, he is to be envied, as marriages between our two countries, in cases that one knows, have been very happy ones indeed. The British and French are so different in character and temperament, that a couple might be exceedingly happy together. French women are as a rule very womanly and graceful, and full of outward charm, and likely to appeal to the more stolid Briton. At the same time, I do not counsel "D. U. R." to deliberately forsake his own countrywomen. I am only supposing that he may fall in love with a French girl, as he says, and should he do so, I do not see why he should not marry her.

Two Broken Engagements.

I HAVE received two letters from readers, one of which seems to provide the answer to the other. It is a story of broken engagements. Firstly there is "SOUTH AFRICA," who tells me the following tale of woe: "I was engaged to a girl for two years until the other day, when, without knowing what I was doing, I broke it off with her, and offended her parents. I am still madly in love with her, and try to forget it, but cannot. Neither she nor her parents will now have anything to do with me."

* * * * *

Before I answer this, I will just quote "J. O.'s" letter. He says: "I used to walk out with a girl who had a rather hasty temper. We quarrelled over another girl, and she told me she never wished to see my face again. Her mother has written to me since, and wants me to go and see the girl, and explain matters, as she seems much upset about it. I don't know what to do, as I *do not care for her now.*"

* * * * *

"J. O.'s" last words probably hit off both his own position and that of "SOUTH AFRICA." Both of them have quarrelled with their sweethearts, and used hasty words. Both sweethearts have taken mortal offence and refuse to be reconciled. Well, that is not surprising. When one's feelings have been deeply wounded—the love one has had for another may be completely destroyed. The only healer is time. I have often said that I do not believe very much in mere spoken apologies after a deep offence, but I think that, if a couple are really in love, time will sooner or later force them back again to each other.

Meeting in the Street.

"GIBLIE." You are sixteen, and you often see a boy whom you would like to know, but know nobody who could introduce you. Would it be forward of you to speak to him as you pass him in the street? You think he would speak to you if you made the start.

* * * * *

Certainly, it would be forward for you to do so. I don't think if I were you I should speak to him. After all, if he very much wishes to know you, he will find some way of getting the introduction.

Christmas Proposals.

"Is Christmas a good time to 'pop the question'?" asks "GEORGE." "I am very fond of a girl, and have often visited her people, but have not yet said anything, as I doubt whether her father thinks I am well-enough off. Should I propose at Christmas, or would it be better to postpone it?"

* * * * *

Christmas is a very good time indeed to propose. If you are visiting the family during the festivities, and the time seems ripe for a proposal, you should take advantage of the prevailing goodwill to perform the dread task. But be careful to catch papa before he gets his Christmas bills sent in. That is usually a very bad time for the proposing young man.

The Art of Talking.

"WHEN one is in conversation with a lady," writes "T. E.," "ought one to always address her by her name, or simply say 'yes,' and 'no,' as the case may be? Do you know of any book dealing with such matters?"

* * * * *

It would be very foolish to repeat a lady's name with every fresh remark. Mention it occasionally, if it seems necessary in giving your sentence a finish, but do not do it in an obsequious way, as that makes a man ridiculous. The art of polite conversation is to make your phrases sound polished, even if there is no particular sense in them. A book will not teach you such an act, which is inborn, and I should not recommend any man to study conversation from a book, unless I wished him to develop into a hopeless prig. Just talk to a girl naturally, and she will like you all the better for it.

Quarrel Between Brothers.

"S. E. F." tells me of a serious family quarrel, and asks if I can advise a settlement of it. Two sons of a friend of his have had words, in which the elder said something to the younger which he will not forgive unless there is an apology. Some months have now elapsed since the row, with no signs of reconciliation. The elder brother is three years older than the other. "S. E. F." wishes to know how the parents could deal with such a matter.

* * * * *

I am afraid that such quarrels between brothers are very frequent, and more difficult to reconcile than ordinary quarrels between friends. If an estrangement once sets in a family the chances are against peace. I fear, too, that an apology so late in the day could not have the desired result. Perhaps after a while the two brothers will see that this estrangement is very foolish, and will agree to shake hands and forget the whole affair, regardless of the rights and wrongs. An apology usually means that one or other is humiliated, and that feeling is one which rankles. Forgetfulness will be the best cure for the quarrel in question.

Cynthia

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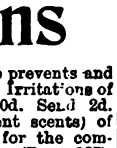

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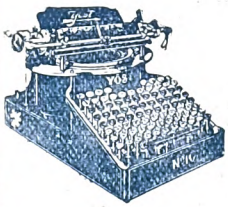

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SHORT STORIES.

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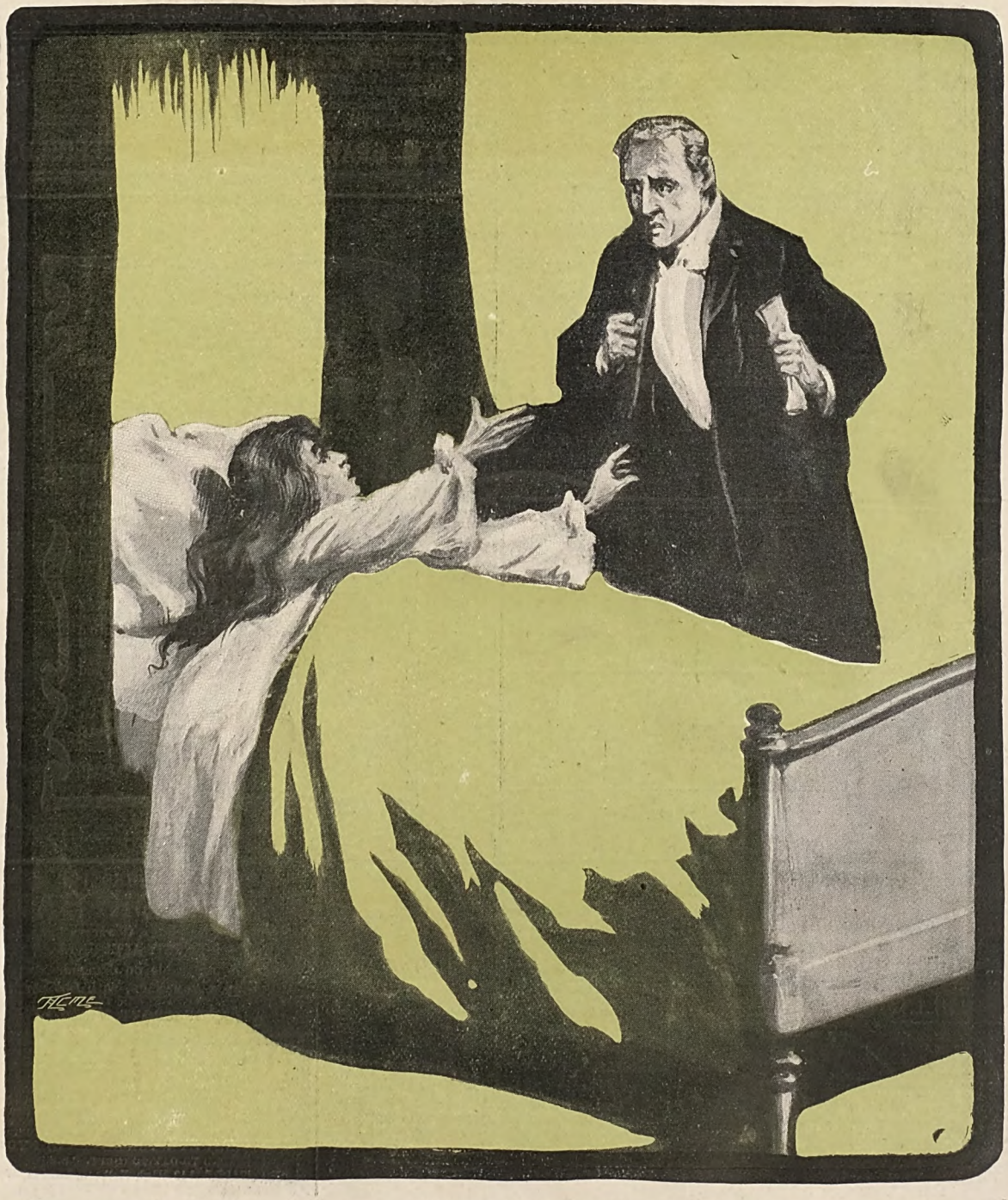
No. 781. Week Ending December 19th, 1903.



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(A Dramatic Incident from our New Serial, "DUPES OF DESTINY.")

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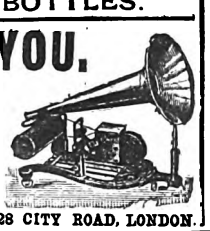

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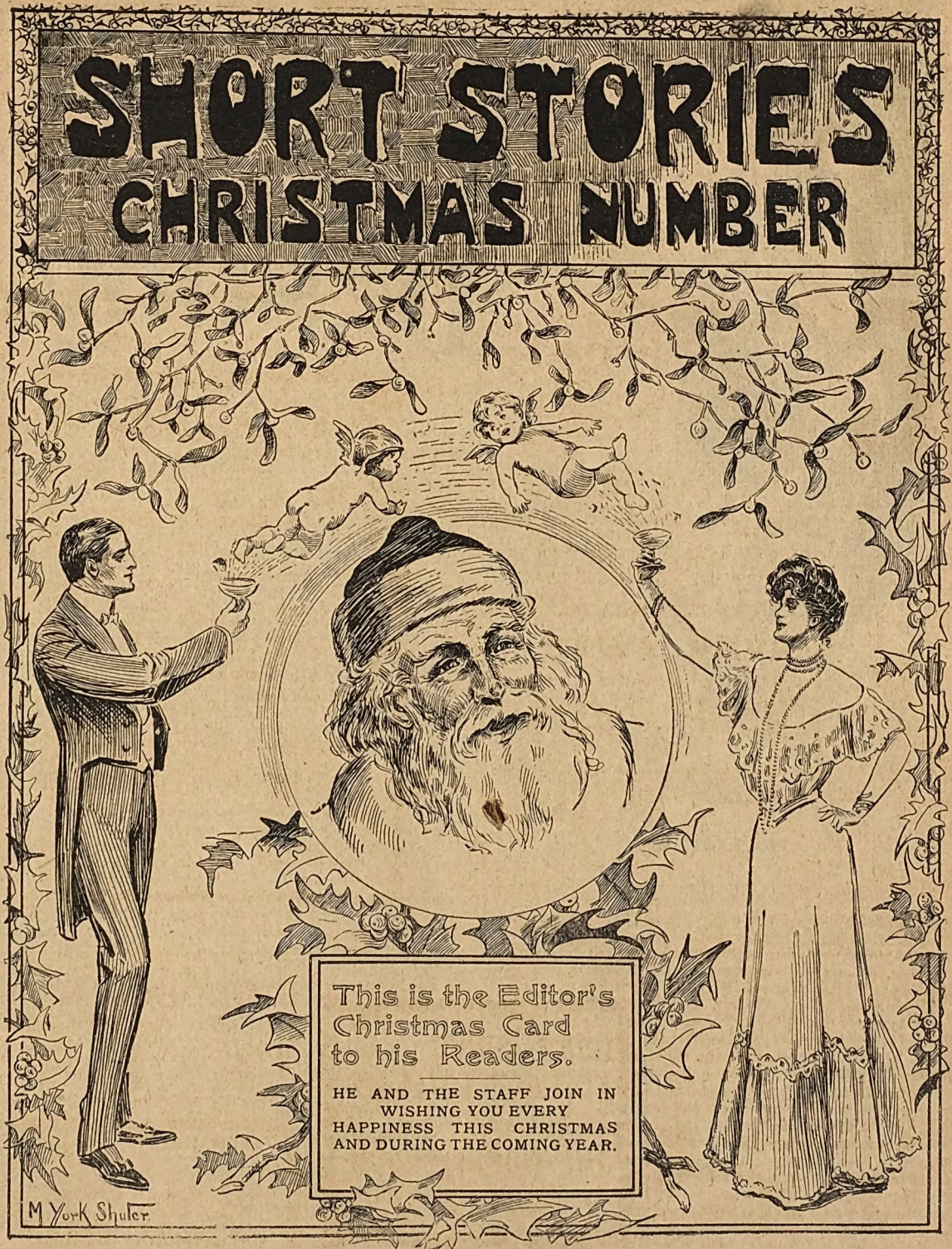

No 781. Week ending December 19th, 1903 Price Twopence.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL STARTS IN THIS NUMBER.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Fadley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

I.

The Man and His Inheritance.

Outside the grimy buildings in Walbrook, devoted solely to chambers for solicitors and other professional men, a hansom pulled up at No. 32, where a brass plate notified that "Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors and commissioners of oaths" were to be found on the fourth floor.

A youth sprang out of the hansom on to the kerb, and a pretty typine hurrying past, turned to look at him again. He was tall and lithely built, and the face the girl had noticed was worth a second glance even in the busy thoroughfare of Walbrook. His skin was pale and innocent of hair, almost effeminate in its delicacy, and the broad white brow, with a suspicion of crisp yellow curls showing under the shabby sombrero, together with the straight, classic nose, and beautifully moulded mouth and chin made up a whole both rare and pleasing. A captious critic might have said that the merry gleam in the blue eyes had a trick of losing itself in a flash of steel-like rapidity, and that behind the frank, ingenious smile there lurked a snarl ready at the least provocation to startle the person who provoked it. But the pretty typine was no physiognomist, and she admired the handsome face of the boy in the shabby clothes.

In the meantime the boy on the kerb had taken a handful of money from his pocket, and picking out a bright two-shilling piece, gave it to the waiting Jehu.

"Here you are, cabby," he said, with a brilliant smile; "a bob over your fare."

The man grinned and touched his cap. "Thank'ee, sir. Good luck and good day to 'ee, sir!"

As he went with light, springy steps up the narrow, carpetless stairs that led to Messrs. Sharpe and Quirke's, the shabby stranger laughed softly: "I'm glad I got rid of that piece of money! It would never do for 'Sir' Cyprian Rust to pass spurious coin of the realm! And I'm almost certain it's all right now! These old rotters have had their six months for investigations. They would have written had they heard anything."

He turned the handle of the door that led into the outer office. "Now to make assurance doubly sure."

Immediately he entered he was taken into the private room of Mr. Sharpe, the senior partner, who greeted him suavely, apparently oblivious to the down-at-heel appearance of his client.

"You are up to time, Mr. Rust," he said, a slight smile touching his lips.

The young man laughed pleasantly. "I always am, Mr. Sharpe, where there is money to be gained! If you knew the hand-to-mouth existence I have been leading these last six months, waiting for this blessed will to be proved, and you to satisfy yourself that there is no grandson living to claim my uncle's title and money, you would understand a little of my impatience. For I am honestly eager to know the best or the worst," he went on passionately; "I'm not a hypocrite to pretend to hate money; I don't; and what's more, I want it badly—jolly badly!"

Mr. Sharpe nodded thoughtfully. The boyish outburst was natural, he thought, uncertainty in a position that may either mean poverty or riches is enough to try the patience of most men.

"So painting is not a success, then?" he said, busying himself with a bundle of blue documents as he spoke.

Cyprian Rust shrugged his shoulders. His eyes were following the movements of the older man with idle curiosity.

"Hardly," he answered, with a short laugh. "Art with money at your back is a beautiful vocation, but without the means of providing the necessary equipments such as a studio and models—to say nothing of paints—a crossing sweeper's work is preferable."

Mr. Sharpe smiled sympathetically.

"And you have no other way open to you to earn your living?"

The fair, boyish face flushed warmly, and from his blue eyes

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there flamed one of those rare flashes that would have startled Mr. Sharpe had he seen it.

"I have no other profession open to me," he answered curtly; "and I suppose all these questions are a prelude to telling me that I may disabuse my mind of the idea of inheriting this money? Out with it!" he laughed bitterly. "I have had too many knock-down blows to feel it—much! Has the precious kid turned up?"

Mr. Sharpe, the family solicitor for many years to the late Sir Basil Wingate, rose with slow dignity, and, drawing his chair back from the table, said:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

"Yes," Cyprian Rust said impatiently. "I know all that jargon. Why worry me with it now? If I'm not to have it, then I'm indifferent to the whole concern."

"One moment, Mr. Rust," continued the dispassionate voice of the solicitor. "During the six months that have intervened between the reading of the will and the proving of it, I have searched high and low for news of Mrs. Jerningham. It is two years since she ran away, and hearing she went to Australia, I had advertisements inserted in all the Australian papers requesting her to communicate with us in the event of her having a male child, and I sent advertisements to the American papers also, with the result that——"

He stopped suddenly, startled by the almost deathly pallor of the young artist's face. It was bloodless, even to his lips, and his eyes were black with the intensity of his suppressed emotion.

"Go on, for Heaven's sake, man, tell me the worst!" he breathed hoarsely.

Mr. Sharpe drew himself up; he was not accustomed to such language.

"With the result," he continued, "that the will being proved, and no claim being set up against it, I have much pleasure in congratulating you upon your good fortune, Sir Cyprian."

For a moment the room danced before the eyes of the late Sir Basil Wingate's nephew, and he fell into a chair, burying his face in his hands.

Sir Cyprian! Sir Cyprian Rust, and owner of unlimited wealth! It was too good to be true, in spite of his boast that there could be no other result. His relief at the news showed him how unwarranted had been his assurance before.

"Are you quite certain," he said anxiously, "that it is all right? Suppose—afterwards—a son of Helen Jerningham turned up, what then?"

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders. "Then, Sir Cyprian, after due inquiries and proving the authenticity of legal documents, you would go back to your former position in life! But you need have no fear of being sent back to poverty," he said, noting the strained look about the boy's mouth; "your position is impregnable—absolutely assured; for if the poor lady had been living she would have seen one of those advertisements."

Sir Cyprian Rust breathed deeply; then a tremulous laugh rose to his lips. "I am still a beggar, Sharpe. I don't possess a red cent in spite of my new honours! Can I touch you for an advance? I must rig myself up decently. I shall not believe it is true until I am wearing some garments that have not come from a 'reach-me-down' shop!"

"Certainly, Sir Cyprian," said the old solicitor graciously. "I will give you notes for one hundred pounds. That will do to go on with, until you get your cheque-book from the bank. And I trust," he added pompously, "that as we understand the entire working of the property, you will retain us as your solicitors?"

The youngm an laughed. "Certainly, Sharpe. You shall have no cause to complain! But, buck up with that money, there's a good chap!"

At that moment the office boy put his head in at the door.

"Please, sir, you are wanted at the telephone," and with an excuse Mr. Sharpe left Sir Cyprian Rust alone in his private room.

He walked up and down the narrow little office with quick, impatient steps, planning his life anew, and arranging the cutting away of awkward associates. Once he shook his handsome head and smiled slightly. "No, I won't throw *that* up. It is too exciting, and my blood needs the stimulant the uncertainty gives! Only I will be more careful! My position demands it—now!"

The door re-opened to admit not the solicitor, but the office boy, who placed several letters on the desk and retired.

Moved by an idle impulse the young man turned them over curiously; then, suddenly his face grew livid, and he stifled an exclamation by biting his nether lip savagely.

The letter that had caused his discomfiture was a dirty-looking envelope, but the writing was that of someone he had begun to hope dead, since she stood between him and a fortune. It was that of Helen Jerningham, his cousin, and Sir Basil's once-loved daughter.

Fascinated and shivering as though with ague, he examined the postmark. She was not in England then! For it was the Sydney stamp on the envelope. Why was she writing? Suppose it was to announce the birth of a son and heir! Then once more he, Cyprian Rust, would be the penniless Bohemian artist, obscure and uncourted; while, if the letter failed to reach the man for whom it was intended, then he would be safe, and could watch that no others followed it!

A step outside decided him. He grasped the letter, and had just time to conceal it in his waistcoat pocket, when Mr. Sharpe returned.

He was too pre-occupied to notice that the new baronet's hand was trembling, or that his hairless upper lip was moist and twitching.

A few moments later, with bank notes to the value of a hundred pounds in his pocket, the new Sir Cyprian Rust found himself in the street once more. Seeking the nearest public house, he entered and had a glass of neat brandy, which he drained quickly.

That night, over a cigarette, and clad in immaculate evening dress in a private room at the Hotel Cecil, he drew from his pocket the letter that might have dealt the death blow to his ambition. He opened it and read:

DEAR MR. SHARPE—*I have seen your advertisement in the* Sydney Herald, *and am coming to England shortly, in order that the future heir—if a boy—to the title and property of my dear late father, Sir Basil Wingate, may be born in his own country. I am very poor, having left my husband, and if you could send my fare to London, c/o. the General Post Office, Plymouth, to meet me, I shall be able to call and see you, as, of course, you will be the trustee for my child. Hoping to hear from you, as I shall not write again,*

I am,
Faithfully yours,
HELEN JERNINGHAM.

That was all; but the new baronet shivered over his wine, as he realised the result this letter would have had upon the words Mr. Sharpe had spoken to him that morning. The letter was dated nearly two months back; then the heir—if there was one—would soon be in England!

"It was touch-and-go with Fate this morning!" he muttered. "Had old Sharpe not gone out of the room I could not have seen this! Then——"

He rose, and taking a match, struck it, then held the letter over the flame.

"I am afraid my dear cousin Helen will not find that money waiting at Plymouth," he said slowly as he carefully dusted away the ashes of what had once been another man's letter, "but I will make it my duty to watch every liner that comes to Plymouth from now."

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He glanced at his reflection in the glass, and smiled as he saw how much better he looked in his present attire than in the careless Bohemian dress of the morning.

But his laughing, brilliant eyes grew dark as he muttered:

"Sir Cyprian, you hold the cards now! It rests with you to keep them!"

II.

The Broken Sentence.

The woman moved her head and opened her eyes wearily. The hot air in the close-smelling little cabin barely moved the loose hair on her brow. The third-class passengers of the home-coming liner were as usual crowded out, and the narrow cabin where the woman lay, held three bunks.

"Now, my good woman," said the kindly, brusque voice of the ship's doctor, "you must not look about and mope. There are two strapping boys waiting to be introduced."

The woman pushed back the heavy strands of black hair, and said in a curiously breathless voice:

"Boys! Boys! Tell me—is it true? Then has my prayer been answered?"

The doctor looked at her sharply. In spite of her common, poor clothing, and want of money, he knew at once that the woman with the great, eager eyes and hollow cheeks, was a gentlewoman whom Fate had dealt hardly by.

"Yes, yes, that's it—boys," he said in a more gentle tone. "Now you must go to sleep, Mrs.——?" He glanced at her left hand, and experienced a curious sensation of personal disappointment at seeing that it was ringless.

"Never mind my name," the woman muttered, her pale face flushing, and her eyes glittering feverishly. "My boys—will they live? The truth—as God is your witness! Will they live?"

"They will," the doctor replied gravely.

The woman's answer was a strange one. She fell back on the tiny pillow with a sigh. "Then I shall die in peace!"

Wondering greatly, but fearing to excite her by further conversation, the doctor slipped outside into another cabin, where a kindly-hearted passenger was playing the *rôle* of nurse to the tiny atoms of humanity to which the lonely creature next door was mother.

"They are flourishing," he said curtly, glancing at the bundles of flannel from which strange noises came forth, "but I am afraid"—and he jerked his head in the direction of the cabin—"that *she* will go. She only seems to have lived with the desire to give life to these boys. That done, she is content to die! Did she tell you her name?"

The eyes of the homely creature filled slowly with tears.

"No, sir, she's very close. 'Ardly spoke to anyone, and she's not one that you can ask questions of. There's something that stops you."

The doctor agreed, and after another glance at the mother in the adjoining cabin, returned to his companions on the promenade deck.

In the meantime the woman acting as nurse put the infants to sleep in a berth, then stole softly to the side of the mother. She listened to her breathing with a strange fear, for the marble-like face had the impression of death on it. Suddenly the large dark eyes opened, and, reading their expression rightly, the woman bent close over the bunk.

"Yes, dearie," she said soothingly, "they are all right; sleeping for all the world as though they had been brought up to it as a profession. Don't take on so!"

The pallid lips moved, and the kindly creature bent lower still.

"Boys' certificates of birth! I—want—the—doctor!"

Hurriedly the doctor was sent for, and left the smoking-saloon at once.

The eyes of the dying woman brightened as they fell upon him.

"What can I do?" he said gently. "Don't be afraid—tell me!"

"Certificates—of—birth!" The words came painfully. The doctor nodded encouragingly.

"That will be done. What name—what surname?"

She moved her head restlessly. "Send certificates—the older is—the—future—Sir——" Her voice faltered, and the doctor saw that her mind was beginning to ramble.

"Yes," he said earnestly. "The certificates shall be sent anywhere you like, but they cannot be properly christened unless you give me their names—the surname—the name of their father."

She started up with a cry of terror. "No, no! He was cruel—not his name—put that of my father instead on the certificates, and send them to Mr.——". She paused. "I can't remember—but—he—is—in—London. He knows about them—he—has—the—will—the—heir——" Her voice trailed off into a moan.

The doctor looked at the passenger who had taken care of the babies. "Cannot you rouse her?" he whispered. "If this poor girl has anything on her mind to right these children we must get the name of the father, or someone."

"Dearie," said the woman, leaning over the figure on the bunk, "tell us the name of the gentleman or lady who's to 'ave the babies."

The weary eyes opened. "I'm sorry, father! Forgive me! You were right—I was wrong! But the boys—the heir—the old place!"

The doctor sighed hopelessly. He was watching a secret being buried in a grave.

"The name! The name!" he said desperately.

A tender smile broke over the face of the woman.

"I remember," she murmured. "The solicitor's name was Samuel——" she stopped again, and a grey pallor spread imperceptibly over her face.

"The boys' name! For their sakes! The boys' sakes! The name of their father!" he said earnestly.

"For their sakes!" she murmured softly. "His name is—Jer—Jer——" Then she paused once more, and the doctor, bending over her, knew that she had died with the unfinished half of her sons' name on her lips.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Marcella.

"Is my father in, Wermen?"

"Yes, miss, but he does not wish to be disturbed," answered the low-voiced servant respectfully.

"Is he in his study?" the girl said quickly.

"No, miss, in the studio," and the man left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

Marcella Rust sighed wearily. Her father, to whom she had returned from the convent in Brussels, where she had spent her childhood, and the first few years of her girlhood, was as much a stranger to her now as in the days when she had heard his name on the occasion when the Mother Superior had sent for her to receive his annual letter.

It was their first Christmas Eve together since she had returned home for "good," and she could not help wondering sorely why her father preferred to shut himself up in his studio—that mysterious room he allowed no one to enter save his valet, Deacon.

"He might have stayed with me on Christmas Eve," she mused. "This large, gloomy house is a like palace under the sea! So lonely, dark, and forbidding! And he won't have any of my friends to stay with me! He seems to hate people!"

But Marcella Rust was not the type of girl to mope because her father was unsociable. She was young—just twenty-one—with a tall, graceful figure, set off by a face that was beyond

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the usual type of prettiness, being too intense and full of character to please the passer-by, yet the glowing, soft brown eyes, with their black lashes, and the rich, brown hair, waving rebelliously about her creamy brow and neck, were beautiful things to look upon. Her mouth, a trifle large for strict beauty, was vivid and sensitive, grave in repose, but the instant she spoke it dimpled at the corners, and revealed two even rows of milk-white teeth, while her short, straight nose, with its fine nostrils, indicated a nature both proud and noble.

Such was Marcella Rust, the only child of Sir Cyprian Rust, the rich man who spurned the world and all its vanities,

Marcella uttered a cry of amazement. The object the mysterious man had hidden was a spade guinea!

to revel in the delights of his hobby, that of collecting rare paintings, tapestries, china, and jewels, to say nothing of being a connoisseur in art as well.

Marcella rose, and, after gazing out upon the world of snow, turned away from the window with a laugh.

"Well, as I am alone, I may as well find something to do. I have not seen half the rooms in this rambling old house. I will begin a tour of investigation."

Another strange freak of her father's was to have as few servants as possible at the Court, so Marcella went down corridors, up flights of winding stairs, and into rooms that had long lain under the seal of dust. She looked about puzzled. The wing to which she had been lucky enough to find the key was absolutely going to rack and ruin for want of habitation. And yet it faced a south aspect, and the rooms were larger and more modern than those now used.

She was about to leave the corridor when a door at the extreme end opened, and her father's valet, Deacon, came out breathlessly, as though having run up a flight of stairs, looking pale and astonished when he saw the tall figure of his master's daughter.

"What room is that, Deacon?" Marcella said. "I did not know these were the servants' quarters."

"No, Miss, they are not," the man replied civilly, breathing quickly. "This is a lumber room."

"A lumber room?" Marcella said, puzzled, noticing the man's sudden discomfiture. "What lumber room? Let me see!" and she took a step towards the door, but quickly it was slammed to, and Deacon barred the way.

"I'm afraid, Miss," he said apologetically, "that you must not go in. It is not the kind of room Sir Cyprian would like you to be in."

"Not like me to be in?" she repeated in angry surprise. "What nonsense is this, Deacon? A lumber room is no curiosity to me. Why should not see this one?"

"It is full of dust, for one thing, Miss," the servant replied, civilly, "it would ruin your skirt for you."

Marcella looked at the feet of her father's valet. They were clad in shining, black patent slippers; both they and the bottoms of the man's trousers were innocent of dust!

"Really," she said slowly, "you must take great care to keep your own feet out of the dust, Deacon!"

A shadowy smile flitted across the man's mouth. "I know where to put them, Miss! Sir Cyprian's orders are that no one goes into that lumber room but myself."

"It is not my intention to bandy words with my father's servant!" Marcella said coldly, moving away; "but I shall certainly see the inside of that room soon, Deacon. My father's orders to the servants do not include me!"

As she strolled haughtily away, the valet smiled oilily. "I think they do, Miss!" he muttered; "more than anyone else!"

When Marcella, still burning with indignation, regained that portion of the Court to which she was accustomed, she heard voices as she was crossing the hall.

"Sir Cyprian is engaged, sir," Wermen was saying.

"Tell Sir Cyprian that I will not keep him very long," said the other voice, also a man's; and Marcella recognised, with a quickening of her pulses, the voice of the new, interesting curate of the parish church, who, in spite of being a recent comer, and with no rich relatives in the church to secure a living for him, was thought nearly as much of by the parish as her father who had rebuilt half the village, as well as given a new organ to the church.

"I'm sorry, sir," Wermen said firmly. "Sir Cyprian would not be disturbed for the world! They are his orders."

The curate hesitated. He seemed curiously loth to leave the Court without accomplishing his errand.

"Is—is Miss Rust at home?" he said, after a pause.

"Miss Rust is engaged, sir. I—can give a message for you."

Marcella stepped forward. It was intolerable that these horrid servants of her father's should have been trained

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to lie so callously, and to a clergyman, too! Ever since she had been home she had heard nothing but "Sir Cyprian's orders"!

"I will see Mr. Nullius, Wermen," she said, in a clear, high voice; "and when next you undertake to make a statement about me, please see that it is the truth. *I* am the mistress here, and receive whom I like. You may show Mr. Nullius into the drawing-room, and bring tea."

When, a few seconds later, Wermen ushered the curate into the presence of the strong-minded young mistress of Wingate Court, his face was impassive, but when he closed the door he chuckled softly, as though tickled by a subtle joke:

"There is going to be a tug-of-war here, now she's come. It did me good to hear her speak up. It was like old times when the mistress first started having her own way. But she soon stopped; the master's will beat hers, and she went out for sheer want of spirit! But this one"—he chuckled again—"there's something about her that won't be easy to break!"

SECOND CHAPTER.

"The Son of No One."

In the meantime, ignorant of the old man-servant's eulogy in her favour, Marcella was greeting the tall, athletic-looking curate, whose lean, strong face was lit by a smile of amusement that for a brief moment relieved his classic mouth of its usual expression of stern harshness, and lit his dark, grey eyes with a sudden laugh. Marcella thought, inconsequently, how that flash of youth changed him from a sad, over-worked curate into a strangely handsome man.

"Well done, Miss Rust!" he said, in a deep, musical voice; "your method of subduing the Philistines was primitive but effective."

Marcella laughed. "Yes, my father has so centred his thoughts round his works of art in his studio, that the servants have had nearly everything their own way! But you came to see him on important business, did you not?"

Her words had the unintentional effect of reminding the curate that he was in the presence of the daughter of the richest man in the county, and that he was only in her drawing-room on sufferance, as the bearer of a message, not as a friend.

"Yes," he replied, relapsing into his clerical manner. "A poor woman recently come to the parish, is ill, and I was called to see her this afternoon, as dangerous symptoms were developing; and when I got there, I found her in a very excited condition. She is an Australian, I believe, and once might have been very handsome, but disease and want have played havoc with her. I tried to comfort her, but she kept asking to see the owner of the Court, so I naturally thought Sir Cyprian would like to know."

"Naturally," Marcella answered. "What is her name?"

"I am not sure," he replied. "Mrs. 'Graves' or 'Grey.' But I promised to let the owner of the Court know that she wanted to see him. Perhaps," he added, "Sir Cyprian would go round this evening? She is at 14 Digges Row, with Mrs. Samson."

"I will tell him," she said thoughtfully. She was wondering what a woman in such a place as Digges Row could have to say to her retiring and fastidious father.

She looked up and caught a glance from the curate's dark, glowing eyes, that for some unaccountable reason made her heart flutter strangely; and she plunged into the conversation with the first question that came into her head.

"You must have felt very lonely coming to Crawley from London, Mr. Nullius. To leave a large city, full of life, for this village, and, perhaps," she added shyly, "a bright home full of brothers and sisters, for dull lodgings."

The curate's face flushed, then paled.

"On the contrary, Miss Rust," he said, in a low, sad voice, "I have only exchanged a lesser loneliness for a greater! I have never had a home, nor brothers and sisters. I"—and and his voice trembled slightly—"I was brought up in the Foundling Hospital, and from there the kindly notice of an old clergyman rescued me, and got me into St. Paul's School, where I was lucky enough to win one or two scholarships, and so went to Oxford, where I took my degree. I have lived alone—even my name illustrates my isolation"—he laughed, a bitter inflection in his voice. "It was originally 'Filius Nullius,' the son of no one, now corrupted to Philip Nullius!"

"Filius Nullius," she murmured. "It has an attractive sound! Why, Mr. Nullius," she cried, "in the days of Nero that name might have belonged to a Roman noble—or even 'a king in Babylon,'" she quoted softly. Then, moved by an impulsive fancy, she reached out her hand to him. "I am also lonely," she said; "more so, because I have no interests to take me away from my loneliness. Let us be friends, Mr. Nullius."

The curate took her hand in his very gently.

"Thank you, Miss Rust," he said simply. "I am grateful. Yours is the first hand held out to me in friendship. And even were it only pity I would clutch it gladly. Now I must be going," he said, in a changed voice. "I have a lot to do. You won't forget to ask Sir Cyprian if he can manage to visit the poor soul, will you?"

With a lingering contact of hands he took his leave, and the eyes of Sir Cyprian Rust's daughter gazed after him wistfully.

"Pity," she whispered softly, "is akin to——" Then with a sudden blush, she turned to leave the room. "I had better find father, and give him that message; I won't trust it to a servant."

She ran lightly upstairs, and as she paused outside the door of the forbidden corridor, a man came suddenly out. He had black hair, beard, and moustache, and the dim glimmer of light in the unused corridor showed him to be a man of tall, well-made proportions.

Marcella shrank back into the shadow of a welcome corner. Her first impulse had been to scream, but she suppressed the desire and steadily watched the man. His movements were peculiar. He looked back quickly down the passage that led to the door to which her father's valet, Deacon, had refused her admittance earlier, and then taking something from his pocket, he stooped and placed it under the mat that lay at his feet, then, shutting the door, he locked it, put the key in his pocket, and had vanished before Marcella had recovered her presence of mind to follow him and raise an alarm. She had never seen the man before, of that she was certain, and yet there was that in his manner strangely familiar. His obvious knowledge of the complicated passages and the exit, together with his calm pocketing of the key of the door of the corridor, proved that he had been in the house before.

Marcella waited until the corridor was in silence, then slipping from her hiding-place, she raised the rug in front of the door the strange man had locked, and picked up the secret thing he had concealed. It felt like a sovereign, but it was too dark to make it out; so she hurried to her room, enjoying the uncommon sensation of excitement within the dull walls of the Court, and switching on the electric light, she turned over the coin in her hand curiously. It was a piece of gold to the value of twenty-one shillings, that had long since become obsolete among the current coin of the Realm, having on one side the head of the King, then George III., and on the reverse side a spade-formed shield, with the coat-of-arms. Marcella uttered a cry of amazement.

"A spade guinea! How odd! And what could that strange man have meant by putting it under the mat?"

Then she slipped it into the jewelled bag at her waist, and began to dress thoughtfully for dinner.

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THIRD CHAPTER.

Sir Cyprian's Appointment.

"Father," Marcella said, that night at dinner, "who is that dark man I saw coming out of the forbidden corridor this evening?"

Sir Cyprian Rust raised his calm blue eyes and glanced down the length of the dining-table ablaze with silver épergnes, and costly Christmas roses, interspersed here and there by glittering fairy-lamps in the shape of pink and yellow butterflies, while tall wax candles, standing in massive silver candelabras, lent a softened old-world tint to the dazzling effect of modern luxury.

But Sir Cyprian was not regarding the display of wealth on the dinner-table, he was accustomed to that; the years had made him callous to what had at first been a continual feast of beauty to him. He looked instead at the radiant, uncommon beauty of his daughter, who, in her dark, vivid personality, was the extreme antithesis to her father's pale golden hair and fresh complexion.

"My dear Marcella," he said, in soft, conventional tones of surprise; "what a strange question! Allow me to answer it by putting another. What 'dark man,' and why 'forbidden corridor'?"

Marcella's answer was like her nature—straight and to the point.

"He was very dark," she said. "Hair, beard, and moustache inky black; though it was not so much his appearance that I noticed as his manner, and a secret sort of air about him made me wonder what he could be doing alone outside the door of the corridor leading to an end room to which your valet denied me admittance this afternoon!"

"We must watch that girl, Wermen," said Sir Cyprian. "She is uncommonly alert."

Sir Cyprian laughed, and his laugh was very musical and pleasant to hear. "I think I can easily satisfy your curiosity, my dear. I gave orders for some alterations to be made in one of the rooms in that corridor. Probably that was the fellow you saw coming out. As for Deacon having told you that the room at the extreme end of the corridor was forbidden to anyone, he was perfectly right, for those were my wishes. I am having valuables stored in strong safes in the room, and don't wish the work to be disturbed."

Marcella listened politely. She believed her father implicitly, though a vague feeling of distrust lingered in her mind regarding the mysterious stranger who did not resemble a workman.

"By the way, my dear," Sir Cyprian continued suavely; "I suppose you passed on to your own apartments when that man came out of the corridor?"

"On the contrary," she replied lightly, "I was too astonishd to move! I kept back within the shadow, and he rather interested me, because——"

The butler, Wermon, who, during this conversation had been moving about the room, paused for a moment in the act of pouring some champagne into a glass, as though waiting to hear the end of her sentence.

Sir Cyprian smiled, and stroked the leaves of one of the flowers nearest him with gentle fingers.

"Interested you, dear child; how was that?"

"He put something under the rug at the door," she answered; "and after he had gone, I stooped to satisfy myself what it was, and to my surprise found an article not at all dreadful or blood-curdling, but extremely fascinating. It was a spade guinea!"

At that moment there was a crash of glass at the sideboard.

Wermen had knocked over a Venetian vase of which Sir Cyprian was particularly fond.

A slight frown wrinkled the almost boyish brow of his master.

"How clumsy you are, Wermen! Leave the room!"

As they finished their dessert Marcella said abruptly. "Oh, I nearly forgot to give you a message Mr. Nullius left for you," and a faint flush rose to her cheeks as she remembered how loth she had been to see the handsome curate leave that afternoon.

Her father looked at her sharply. His thoughts had been intent on something else, and it was with a struggle against impatience that he said:

"What message had Mr. Nullius, the curate, that it would not keep until he saw me? I suppose it was to drain me for some charity?"

Marcella's large brown eyes flashed.

"Mr. Nullius called here, and had I not overheard Wermen telling him a string of lies about my being engaged when he asked to see *me* as you were in your studio, he would have been obliged to go without leaving a dying woman's message."

For an instant a curious change came over the still remarkably handsome face of the baronet. It seemed almost as though his fair skin had tightened into a network of fine wrinkles, and his mouth quivered under the sweeping yellow moustache. But before Marcella could do more than fancy

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(*continued.*)

that her eyes had played her a trick, her father rose quickly from the table with an expression of concern.

"That's very sad! Of course, my dear, in that case I should have been told at once. A dying woman Did——" He turned his back to light a cigar. "Did Mr. Nullius tell you her name—or where she came from?"

"I think he said that her name was either Mrs. Graves, or Grey," she answered slowly. "She is at 14 Digges Row, and she comes from Australia."

Sir Cyprian held the match in his hand so long that it burnt his fingers, and he dropped it with a soft exclamation.

"I will go to her at once," he said, then, as though he had remembered something, he turned to the girl gazing dreamily into the fire, and said:

"Let me have that spade guinea, my dear. That fellow must have found it on the floor, and thinking better of stealing it, replaced it where it would probably have been found in time. I would not lose it for the world, as it has taken me a long period to get a collection of them—they are very rare."

Marcella took it from the little bag at her waist, and handed it back to her father, then said suddenly:

"Will you let me come and see your collection one day, father? I have been home nearly a month, and you have never let me see you working in your studio yet."

A gentle smile curved Sir Cyprian's lips. "I am very sensitive about allowing my daubs to be seen. But I will send some of my pictures up to you one day. My studio is a rough sort of place, unfit for a woman to visit; you would be all over paint in two minutes."

Marcella laughed. "Did my mother ever see your studio, father?"

Sir Cyprian did not answer immediately, but the pupils of his bright blue eyes expanded for a moment, then he put his hand on his daughter's shoulder:

"Once, Marcella. Your mother had no taste for art. I hope," he went on, "that I shall find you are an obedient daughter. If you obey my wishes and don't thwart my instructions to the servants, you will find me a kind, indulgent father; but"—and he smiled slightly—"go against them, and you will dash your little head against a stone wall! Your mother went contrary to me—once, and regretted it ever after. So now I warn you in time!"

He stooped and a light caress fell upon the girl's brown hair and the next moment Sir Cyprian Rust had closed the door gently behind him, leaving his only child silent from bewilderment at her unexpected reproof.

In the hall the baronet, clad in a long dark overcoat and a soft, slouch hat, was speaking with low, rapid gestures to Wermen, who held the door open for his master.

"Don't let an exhibition like that occur again," he said curtly; "I thought all these years had schooled you never to show surprise at anything."

The old man's hand trembled. "I'm very sorry, sir," he muttered, "but it came so sudden, and made me think of the—the mistress, the first time she—talked like that."

Sir Cyprian's fair face clouded. "Then keep your thoughts to yourself next time," he snarled; adding quickly, "I suppose the 'Shovel' got off safely?"

"Yes, sir," answered the other in a low tone; "although he was worried at not finding the usual sign that all was safe."

"Ah!" Sir Cyprian breathed; "it was an awkward occurrence this afternoon. Before, there was no great occasion for care. We must watch that girl, Wermen! Don't be careless with the keys. She is uncommonly alert. I want no bungling."

Then, with a curt movement of his head that denoted the conversation was finished, Sir Cyprian Rust left the Court, walking rapidly in the direction of Digges Row, the sordid end of the village from where the dying woman had sent her disturbing message.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Tardy Confession.

When he reached the humble abode of No. 14, Sir Cyprian Rust hesitated. He was naturally a cool man, but somehow his nerves were slightly shaken, perhaps by the fact that his daughter seemed to be more self-reliant than he had desired or expected her to be.

"Bah!" he muttered. "I put off having her back from Belgium as long as I could, but when she reached her twenty-first birthday, I could not invent another excuse to keep her away. But I will show her that I am master—as I showed that other fool. And this—this beggar, can only be a poor wretch wanting refuge from the workhouse, and knowing that I am a rich man, wants to plead for money."

He knocked at the door softly.

A woman answered it, and in his long coat and slouch hat that nearly covered his eyes, did not recognise at first the owner of the Court.

"Mrs. Graves is expecting you, I think, sir," she said, and led the way into a dark, narrow, little room at the back of the house where, on a bed in the corner, a woman lay.

"Ah!" she breathed in a low tone of relief. "I was afraid you would not come. That I might die before I could say what I wanted!"

"If there is anything I can do for you, my good creature," said Sir Cyprian, in a patronising voice; "tell me as quickly as you can, for I have an engagement, and only came here because your request was so very unusual."

The woman laughed weakly. "And *I* have an Engagement, too; so will not keep you long in case *I* have to go before I unburden myself to you."

An uneasy sensation seized the man of wealth who stood looking down on the thin, wasted face of the woman, who, in the dim light, looked about forty years old.

She beckoned him nearer to her; "Years ago, sir, I was maid to Sir Basil Wingate's daughter, Miss Helen—afterwards Mrs. Jerningham. I was jealous of her—for reasons I need not say now; and, God forgive me! I did her a great wrong of which I have long repented and sought to find her. It was with that reason that I left England and went to Australia, seeking for Mr. Jerningham or those belonging to her. I—I—nearly found Mrs. Jerningham once, but he had gone when I got to the place; then—then, I married and settled down there; but I could not rest, and I had to come back."

"You have not yet told me what you did," Sir Cyprian said coldly. "Why this sudden storm is a teacup over what must have taken place more than twenty years ago? Besides, my good creature, I should be unable to help you."

"No, sir! You could right the wrong for me!" the woman panted. "You could seek out those that I had sinned against, and put them in their proper places!"

"What did you do?" he said again; this time his curiosity excited to a strange pitch.

She raised herself on her elbow, and fixing him with glittering eyes, said: "I stole the will—the real will, written by Sir Basil Wingate on his death-bed, leaving everything he possessed to his daughter, Mrs. Jerningham, in trust for her children—whether *boys* or girls—and failing them, sir, it was to pass over *you*, and go to your child, if you had one. Oh, I learnt it all!" she said wearily. "I never forgave myself for concealing it. But you will take the will, sir, and seek for the child of Helen Jerningham, won't you?"

Sir Cyprian Rust did not reply immediately. He had felt so sure after all these years that both the inconvenient cousin and her possible son had died before leaving Australia, that to hear that there was a later will still in existence likely to threaten his security, was a blow so dreadful that it dazed him at first.

"You have the will here?" he said eagerly. "Of—of course, I will put everything in the hands of the solicitors at once. I am independent of Sir Basil Wingate's money, but—but I have a child also"—and his eyes glinted oddly—"she will be only too glad to waive aside all her rights should she have a cousin living."

"But she has, sir!" the woman whispered; "your daughter

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can never have that money—or you the title; for the boys of Helen Jerningham are somewhere in the world, wanting their inheritance."

Sir Cyprian caught his breath sharply. What arrant nonsense was this creature talking, and why did it make his heart flutter wildly and the blood tingle in his veins like quicksilver?

"Your mind must be wandering," he said brusquely; "there were no boys born to my cousin, or the solicitors and myself would have heard of it at once. There were advertisements in the papers for six months for news of her or the child and—no notice was taken of them."

"I know what I know," the woman whispered, her pale lips shaping the words painfully. "I heard she left for England—but never reached it alive; the stewardess on board the ship that took her on her last journey told me, when I met her on the arrival of the ship at Sydney, that a woman had died among the third-class passengers, giving birth to two boys—and I know that the woman was Mrs. Jerningham."

"Why didn't you pursue your inquiries regarding the boys then?" sneered the baronet with a chilly laugh.

"I did; and heard that one of them had been adopted, the other sent to a home."

Then she raised herself on the pillows. "Something tells me, sir, that they—or one of them—is alive now.. Promise me that you will seek them out; they must be men by this time, and Fate has cheated them of their rights for a long time."

"Yes, yes," muttered Sir Cyprian quickly; "I will do my best to find them. But—but I can do nothing without the will—the new will you say you stole from the dying baronet. That must be produced before any steps can be taken."

The woman's hand fumbled beneath her pillows, and Sir Cyprian held his breath with suspense.

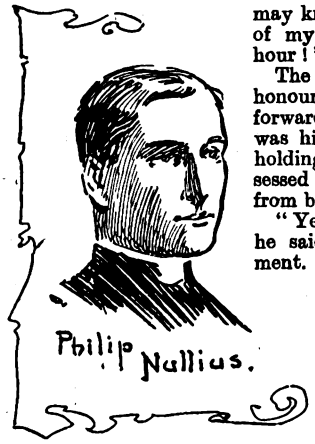
"This is the will," she murmured; "I have always kept it by me in case anything happened; and I put it under my pillow when Mr. Nullius, the curate, told me he would have my message given to you. He is a good man."

Sir Cyprian made an impatient movement. He did not care about the virtues of the village curate, he only wanted to possess the will that the creature who lay at her last gasp held in her power.

He reached out his hand with a smothered ejaculation: "Let me have it," he said hoarsely—beads of perspiration standing on his white brow.

A strange instinct warned the woman on the dirty little bed, that the interests of the baronet were at variance with those of the wronged, and she regretted that she had not trusted her secret with one less interested in the issues of the new will.

She kept her hand under the pillow, while she said earnestly: "Promise, on your oath, before the God in whose presence I shortly shall be, that you will use this will for the furthering of justice; that you will seek out those motherless boys and make over the title and estate, with all the money, to the rightful owners! Promise me, so that I may know that I have done a little of my duty even at the eleventh hour!"



The baronet—who wore his honours like a giant's robe—leant forward, nearer the hand that was hidden under the pillow, still holding the document that possessed the power to cut the ground from beneath his feet.

"Yes, yes; of course I do!" he said, suppressing his excitement. "I promise everything!"

Still the woman held back, eyeing him fearfully, and with increasing doubt in his mind. Her instinct, quickened by the approach of the Great Reaper, detected the false note in his voice.

"I have changed my mind," she murmured nervously. "Perhaps it will be better to give it to the curate, Mr. Nullius. Then no one can misjudge you, sir. Will you call him? He said he would be here soon."

An ugly gleam flickered in Sir Cyprian's usually seraphic eyes and he bit his lip vindictively.

With a swift movement he wrenched the woman's hand from beneath her pillow and seized the precious document in a second.

"It is quite safe with me," he said roughly. "You have no cause to doubt me. I gave you my promise and will keep it, when I have mastered the contents of the will."

She flung out her hand. "Give it back, I say! You are false! I know you are! I will let Mr. Nullius take it; I can put perfect faith in him, and he will be here now."

She raised her head suddenly and cried: "Mr. Nullius, come quick! I want you! I want——"

In another moment a strong white hand was clapped to her mouth and increased in pressure until the woman's struggles suddenly ceased, and she lay quiet.

* * * * *

Sir Cyprian Rust rose from the awkward position in which he had been kneeling, and stroked back the damp hair that had fallen across his forehead. His knees were stiff also, and he breathed quickly.

At the door he came face to face with the curate, Philip Nullius.

"I have just received a strange confession from that poor soul," he said; "she has evidently suffered much through her sin, but none of us can afford to throw stones," he continued gently; "and I am going to do the best I can for those she has left in my care. I think, Mr. Nullius, that you are the only person whose aid she needs now."

With a brief nod on either side the two men parted and the curate entered the darkened room.

After one swift glance at the face on the pillow he fell on his knees and began to murmur the prayers for the dead.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Gold King.

Caleb J. Johnson, financier, company promoter, Society lion, and City scamp, smiled as he ran through the papers and letters placed by his side at the breakfast-table.

He was not a commonplace man—in fact his personality was inclined to be magnetic, to which fact he owed the greater part of his success; for, few and far between were the men and women who could withstand that plausible tongue or facile imagination, that would explain in terms of sugared conviction the prospectus of a new mine in which he was interested, or rather, in which he desired the public to be interested—which was quite another matter.

Enormously tall, with square shoulders, and weighing nearly fifteen stone, he was a conspicuous figure at any time. His head was large, but with the largeness of a brilliant intelligence rather than that of the brainless idiot.

His eyes were smallish, twinkling and expressionless, not unlike stars, nearly buried in clouds of fat of eyelid and cheek. His nose was straight and characterless, his skin flabby, and his chin had long since effaced itself in layers of other more recent chins.

Yet, like the bull-dog, his ugliness was his beauty, for it served as a foil to his perfect courtesy, his inimitable tact, and indomitable perseverance to come out on top in whatever piece of villainy he participated—whether swindling in the City, or posing in Society.

Of the past, before he swooped upon the market with his boundless wealth and breathless prospectuses, no one ever

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(*continued.*)

heard him speak; and it never occurred to anyone to question him. Caleb J. Johnson, the gold king, was all they cared about. His capital interested the world more than his inner life; and of his money he gave freely, but of himself he spoke rarely.

No one person could say they had ever heard Caleb J. Johnson mention the words "my wife" or "my family"—the man's gold seemed to have grown round him, placing a glittering barrier between him and the outer circle.

And over the top of that yellow wall the little twinkling eyes of the man laughed at those who scrambled for his favours, and took upon themselves the brunt of his erratic humours for the sake of the money that filtered through his fingers. His name stood well in the City, and it had never yet headed a bogus prospectus.

"Fat, fifty, and famous!" a man had once described him as being, and, sitting at his well-spread table, with its neat bachelor appointments, the words were very apt.

He tossed most of the letters aside with a contemptuous smile. He knew why he was invited to all the big crushes of the season; not on account of his appearance or his birth—for he possessed neither the one nor the other. But the mothers in Society had daughters in the market that were labelled with a price, and to the highest bidder that came along those mothers were prepared to knock down, to the tune of "going—going—gone!" the souls of their children. And Caleb J. Johnson knew that when he turned his beady glance upon one fair Society flower, a dozen maternal pulses throbbed with envy.

He picked up one letter, and his smile lost its twist of contempt. It was from a woman he respected—one who treated him—for all his wealth—with the same languid interest she would bestow upon a Battersea pariah. He had met her at several balls, "at homes," and week-end parties, and his interest had grown to admiration.

He opened the letter curiously. It was a dainty epistle, redolent of violets, and prettily worded:

"DEAR MR. JOHNSON,—*Will you dine with me on Thursday next? Quite an informal party, consisting of myself, my nephew, and Sir Cyprian Rust. I do hope your many engagements will allow you to come, for I will be more than pleased to show you my humble home.*—*Yours sincerely,*

"VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX."

"Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox," the financier murmured, thoughtfully. "Age forty, and looks thirty; elegant, and an aristocrat to the finger-tips. A widow with a competence and no encumbrances. A rare woman who, in spite of the whirlpool that is always near her, has avoided the eddies. A woman who would be a credit to the position of a millionaire's wife. She has had a sufficient lack of money to make her appreciate the handling of unlimited coin, and sufficient breeding to make her treat the possessor of it like dirt!"

He clasped his large, capable hands together, and smiled oddly.

"So she has the baronet, Sir Cyprian Rust, staying with her! A strange coincidence! I remember Sir Cyprian's name, and he probably heard me mentioned in terms not exactly those of love, when that little fool led me innocently to believe that she was an heiress!"

He rose suddenly. "Those days are dead, Caleb J. Johnson, the millionaire, has no truck with the penniless, headstrong Caleb J. ——" He smiled, and cut the end of a cigar with thoughtful precision. "'Lady Violet Johnson' is not so pretty, but one day we may do away with the 'Johnson,' and if she prefers it, adopt the other. I will meet this Sir Cyprian Rust! It will be amusing to see the man whom I envied and reviled as a boy! Also, I will study Lady Violet."

He touched a bell, and dictated one or two letters to his secretary, then wrote a neat, conventional acceptance of the only invitation he had opened.

* * * * *

The strains of the Green Hungarian Band floated from the windows of the house next door to that of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, who was entertaining only a very small party that evening, nearly all the guests of which were already in the house.

The hostess was the first to arrive in the large Louis XVI. drawing-room. She was a beautiful woman, but her dark, restless eyes conveyed an impression of always suppressing and fighting some hidden longing. That look was a puzzle to most people, and one or two imagined they had found the key to it. But Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox knew that she had herself flung away the key to forgetfulness with wilful fingers.

She halted before a long cheval glass. Her glittering robe of black sequins clinging to her lissom figure, threw into bold relief the dead white of her marble skin, and the sleek, well-groomed head, with its coronet of brown hair surmounting a small, patrician face, curiously defiant and supplicating at the same time.

"I think he may ask me to-night," she murmured. "He seems to have made up his mind; and, after all, there is little risk in it. More than seven years have passed since that incubus ceased to bleed me. I may with impunity consider myself what the world imagines me. And his money will be very acceptable! Yes; if he proposes to-night it will be a matter of congratulation to my dressmaker, and of gall and wormwood to my friends!"

The door opened noiselessly, and a man stood on the threshold, smiling at the vision of feminine loveliness and charm appreciating its own powers.

"Age cannot wither her," he laughed, and a mocking note touched his mirth with satire.

Lady Violet turned slowly from the glass. Her hands were trembling, and her eyes sparkled ominously.

"Age passes us both by, Cyprian," she answered, "you still retain your sheen of youth and golden hair as of yore. You are no older in appearance than when——" She paused and her mouth quivered.

"Than when," the man finished, smiling strangely, "you and I, my charming Violet, contracted a very convenient compact giving us each what we both wanted at the time—you, money, and I——" he shrugged his shoulders. "A very poor bargain after all!"

"What do you mean?" the woman flashed. "I gave of my life and soul, you only a few pounds that you barely missed! I gave blood, you paltry gold!"

"Hardly paltry, my dear sister-in-law," murmured the baronet, casting a glance round the richly-appointed room in which they stood, "since for twenty years it has kept up this place for you, and given your beauty a decent background. On the other hand, it is *I* who should grumble. Your sister—my dear, lamented wife"—his voice was curiously low—"did not prove the gold mine I expected of her. There was no heir to take my title and the money after me, and I am placed in the unhappy position of being unable to marry again."

The woman clasped her white hands, on the fingers of which glittered precious stones.

"You killed her soul, and flung open the windows of her

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mind! You allowed her to—tumble upon the truth—the awful truth that she told me!"

Sir Cyprian Rust smiled gently. "Have you seen Marcella yet? She is a promising girl, but I had cause to reprimand her some days ago. She discovered too much. She found—a spade guinea!"

Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox shuddered, and her eyes grew distended with an unspoken thought.

"Marcella! Oh, God, spare her!" she murmured, turning a white, strained face to him. "Don't let *her* know, Marcella—my——"

"Your niece, Violet," said the cold voice, "is my daughter, and my heiress. After me she inherits the property. Her life is valuable, don't fear."

"Then why did you insure her life when a baby?" she said slowly. "What has caused it to be so valuable—now?"

He smiled slightly. "The life of a child is uncertain—sometimes! Marcella has every reason to live to old age as far as I am concerned."

"But *she* died!" breathed the woman.

"Yes!" he answered, slowly. "Her death was her own fault. The insurance on her life was paid over to me only after due inquiries had been made by the insurance people. Now," he continued, sarcastically, "that you have satisfied your inquiries, I have my wishes to express to you."

Her eyes dilated suddenly. "They are?"

"The house of that millionaire chap, Johnson, contains a valuable lot of plate, and you have the *entrée* to it. When next you visit it there are certain details I wish you to note, and——"

"Not *that* house!" she gasped. "I cannot, even to you! He will be here to-night, as my guest."

He looked at her curiously. "You either do this for me, or Marcella will know that for a certain sum her—aunt—sold her!"

For one brief moment the woman hesitated, then her answer came, slowly:

"I will do it; for my task-master is a hard one!"

As voices drew near they separated, and presently Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox was laughing and chatting with Marcella, who was statuesque in soft silver gauze, while Sir Cyprian Rust and Mr. Caleb J. Johnson discussed the City.

Lady Violet drew the girl aside. "Are you happy, dear, with—with your father?"

Marcella's eyes opened. "Oh, yes, auntie! But he's a fearful recluse at home, and spends all his time in his studio."

Lady Violet shivered and turned to her nephew, Edward Day, a slim, fair, young man, with a weak, effeminate face.

"You must take Marcella to see the conservatory after dinner, Edward; she has not been here before."

In the drawing-room, towards the end of the evening, when Sir Cyprian was playing Bridge with Edward Day, Johnson seized the chance for which he had come.

"Lady Violet, I am a plain, bluff man, like my name but I want to ask you a question. Will you marry me?"

Although she had expected the question, Lady Violet was not prepared with an answer.

"I—I——" she murmured, "am not sure that I can marry you, Mr. Johnson!"

"Why not?" said the financier, coolly. "You are a widow—I, a bachelor. Why should we not marry, if you think we can jog along together comfortably? Is there any just cause or impediment?"

A faint smile touched her lips.

"No, Mr. Johnson. As far as I know, there is no just cause or impediment. I am perfectly free to marry you."

A low, amused laugh broke the stillness that followed her words. It did not come from the financier, but from the balcony that had wide windows flung open.

Lady Violet turned sharply. Her lips were white.

"What was that noise?" she said, hoarsely.

The financier looked at her in surprise. "Some loafer outside," he said. "But, come, Violet; you have not said that you would marry me."

Again the laugh sounded, mockingly derisive; then the palms in front of the window parted suddenly, and a man lurched heavily into the room.

(Another long instalment of this fine serial next week.)

A LOST MEMORY.

The Tale of a Christmas Gift.

THE operation was over.

The cleverest surgeon that could be obtained had finished his work, and now, with the family physician, awaited a final interview with the father of his patient.

There was good and bad news to tell John Chambers about his son.

He came into the room and advanced towards them, with his teeth set; what would their report be? He waited for it anxiously.

'We are glad to say that our work has been successful in one direction, that of saving life, Mr. Chambers, your son will live, but——" the surgeon paused.

"But, sir."

Outwardly calm and possessed, yet with the demon of suspense tugging at his heart, the great financier awaited the conclusion of the sentence. The patient was his only son, in whom all his ambition and hopes were planted.

"We are sorry to state, that when your son recovers consciousness, he will have no memory; all the past will be as a blank; he will not even remember his name, nor the fact that you are his father."

"Thank Heaven!"

Was the man mad? To thank Heaven that his son would be as a complete stranger to him—that his intellect would be clouded of aught that had happened, even as a little child; he would be obliged to trace his progress up the ladder of education. To thank Heaven for *that*!

"I am afraid you do not fully understand your son's position, sir—what such a state means," said the physician gravely. "Your son will have no affection for you; practically he has to begin life over again."

"Thank you, gentlemen, but I think I fully realise my son's position; physically he will soon be well; mentally, nothing remains to him of the past, no promises he has made or anything of that sort."

The surgeon bowed.

"And for that loss of memory—as his father—I again say 'Thank God,' but I must not keep you waiting. Accept my grateful thanks for what you have done, sir, and this"—handing the astonished surgeon an envelope; "you, doctor, will watch over Edward until he is restored to his normal strength. I have the honour to wish you both 'Good-day.'"

And Mr. Chambers left the room with a brighter step than when he had entered it.

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Doctors Aknew and Renfrew stared blankly at one another, then the latter said:

"I think it must be this, Mr. Chambers is a most arbitrary and ambitious man. I heard he had set his heart on some marriage for his son, but young Ned turned restive, and vowed he would only marry some penniless lassie whom he had met, and lately there have been rumours of ructions between father and son."

"There may be something in that," responded his companion; "still, it is strange."

* * * * *

John Chambers went to his study, and, unlocking a drawer, took three letters, all written in the same girlish hand, one bearing the postmark of that morning; this he read with a sneer on his face:

"My Dear, Dear Ned,—*Why don't you come or write? I am getting so anxious. It is now three weeks since I heard from you, and it will be Christmas Day on Friday. Ned, darling it's not like you to keep your little girl in suspense. Come darling, soon, to your own.* "Mary."

This was the reason; this Mary was the girl for whom his son Ned had taken such a mad infatuation; a dancing master's daughter, earning her living at teaching music; a nice wife for his son, who would be heir to over half a million. Fate, however, had played into his hand. He would go to this girl, and in his son's name break off all connection with her. If he had promised to marry her, so much the worse. If she insisted on seeing him, well, she could, for his memory would be a blank as regarded her as well as everyone else. Her voice and figure would awaken no chord. And the hard man chuckled.

He wrote down the address, 2 Rose Mansions, Maida Vale. He would drive there at once.

* * * * *

In her tiny flat Mary Chambers waited and waited for a letter or the appearance of her husband, for Ned Chambers had married her some three months previously, trusting time would soften the old man's heart, and then their secret marriage would be forgiven.

Mary had been averse to the deception, but she was not strong, and the constant out-of-door journeys she was obliged to take—for her music pupils were very scattered—had weakened her constitution, and after a sharp attack of influenza, she had given way and consented, and had promised never to mention the fact that she was married to Edward Chambers to anyone, until he gave her leave.

Edward Chambers had been too much in love to consider the consequences of such a step. His allowance from his father would provide for his wife, and he resolved meantime to fit himself for some profession, so that if in time he should be disinherited because of his refusal to carry out his father's wishes, he would be enabled to maintain himself and his wife.

Fond of engineering, he had for some months been studying it, both practically and otherwise, much to Mr. Chambers' disgust, who, to have more hold upon his son, had purposely prevented his taking up a profession.

In the midst of the girl's sad reflections she heard the bell, and she ran joyfully to answer it: perhaps it was a message from Ned.

In the dusk of the December afternoon she at first thought it was her husband, and she exclaimed:

"Oh! Ned." But as the stranger followed her into the light she saw she had made a mistake, though from his appearance and likeness she knew her visitor to be Ned's father.

"You are my Ned's father, I can tell; is he ill?" she asked anxiously, and her eyes filled with tears, while terror seized her; this hard, stern-faced man had not come as a friend.

John Chambers leisurely surveyed the room, which gave unmistakable evidence of his son's visits. In one corner was his walking-stick, on a small table his engineering books; this was where he spent his time—with this girl.

No mercy should be shown to her.

"I have brought a message to you from my son," he said coldly. "He has gone abroad on special business for me, but before going he asked me to call upon you."

"I do not understand," faltered the girl. "Is Ned ill?"

"Perfectly well." He told the lie without a quiver. She had evidently heard nothing of the motor smash and its sad result—and should continue to know nothing.

Placing an envelope on the table, he said:

"My son desired me to say that he has grown tired of his—ahem!—entanglement with you, and that he desires to forget it, and bade me bring you this," pointing to the letter.

Grown tired of her? What did it mean? Mechanically Mary opened the envelope and saw that its sole contents was a bank-note. The room seemed to be dancing round her. How could he send her that message? He was her husband. This dreadful man did not know that; she would tell him, but—she remembered she had promised not.

She collected her courage, and facing her visitor bravely, said:

"Take back this money, though you are Ned's father. I do not believe he sent it to me, or the message you have brought. I will see him myself."

"You are welcome to, on his return," he answered roughly; "but you will find he will deny all knowledge of you." He added scornfully: "His words to me were, 'if she persists in seeing me, father, I shall deny having known her.'"

Taking no notice of this taunt, Mary said quietly:

"When does he return?"

He made a rapid calculation. It was now December the 24th. If he allowed Ned a month, that would do.

"A month from to-day."

"Very well. I shall call at your house in Palace Gardens on the 24th of January at three o'clock," and with a gentle, dignified manner, she held open the door for her unwelcome visitor to depart.

That night, as he visited the sick-room, and heard the nurse's report as to the progress of her patient, the bells from St. Mary Abbot's chimed out their message of love, forgiveness, and peace—the message which every year they rang out afresh, but they touched no string in the financier's heart; the dust of ambition and avarice had corroded the strings of love and peace. His only son should wed rank and money, not a penniless girl, whose only dower was her looks, so the bells taught him nothing.

But they rang a whisper of comfort and hope to the poor deserted girl bride. There was a God, who would protect and care for her and Ned, for she believed not a word of what that cruel man had said; only she must be patient and wait.

But that Christmas Day was a sad one to the lonely little wife.

Where was Ned?

A month later Mr. Chambers sat after lunch chatting to his son, who, apparently quite well, was trying to grasp everything that those around him endeavoured to impart. But it was hard work.

He could recall nothing, and could only do exactly what he was told, and as the man, who said he was his father, directed.

The butler entered, and whispered something to the elder man.

"All right, show her up in two minutes, Dale. Ned, my boy, I want you to listen to me. There is a lady coming here; she will speak to you, and ask you things, you must simply say, 'I do not know you.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, father," he repeated slowly. "I—do—not—know—you."

Mary Chambers came softly into the room and walked straight to her husband's side. Her voice was sweet and gentle, as she tried to take his hand, saying:

"Ned, why have you not been to see me?" But he strove to push her away, and said in a mechanical way:

"I—do—not—know—you."

The anxiety of the last month had strained Mary's powers of endurance, and when she heard those words from her own husband it was too much: she fell fainting at his feet.

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When she recovered he was gone out of the room, and her only wish was to be gone also, and, refusing all aid, she walked into the street, alone and friendless, denied by the man who had sworn to cherish her, with the knowledge that for the future she must protect and care for herself.

* * * * *

"This is passing strange, Aknew; a year to-day you operated on him, and we had to tell his father the sad result, and now this afternoon that you should have to operate again. It was unfortunate his getting in this railway smash," said Dr. Renfrew.

"It may be fortunate. I am hopeful that this blow will cause a transformation. I think when I have finished and he awakes his memory will have returned, and only the past twelve months will be a blank."

Mr. Chambers came to them.

"I am glad to see you, sir."

"I hope after I have been with my patient to have some good news for you, Mr. Chambers; but I want to impress upon you this: If your son recovers consciousness, he will, I believe, fancy himself back in the events which happened before he was in that motor smash, and whatever he asks for, whomever he wishes to see—in short, what he wants, must be given to him. His desire must be satisfied if you wish his memory to return," said the surgeon.

"I do *indeed* wish it," said his listener, and the men of science went away to their patient.

Only a year ago—only one year, and yet to the financier it had seemed a lifetime. *That* his son Edward; that stupid, inanimate piece of humanity, whose sole wish appeared to be allowed to eat and sleep; this to be his survivor to carry on his race and endow it with distinction and honour. For his treachery Mr. Chambers had indeed been punished.

He had followed the movements of the girl whom his son had loved; she had left her flat and was living in one room, supporting herself with needlework, he discovered. He had many times sent her money, but it was always returned with the one sentence, "Your son denied me, so I can accept nothing from you or him," and in his heart he admired her. She was proud; he liked pride. If only she had been wealthy. Still, if his son's restoration to his normal self meant marriage with her, he would gladly give his consent.

Anxiously he paced the corridor, awaiting the surgeon's report. Suddenly the sound of voices came to him, someone was wishing a companion the compliments of the season. It was Christmas Eve again. What would this Christmas bring to him?

The door of the room in which his son lay opened quickly, and a nurse came to him.

"Your son is conscious and asking for you," she whispered.

"Father," said Ned's voice faintly, "father, have I been ill long? It—all seems—strange. I want my wife—Mary. I married her; that little music teacher, Mary. I want my wife, father, before I die."

"Satisfy him," whispered the surgeon; "say you will bring her; say something, man," for speech appeared to have left Mr. Chambers. Everything was swallowed up in the great thought; it was the voice of his son Ned who spoke; it was no stranger who touched him.

"I will bring her to you, Ned, my boy. Only rest," he said thankfully.

"You—will not be angry with—Mary, father? It was not her fault. You will love her," said the sick man, feverishly.

"Yes, Ned; she shall be a daughter to me," answered his father. And then as swiftly the motor could take him, he went to Shirland, to the poor abode where Mary lived.

Why had not the girl told him Ned had married her? Things would have been different then; he would not have allowed his son's wife to live in this manner, silly girl!

And now perhaps she would never forgive. She and Ned would be reconciled, and he, for his treason and revenge, would be an outsider in their happiness, and the old man sighed. Ned was all he had to love and care for.

Mary answered his knock, and his white face and changed look told her something had happened.

"Come at once," he said hurriedly. "Ned is ill and wants you." And then as they drove to the hospital he explained.

"He was thrown out of a motor a twelvemonth ago, and while he lay ill I opened your letters. When he recovered he had lost his memory, and I saw in that a chance to part you; but I did not know you were his wife. To-day he was injured in the collision at King's Cross, and by almost a miracle the operation has restored his memory. Only he remembers nothing of the events of the last twelve months. He is conscious and asking for you; but why—why did you not tell me he had married you?"

"I had promised Ned not to," she answered simply. But her eyes were shining with hope and joy. Ned had never been false.

Anxiously the medical men awaited their arrival; but their fears were allayed when Mary stole to their patient's side, and, pressing her face to his, whispered his name.

He would live now, and, best of all, regain his mental balance.

Softly they left the room for a few moments, and Mr. Chambers watched the girl kneeling by the bedside with an aching heart. Would Ned ever forgive?

Just then the bells from the neighbouring church rang out their merry chime, and their message this time awoke a response in the old man's heart.

"Ring out the false, ring out the false," that was what they were saying. When his son recovered he would be accounted false, and rung out of the lives of the two he had tried to separate.

He buried his face in his hands.

Then a gentle touch made him look up, and he saw the girl he had deceived standing by his side, and there was no hatred in her face, only a tender pity. He was Ned's father, and it was Christmas, and Ned was given back to her.

"Come to Ned," she whispered, "he wants you," and she led the broken man to his son's side.

"I'm—getting—sleepy, father," said the young fellow, "but before I rest I want to give you my Christmas present—a daughter, my Mary," and he placed the girl's hand in his father's.

And then the nurse gently pushed them away, and said her patient must be quiet, and the old man led his daughter from the room.

"Can you really forgive me, Mary?" he said in astonishment.

"Ah, yes, father, for you too, have something to forgive. We were wrong to deceive you; henceforth there shall be no deception, and Ned and I will try to make you happy."

And the bells chimed out again. But this time their message was "Ring in the new."

Robert Murray.

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The Heart of Dorothy Nevill.

The Story of a Love that was Cast Aside, but which was Happily Regained.

THE door stood open, showing a glimpse of the sweet, old-fashioned garden, bathed in sunlight, and sweet with the scent of roses, mignonette, and the spicy odour of the tall, white phlox. In the field below they were carrying the corn, and the voices of the reapers sounded pleasantly—the deep tones of the men, the shrill trebles of the children, and sometimes the fuller, sweeter notes of a woman's voice.

I have seen and heard it all, so many, many times, but never before had the summer seemed so glad, never before had the sun shone, the roses bloomed, the nightingale sung, as in that summer. And in all the countryside, I thought, there could not be a happier girl than I, Dorothy Nevill.

All the afternoon I had dreamt under the shade of the tall beech trees, dreamt of all that made life so fair, so gorgeous a thing. But when the sun grew low in the Heavens, I hastened home, and hurrying to my room, slipped on my daintiest frock, a quaintly fashioned gown of pale mauve muslin.

Then, when I was ready I stood before the glass, a tall, slim figure, a childish face, with brown eyes and lips scarlet as the poppy in the corn. Surely I was a pretty thing in those days—days so long ago that I may well be pardoned for remembering.

I had reason for pleasure in my looks, the best, the only reason worth the name. I had a sweetheart, tall, strong, with brave blue eyes and a sunny smile, and I loved him—loved him with all my heart. He was waiting for me now, this moment. I wonder did he keep watch for me as anxiously as I for him?

I passed down the wide oak staircase, pausing a moment as I reached the garden door to pluck a deep red rose. I remember it so well—the cool hush of the twilight, the singing of the birds, and the drowsy humming of the insects in the grass.

As I crossed the meadow I caught sight of Mark standing head and shoulders above the men in the middle of the field. He did not see me, and I felt relieved. Mark was very good to me—a more loving brother no girl ever had—but he was just a little strict, and would as like as not have ordered me back. I had fancied more than once that he had guessed my secret, for he had asked cousin Will how it was "young Verner was always hanging round the place," and had muttered something about "teaching him to keep his distance," in a tone which sent the hot blood to my face.

But Mark, Will, and all else went from my mind as I entered the beech grove, for, coming to meet me with glad eyes and outstretched hands, was my sweetheart, Allen Verner.

"Red as a rose is she," he said, laughing, and kissed my face again to make it redder. "Have you never a word for me, Dorothy?"

I stood there, blushing and confused, the loving speeches in my heart dying away before they reached my lips.

"I thought the time would never come," I faltered out at last.

"You wanted me, Dorothy? That is good news. See what I have brought for you."

He made me shut my eyes, drawing my head upon his shoulder. I felt his fingers touch my wrist, and, looking up, I uttered a little cry of pleasure and surprise.

"Do you like it, dearest?" he said. "I had some difficulty to find a bracelet small enough for such a dainty wrist."

It was an exquisitely-fashioned bracelet of gold, made in the form of a tiny handcuff, with scrolls, and leaves, and flowers, in open work, while here and there peeped out a rosebud of diamonds or a wreath of pearls.

"It is too beautiful for me," I murmured, but he laughed my doubts away.

"Don't I deserve a kiss for it, sweetheart? You've never given me one yet."

"Not for the bracelet," I said reproachfully.

"Well, then, for myself."

Flushing, I raised my face, and wondering greatly at my boldness, clasped my arms about his neck.

"Not for the bracelet, but because I love you," I said softly. Then I kissed him. And I never hear the soft, west wind sighing among the beech trees on the hill, but I remember. He held me to his heart, and called me strange, sweet names, and I was happy beyond all knowledge, past all thought.

The moon had touched the trees to silver, when with a start I thought of Mark.

"It is late," I said, "I must go, I am afraid Mark will be angry."

I half hoped Allen would offer to come with me and explain matters—better than I could—to my brother, but he frowned at the mention of Mark's name, and turned aside with an impatient gesture.

"Why should you worry about your brother, Dorothy?" he said. "You're not a child. Surely you need not ask permission to go for a walk. Take my advice and don't allow any questions. Tell your brother it is not for him to say where you shall go, what you shall do."

He did not ask me, as he usually did, to meet him again. I was seized with a sudden fear that I had vexed him, that he did not mean to see me any more.

"Allen," I cried, "are you angry? Have I said something that you didn't like?"

"Why, Dorothy, how could you vex me? Do you care

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as much as that?" he whispered, and I noticed a touch almost of sadness in his voice. "I am not worth it; indeed, I think it would be best for you if I went right away."

But that I could not bear, and clinging to him I cried out that I should die if he ceased to care for me, to love me.

They told me many things against Allen Verner—many, alas! I found out for myself; but I know that he spoke the truth that evening, when he answered that I was very dear to him.

"I'm going up to town to-morrow," he said, after a while, "so I sha'n't see you for the next week. Will you be here on Wednesday, Dorothy?"

My heart sank at the thought of a whole week without him, but I was made happy once again when he declared that time away from me would be intolerable.

A last embrace, and then we parted, and as I reached the the top of the beech grove I turned and waved my hand. Allen was standing in the moonlight, I could see the smile upon his lips, the tender greeting in his eyes.

I hastened down the road, but as I passed the meadow—quite deserted now—I saw two figures coming from the farm. I recognised them as visitors at the Hall, and one of them, Captain Burton, as Allen's special friend. Somehow I did not want to meet them, so I slipped behind the hedge and waited till they had passed.

"It's a charming old place," said Captain Burton, "and as for the girl, I've never seen a lovelier face the whole world over. The brother's a superior sort of chap, too, for a farmer, isn't he?"

"The Nevills are of good family, I believe," returned the other carelessly, "at least, so Verner told me."

"It strikes me Allen will find the brother an awkward customer to tackle," he went on, "if he gets up to his usual games, let alone that Lady Helen is sure to hear about it."

"You're mistaken, Tollington. I wouldn't forgive Allen if he tampers with the poor child's happiness. He is not incapable of such a thing."

"All the same, my dear chap, she's very pretty, and he's—well, we all know what Verner is where a woman's concerned. I fancy Lady Helen will have rather a time of it."

What they mean, I wondered. Who was Lady Helen, and what had she to do with Allen. And whose happiness were they afraid he'd tamper with, he who had shown *me* what true happiness was? I felt a sudden chill of fear, and though I thrust it from me, a vague dread remained, and I wished, I wished a thousand times, that Allen was a farmer just like Mark.

And through the night the chill crept ever closer to my heart; but at the quickening of the dawn I heard the glad birds sing, and on the wings of their sweet melody my fear took flight, and with a happy smile I fell asleep.

* * * * *

Ever since I could remember my cousin Will, half in play, half in earnest, had called me his little wife, and until I met Allen I had placidly accepted the future the words implied. But now that I had learnt what true love really meant, I understood how impossible it would have been for me to have married Will, and, foolishly, I took it for granted that he looked upon the matter in the same light as I.

Far from that being so, however, Will was only waiting till I was eighteen to speak to me, and, to my dismay, on the evening of my birthday, he commenced in a serious tone.

"I'm thinking, Dorothy," he said, "that it is time that you and I were promised man and wife. You know I've loved you since you were no higher than my hand, and now, my dear, that you're a woman grown, I think, and Mark agrees, we don't need to wait longer."

"Wait longer?" I stammered. "For what? What do you mean, Will?"

He came quite close and would have put his arm about me but that I pushed it off.

"I asked you, Dorothy, last summer, if you'd marry me?" he said.

"And my reply was 'Some day.' Well, who knows? 'Some day' I may."

But he was not to be so easily disposed of. High words passed between us, and at last, with flushed cheeks and tear-dimmed eyes, I left him brooding over what he called his "wrongs." Both of us had lost our tempers.

I was late at my meeting with Allen, and therefore stayed out later than I mostly did. When I reached the farm Mark was waiting for me at the gate.

"I want you, Dorothy," he said, and with a trembling heart I followed him into the oak-panelled parlour, where Will was waiting.

"You're late," said Mark at last, "Where have you been?"

Something—I know not what—told me that Mark knew about Allen. My brother, quick to blame, was always doubly angered at prevarication. I would answer, I decided, to the point. After all, as Allen said, was I not my own mistress in such a matter?

"I have been for a walk in the beech grove."

"With whom, Dorothy?"

"That has to do with me, Mark. Your question sounds more like a command than I care for."

"I'll answer for you," broke in Will. "You were with Allen Verner, the young squire."

"And what then?" I asked defiantly.

"And what is more," continued Will, paying no heed to the look of defiance that I cast at him, "you've met him almost every evening through the summer. I've heard whispers this long while down in the village, but I never thought it was Dorothy they meant. Dorothy, the girl I've trusted, loved, and cared for, all my life. I never dreamt that she would steal out secretly to meet that scoundrel, Allen Verner."

"How dare you say such things of him—*scoundrel*—he, the truest lover a woman ever had. It is not like you, Will, to call a man such names when no one is by to defend him but a girl. What is it to do with you that I meet Allen Verner? You say you love me. I don't want your love, for I—I *hate* you just as much as I love him."

He staggered a little as I finished, and stood against the wall with a dazed look in his eyes.

"Dorothy," said Mark, "you've acted in a foolish, nay, a wicked fashion. When have I ever refused you anything that you should steal out of the house as though you feared me? Had you but given me your confidence, I could have spared you bitter suffering. He's not a good man, Dorothy; you'll rue the day you met him yet."

"That's what is said of every man like Allen," I retorted. "What has he done so bad?"

"You tell me, Dorothy, you love him, and that he loves you?"

"I know he does," I cried, "I'll swear it."

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My brother laid his hand upon my shoulder and there was kindness in his face, almost pity.

"And has he asked you to be his wife?"

"He means to, he is only waiting. Why do you look like that? Why do you torture and torment me so? What do you mean, Mark, what do you mean?"

But it was not my brother who answered me. He had pity on my white set face.

"Tell her, Will," he answered hoarsely, "I can't."

"I said that Allen Verner was a scoundrel, and I say it once again," said Will. "All the time that he's been meeting you and winning your heart away from home, from Mark, from me, he meant to marry another woman. He is engaged to marry Lady Helen Stuart in the Spring."

"It is false," I cried; "you're saying it to hurt me. It is not true, I——" but my words died away, and, like a cold hand in the darkness came the memory of the words I'd heard, "I'll not forgive him if he tampers with the girl's happiness," and "Lady Helen will hear of it."

With a bitter cry I turned on both of them. In my despair I uttered words cruel as untrue. I taunted them, my dear, kind brother, and the man who loved me as his life, with speeches, and mad threats poured from my lips, till panting and utterly exhausted, I fell trembling into a chair.

"I'll not believe it," I said sullenly, "unless he tells me so."

Mark called Will to one side, and they talked earnestly for a few moments. Then he told me what he had decided.

"I shall go to the Hall to-night, Dorothy, and see Mr. Verner. If he tells me that he wishes, or intends to marry you, well and good. If not, I shall warn him against seeing you again. In any case I promise to bring you his decision in his own handwriting."

The gate clanged after the two—Will was going to walk up to the Hall with Mark and in the scented darkness of the summer night I waited.

Ah, me! how much I suffered. Each breath seemed but to add to the dull heaviness that pressed upon me.

"It's not true," I sobbed, and lingered to hear Mark's footsteps up the path returning—surely it would be so—with the news that Allen was loyal to me. Even as I told myself that this was so, the doubt weighing upon my heart cried out, "He never loved you," and the clock ticked to the same refrain, and the lilac trees beat with their branches at the window—"Never loved you," and the wind rose to a wail, and the clouds gathered in the summer sky, because he never loved me.

I heard Mark's voice as he came through the gate. I tried to meet him calmly, tried to smile and seem confident of Allen. But when he entered my strength went from me. With a cry I put out my hand and snatched the note.

It ran as follows: "My Dorothy, for the last time I call you mine. I have deceived you wilfully, cruelly; I loved you, and had not the courage to tell you that I was bound to another woman. That I was going to marry Lady Helen Stuart."

The wind was shrieking now, and the rain beating with pitiless force upon the roses—happy roses, they could die, but I, alas, what was there left to me? Alas! he never loved me.

* * * * *

It was two days after that I awoke—just as the blue-grey mists of the early dawn were rising from the valley—with a great start, to find my heart beating as I have seen a bird beat with its wings against a cage. After a while I lay down again, but a sharp noise on the window pane as though a handful of small gravel had been thrown, startled me once more.

Fancying I knew not what, I crept to the window and looked out. Slight as was the noise I made, it had been heard.

"Miss Nevill," said a voice I recognised as Captain Burton's, "Verner's leaving England. He wants to see you once again before he goes, and begs that you will meet him in the beech grove—where he's waiting."

"Now?" I gasped.

"It is the only chance," he said. "I've tried my best to dissuade him, but he swears that he will see you. He wanted to come up to the house last evening, but I feared a quarrel with your brother. If you don't come now, Miss Nevill, I sha'n't be able to prevent him coming round to-morrow, and there may be trouble."

How could I refuse, when I remembered Mark's threat if Allen should again try to see me?

Once again I passed across the meadow, the last buttercups, heavy with dew, brushing against my ankles.

Once again I stood beside my lover at the old familiar spot.

Captain Burton was waiting a short distance down the road with a dogcart to drive Allen to the station after our last "Good-bye."

Even now I cannot recall those last sad words unmoved. But I remember—oh, how gladly—that I forgave him, fully, freely, and that when he talked of breaking faith with Lady Helen I bade him keep true to her and forget me. He had not been so much to blame as Mark had thought. Lady Helen was an heiress, and had been engaged to Allen since they were girl and boy. It was, in fact, a family affair, and his mother would, I think, have broken her heart had her pet scheme fallen through. For Lady Helen's thousands would pay off the many mortgages on the estate and leave her with an unencumbered income.

A lingering hand-clasp, a last fond look, and then I threw my arms about his neck and pressed my lips to his.

"For the last time," I said with a break in my voice, and then a rustling in the bushes, a muttered oath, a shot—Allen lay stretched upon the ground, and at his side, a grim look upon his face, stood Will.

"You thought to steal away with her this morning," he said. "Thank God, I've stopped your villainy once and for all."

I watched dazed, uncomprehending. As they lifted Allen from the ground, I heard him whisper, "Remember, Burton, the gun went off by accident. Don't let them know that Dorothy was here—poor Dorothy."

I followed Will up to the farm—and then for the first time I understood how terrible a thing had happened.

Allen was shot, and Will, my cousin Will, was guilty, if he died, of murder!

A merciful unconsciousness came over me, and I remember nothing more.

* * * * *

When I came downstairs once more I found the snow upon the ground in place of the rose petals I had left.

Allen had recovered sooner than was expected, and, Mark told me in a hesitating voice, was already married. Will had gone abroad, but before he went had been up to the Hall to visit Allen, and the two had shaken hands and parted, if not on friendly, still not on terms of enmity. No one had learnt the truth of the affair, and if Lady Helen guessed the wound was not a self-inflicted one she made no sign.

After a while I missed Will's face, his kindly smile, and pleasant voice.

"Why does not Will come back?" I said to Mark. But he only looked at me and sighed.

Christmas had come and gone before they thought me strong enough to venture out, and at the first step that I took I was reminded once again of Will.

The Winter snows had gone, and the first violets blossomed, and still he had not come. The freshness of the Spring seemed to lay a cool calm hand upon me. I saw with clearer eyes, with better judgment, and gradually I understood that my feeling towards Allen had been but "the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart," and at the same moment I realised the value of the love which I had cast aside.

"Mark," I said one night, "will he never come?"

But on an April morning when the earth was fair with daffodils, and tall Lent lilies, Mark called me to go into the garden.

There, under the hawthorn tree was Will—love in his eyes, love in his heart, and both for me.

"I've come back, Dorothy," he said quite quietly, "shall I stay?"

And with my hands in his, my eyes fixed on his own, I answered with a sob:

"For ever."

John K. Prothero.

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Under the Mistletoe

A TALE OF THE AWAKENING OF LOVE

"How dare you kiss me, Gerald Loraine!"

"How dare you kiss me, Gerald Loraine!" exclaimed Marian, her voice filled with the sudden anger his caress aroused.

"Well, weren't you under the mistletoe, and isn't it a man's privilege at this season to kiss the maid he finds there?" inquired the offender with exasperating coolness, holding her fast.

"Do you imagine I could forego so tempting a pleasure when it was within my grasp? A joy for which I have hungered for three long years! Then you promised that the sweetness of these lips would be for me alone, and now that I have come to claim the fulfilment of the pledge you gave me, I receive cold words and scornful glances."

"Gerald, you are mad!" cried the girl, in terror lest someone should enter the room and see them. "In pity, release me—you have forgotten yourself. You are cruel."

"I have forgotten nothing, save that to-morrow we part! But for this moment you are mine—mine!" exclaimed Gerald. "Marian, do not grudge me this mite of happiness, for he will possess you during all the future, while I must be content with the memory of that which I have lost!"

"Let me go, Gerald," she pleaded again. "Someone will see us."

"Let them; let *him* come and see you in your rightful place," retorted Gerald recklessly. "Oh, Marian, how can you sell yourself to that old man? What has come over you that you can find in his withered life, and empty title, a recompense for your youth, beauty, and stainless womanhood? Oh, my darling, cannot you see that he cares for no one but himself?"

"I am perfectly aware of the gentleman's motive in desiring to marry me, just as everyone else is," she answered, a little frightened by the stern look that had settled on his face, and the unflinching gaze bent upon her. "It isn't complimentary to a woman, nor could it possibly prove agreeable to one who, from her earliest infancy, was taught to hold honour and virtue, mind and soul, above worldly position, purple and gold.

"I doubt that any girl today is so unsophisticated, so devoid of natural reasoning powers that she fails to detect the genuine from the counterfeit. It is a plain business transaction in which sentiment plays no part, and if the purchaser secures all he wants and the seller is likewise satisfied, then they are quits.

"Others have sold themselves knowingly, willingly, have counted the cost and considered the prize worth the sacrifice, why should not I if I wish?" She raised her head and looked at him.

"Yes, why?" he repeated after her slowly.

The words so quietly uttered cut like a keen blade, yet his manner piqued her pride and urged her to further malice. Compelling her eyes to meet his steady regard, she flung another taunt into his face.

"Love and marriage do not always go hand-in-hand; a man may love one woman but find it more to his interest to wed some other one; I have no means of knowing that other men, if less frank, are not impelled by the same spirit that animates my ancient moneyed suitor."

There was no mistaking the implied accusation contained in the words, and the face she gazed at flushed, then every vestige of colour receded and left it white.

There was a quick indrawing of the breath as if it had received a sudden shock, that momentarily confused and surprised him, and into his eyes there crept a shadow of mute wonder and pain.

"I did not think of that, Marian, and I should never have thought that you would either," came the answer. The passion that had been surging through his heart died, leaving behind sorrow and pity for her and himself.

"When the news reached me long ago on the other side of the world that Marian Wybrant was to marry a nobleman, I did not believe it, I trusted you too implicitly. I felt that if such were true you would inform me of it, as certainly your promise gave me the right to know.

"At our parting you asked for three years to test your love and mine. I waited the full time, God knows how

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impatiently, but at last it was over and I came for my final answer.

"That you could change, that you should choose another was very possible, but surely you could have told me that such was the case; instead you met me as a stranger, and treated me as someone guilty of wrongdoing. Was that fair, Marian? Is it just to condemn me without a hearing? Why I don't even know of what I am accused."

He paused, hoping she might make some answer, but although she felt the justice of his appeal, and was already repenting her hasty, ungenerous insinuations, she made no reply.

"I never stopped to consider my position as a poor, struggling artist," continued Gerald, in the same quiet, even tone, drawing a step nearer to her and trying to read in the averted face some sign of relenting. "Strange, but it never occurred to me that I might be looked upon as mercenary because Fate had willed it that I should love a girl who some day was destined to be an heiress; for it seems that as long as I can remember but two things filled my thoughts—you and my art."

"Are you sure?" interrupted Marian, the desire to hear him speak of the woman she imagined her rival, overcoming her determination not to be the first to broach the subject.

"I am sure," he returned, with calm emphasis. "And now that I have what I came for, there is no necessity to fore you longer with my presence. This is not my first bailure, however," he added wearily, "and doubtless it will not be the last; but its pain will linger and be hard to endure!"

"But Madeline will help you bear it, and comfort you for my loss," said Marian, as he turned and walked towards the door.

Gerald stood for an instant like a person stunned. Those few involuntary words were a revelation. In the habitually soft, musical voice there echoed a note of unmistakable jealousy, bitter and despairing. Then he remembered the innocent one whose name she had spoken.

"How dare you speak of her in that fashion?" he demanded, wheeling round on Marian. "What do you know about Madeline that you bring up her name here? Has she anything to do with you or me—with your broken faith? No, but even you must cast a stone at that child of misfortune! Poor Madeline, would to Heaven I knew where you were this night!"

Gerald went to the window and gazed with sorrowful wistfulness out upon the snow-clad landscape.

"I know nothing about the person except what others have said," said Marian coldly. "The names of Gerald Loraine and his beautiful model have been public property for some time, and they who talked seemingly knew——"

"Hush!" he interposed. "I know what you are going to say—it is the old, old story of the artist in love with the maid who poses for him. The story is old enough to be new again, and absurd enough for a joke."

"But do you?" The question seemed literally forced from her lips, so mad was her desire to hear a denial. "I have heard it reiterated everywhere I went. Tell me, Gerald?"

She drew nearer, looking at him with her soul in her eyes, while a desperate fear tugged at her heart.

Gerald was touched by the unconscious confession; joy thrilled through every nerve and fibre of his being, he longed to take her in his arms; but with an effort he controlled the impulse, and responded calmly:

"Yes, I do love Madeline as a friend or brother might. Her beauty I admired as I love and admire the wild grandeur of the mountains, or the perfect loveliness of that flower upon your breast; and her spirit matched the setting. That was all; Madeline liked me in return, but the one great love that a woman gives, was won before I had ever seen her. There was a husband and child——"

"A husband and child!" she gasped. "Oh, how miserably mean I have been—how cruelly unjust!"

"Yes, unjust, Marian," said Gerald softly. "This girl is no older than yourself, yet she had endured more wretchedness in her short life than you can even conceive of. Her husband was stricken down by an accident at the mills where he was making for her and his child a good living, and left a hopeless invalid, to be a burden upon the wife he idolised. For his sake and that of the helpless little one, she serves me as model."

Marian remorsefully turned up to him a face that the flickering firelight revealed wet with tears, holding out her hands with a repentant gesture:

"I—I don't deserve it, but—but, oh, Gerald, forgive me! —it drove me almost distracted to hear everybody saying that you loved——"

He did not wait for her to finish, but catching her to his breast, smothered the words on her lips.

"Is it true, Marian, that the poor, struggling artist is cared for when you have so many of these great titled knights at your feet?" he cried.

"Can you ask, Gerald?" was all she answered.

Nellie G. Coleman.

A Little Misunderstanding.

Which Originated in a Little Miss Understanding Too Much.

Freda and Dora Cuthbert were sisters, and furthermore they were both very pretty. Freda was twenty-one years of age, and fair. Dora was sixteen, and dark. They were the only children of a wealthy merchant, a widower, who lived in a large mansion somewhere in the Northern part of the county of Middlesex.

Now, how this story came to be written originates in the fact that Freda Cuthbert had lost her heart to a Mr. Wilfred Maitland, who was a doctor. In addition, this gentleman reciprocated the feeling, whilst neither knew how affairs were with each other, so to speak.

Wilfred Maitland was certainly an attractive man, and presumably that was why Dora Cuthbert gave her youthful heart to him without his being aware of the fact.

Thus we have a triangular love affair. Freda and Dora both love Wilfred; Wilfred loves Freda; Wilfred does not love Dora; Freda does not know Wilfred loves her, and *vice versa*; neither does Freda know Dora loves Wilfred; Dora, however, is fully aware of Freda's feelings and resents them.

I hope you have understood this somewhat tangled statement.

At "The Briars," which is the name of Mr. Cuthbert's house, they have a telephone, which telephone is an unwitting factor to this story.

It was two days before Christmas that the tinkle of the telephone bell caused Dora to jump up from her seat by the fire, and rush to answer the ring.

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"Hullo, is that 'The Briars'?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"Wilfred Maitland," came the reply. "I want to speak to Miss Dora."

"That's me," came the prompt, albeit ungrammatical reply.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Dora? I say, I want you to do a little favour for me, will you?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Maitland."

"Thank you so much. I am sending a little Christmas present for your sister. I want it to surprise her, so, if you don't mind, I will send it to you, and you can give it to her on Christmas Day."

Dora's face went red with vexation as she heard this request, and her little foot tapped the floor angrily. However, she did not permit her annoyance to be heard in her voice as she replied:

"Very well, Mr. Maitland. You send it addressed to me, and I shall know what to do with it."

"Thank you very much, Miss Dora," came Maitland's voice over the wires. "Merry Christmas to you."

"Thanks, same to you! Good-bye," answered Dora.

"Good-bye!"

Then the bell tinkled again.

"A present for Freda," muttered Dora, "and from him, too. Ugh! I could——" She paused, and then began to smile. "But perhaps he will send me one, too. I'll wait and see."

On the following afternoon a small parcel addressed to Dora arrived by special messenger. She took it up to her room and eagerly opened it.

"Oh!" she gasped as she saw an exquisitely wrought chain to which was attached a glistening diamond pendant. "Oh, how lovely!"

After feasting her eyes on the present for some while, she turned her attention to the note which accompanied it. This was very short.

"DEAR MISS DORA,—*You know what to do with the inclosed. I am unexpectedly called away to the country for Christmas. My address will be 'The Grange, Lonsby Hill, Berkshire.' With best wishes for a happy Christmas.—Believe me, yours sincerely,* "WILFRED MAITLAND."

"And this is for Freda?" she muttered, as she gazed at the handsome gift. A wave of jealous anger rushed through her, and she clenched her fists, her eyes blazing.

"She sha'n't have it unless he's sent me something," she whispered through her set teeth.

Dora Cuthbert's temper had always been a great trial to Mr. Cuthbert, and he had endeavoured to curb it, but had failed. Now she was the picture of simmering wrath, with her dark eyes flashing with tears of anger.

Christmas morning dawned. Dora was downstairs early, and eagerly examined the many presents that had fallen to her lot, but there was nothing from Wilfred Maitland beyond a card. Concealing her vexation, she hastened back to her room, and took out the chain and pendant.

"Freda shall pay for having it," she muttered. "I'll do it, yes, I'll do it."

In her outspoken thoughts she was referring to a plan which she had formulated during the night. She read and re-read the letter, and was apparently satisfied with the result. Then she placed Wilfred's present around her neck, and, with the letter grasped in her hand, she sought Freda's room, for she knew that her sister had not gone downstairs yet.

"Merry Christmas, Dora," cried Freda. "I'm just coming down. I've had a lovely lot of presents, father sent them up to me."

Before Dora could answer, Freda had caught sight of the diamond pendant.

"Oh, Dora!" she exclaimed rapturously. "How beautiful? Whoever gave you that?"

"Wilfred Maitland."

"What!"

"Why, you seem surprised, Freda. Yes, Wilfred sent it with this note." She handed Freda the letter which Wilfred had sent to her. Then she stood and watched her sister's pale face, while she gloated over her triumph.

With wistful eyes Freda read the letter, and all the colour left her face. An involuntary sigh rose to her lips, but she checked it as she cried,

"But, Dora, why did he send you this?"

"Why?" questioned her sister in apparently surprised tones. "Why do men send girls presents?"

"But you're only a child, Dora."

"Oh?"

"Still, it's very nice of Mr. Maitland."

"Am I only a child, Freda? Do you think Wilfred would have sent me this if he had thought so. What a pity it is he had to go away so soon."

Dora walked towards the door as she spoke. Then, with a sudden cruel whim, she raised the pendant to her lips and went out.

Freda stood still for a few moments as Dora had left her. Then she threw herself on her bed in an agony of grief.

"Oh, Wilfred," she moaned, "I love you so!"

Presently she stood up, and, with a queer little shrug of her shoulders, she laughed.

"Oh, well," she muttered. "What does it matter? I I don't care, no, not a bit."

But she did, and in her heart of hearts she knew it.

Meanwhile, Dora had returned to her room full of gratification. She replaced the present in its case, and then sat down to think.

"It's a good job I'm going abroad with aunt in a fortnight," she murmured. "There will be a terrible fuss if it comes out, but by the time I return they will have forgotten it. Ugh! I hate him!"

With a rapid change characteristic of her temperament, Dora's infatuation for Wilfred had turned into fierce hate.

"I'd better tell Freda to keep it dark for the present," she went on, still speaking her thoughts aloud.

She met her sister in the corridor. To Dora's discomfiture, Freda showed no signs of being at all upset.

"Look here, Freda," she said. "I don't want you to say anything to father about Wilfred's present to me. Not yet, at any rate. Do you understand?"

"Oh, perfectly!" answered Freda. "I shall not concern myself with it in any way. As a matter of fact, I had completely forgotten about it."

Dora, however, immediately saw how deep her shaft had gone home, despite her sister's calm exterior, and her wicked little spirit rejoiced exceedingly.

Christmas Day passed very slowly for Freda, she could hardly call to mind a more miserable Christmas. Boxing Day went in a similarly dreary manner, leaving Freda more sad than ever.

Away down in the country Wilfred Maitland looked eagerly for a letter from Freda, but none came, and it was two days since Christmas.

"I suppose I ought not to have given her that," he mused. "Just like me, impetuous, and then I spoil everything."

At that moment a message came that he was wanted on the telephone.

"Is that Mr. Maitland?" came a voice, rather faintly.

"Yes."

"I'm Dora Cuthbert. I'm speaking from home."

"Oh, yes!" answered Wilfred, and his heart gave a great leap.

"Are you going to be at the Coleridges' ball on Friday?"

"Yes," he replied. "Are you going?"

"Oh, rather?"

"And your sister, as well?"

"Yes," replied Dora. "We shall see you then, I suppose?"

"Oh, I am certain to be there!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Maitland, till Friday."

"Good-bye," he answered in puzzled tones.

He replaced the receiver and walked thoughtfully away. Then a light seemed to dawn on him.

"Of course," he cried, "that's it. Hardly liked to write to me, I expect."

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At the other end of the wire Dora was laughing silently as she walked from the instrument.

"Just been speaking to Wilfred," she said to her sister shortly afterwards.

"What, is he here?" cried Freda, whilst a vivid blush suffused her countenance.

"Oh, no! He spoke to me on the telephone from Berkshire," answered Dora. "He told me he would be at the Coleridges' ball on Friday."

"Oh, yes!" murmured Freda in reply, whilst she made a mental note not to go to the ball.

If the careful reader has noticed, it will be seen that Dora has not told an untruth at all. But all that she has said has been calculated to be understood in an erroneous manner. For instance, she said that Wilfred had sent her the chain and pendant. So he had. Thus she consoled herself as she ruminated over all she was doing, and began to grow aghast at all that was happening and would happen.

Once she had made up her mind to make a clean breast of it all to Freda, but the latter only added to her own unhappiness by unwittingly frustrating Dora. It happened in this manner.

"Freda," said Dora, "aren't you sorry Wilfred did not send you anything?"

"Sorry, why should I be sorry?"

"Well, he sent me that lovely pendant and chain——"

"My dear Dora," broke in Freda rather sharply, "If Mr. Maitland chooses to throw away costly presents on children who have not yet completed their education, in what manner does it concern me?"

Dora's face went white with anger, and with a malevolent glance at her sister she left the room, all feelings of repentance gone from her. And Freda—must I record it—well, Freda went to her room and sobbed as though her heart would break, whilst down in Berkshire, Wilfred went to and fro with a light heart and happy face.

When Friday came round Freda pleaded a headache, and declared her intention of staying at home. Consequently Mr. Cuthbert and Dora went on to the ball alone, which was exactly as Dora had anticipated.

Wilfred Maitland had returned from Berkshire that afternoon. He had rooms in a house at High Barnet, which was several miles away from "The Briars." The mansion wherein the ball was to take place was very close to the Cuthberts' home, and Wilfred had to pass "The Briars" to reach his destination.

At the ball Dora Cuthbert watched for the appearance of Wilfred Maitland. Her plan was to make him think, although she would not actually say it, that Freda would not come to the ball when she heard he was coming.

She watched the entrance to the ballroom, every moment growing angrier. But Wilfred did not appear, and her venomous appetite remained unappeased.

As Wilfred passed the entrance to "The Briars," he decided that he would call in and accompany the Cuthberts to the ball. But, as he passed in at the west entrance to the grounds, Mr. Cuthbert and Dora in the carriage passed out of the east entrance. However, Wilfred was not to know that, as he made his inquiry from the footman.

"Mr. Cuthbert and Miss Dora have gone out, sir, but Miss Cuthbert is in," the footman informed him.

Freda in! What did this mean? Was she not going to the ball? But Dora had told him that they were both going. Perhaps he had really offended her, and she was not going for that reason.

These and a host of other thoughts rushed through Wilfred's brain as he heard the footman's reply. Then, all in a moment, he resolved that he would hesitate no longer, but would see Freda and find out for himself how matters really stood.

"Will you tell Miss Cuthbert I wish to see her?" he said.

The man departed on his errand, and presently came back with the reply that Miss Dora had gone to the ball.

"But I wish to see Miss Freda Cuthbert," Wilfred said, "not Miss Dora. Will you please say that?"

The footman went away once more, and presently returned with the message that Miss Cuthbert would see him. Wilfred followed the man into the library where Freda was seated before a huge fire.

"Good evening, Mr. Maitland," said Freda in level tones, as the footman closed the door.

Then they stood and looked at each other, both feeling very nervous, neither knowing what to say. At last Freda spoke.

"When I sent that message out I was under the impression that you wished to see Dora, and not me."

"I was not aware," he replied in slightly nettled tones, "that I have shown such a marked preference for your sister's society."

"That is hardly a question we need discuss," said Freda in a dignified manner.

"I must have offended her," he thought. "However am I to find out?"

Once again they faced each other, quite at a loss for words.

"Are you not going to the ball?" said Freda at last. "You will be late; I expect Dora will be waiting for you."

"Dora again!" cried Wilfred. "Why do you continually refer to Dora and myself in such a marked way?"

"Well, you see," commenced Freda, now somewhat ill at ease. "I thought that—er—you rather liked Dora."

"I like your little sister, of course I do," he answered in puzzled tones.

"Well, Mr. Maitland," cried Freda, "I should think you do, considering your present to her at Christmas."

"My present to her at Christmas?" he repeated, more mystified than ever.

"Yes, surely you remember? Or do you give away so many presents to your girl friends?" Freda replied somewhat sarcastically.

"I do not remember giving Dora anything," he said.

"Then you must evidently be quite accustomed to give away diamond pendants and gold chains," cried Freda, stung to angry utterance by his apparent unconcern.

"What!" he cried. "I gave Dora a diamond pendant? Do you mean to say that she kept——" he paused and stared in amazement at Freda.

"Well, Mr. Maitland, she showed me your letter and present. But perhaps I ought not to have said anything; it was meant to be a secret, wasn't it?"

He was still gazing at her in undisguised astonishment, too astounded to speak.

"Why," he said at last, "I only sent one present at Christmas, and that was to you."

"To me?" she cried.

"Yes, I asked Dora on the telephone to give it you. I sent a note as well."

"B—but Dora said you sent it to her."

"So I did, but to give to you."

"Oh!" cried Freda, she could say nothing more.

Somehow her heart grew light, and the dead weight of oppression was gone from her.

"Yes, Freda," went on Wilfred. "I sent it to you, dear, because I love you."

"You do?" she cried joyously, and then they both laughed, and gazed into each other's eyes.

"Yes," he cried. "I love you, Freda."

"Oh!" was once more the only reply she could make, but her eyes gave him all the answer he wanted.

"My Freda," he whispered as he took her in his arms, and then their lips met and they tasted the joy that only comes to man and woman when true love meets true love.

"But what about Dora?" Freda said some time later on, when they both occupied the same armchair before the fire.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "I must have offended her in some way, and it was a childish spite on her part."

But Freda was a woman, and she knew her sex as man can never do; therefore she knew different.

"Let us forgive her, dear," Freda said.

"Very well, but mind you get back my Christmas present," was his laughing reply.

And there we will leave them.

B. N. E.

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The Miser's Christmas Holiday.

Telling of a Good Deed Well Done.

LONDON is frost and fog-bound; and Morgan Carlaw, money-lender and miser, bending over his well-thumbed ledgers shivers with the cold.

The room he calls his "office"—one in a great nest of more or less reputable chambers within sound of St. Paul's chimes—is a small one, but the fire in the dust-choked grate is too small even for it, and the solitary gas-jet that fights against the fog diffuses little heat.

As his master shivers, so does Godfrey Chatterton, his clerk, scowling in turn at the miserable fire, the feeble light, and the safe in the corner.

It seems strange that Morgan Carlaw, owner of the bonds and securities in that safe—totalling how much he alone knows—should deny himself ordinary creature comforts on such an inclement December 24th as this; but the miser's mind is warped out of all reason by long years of business selfishness, and solitude, and he grudges the spending of every penny.

There is but one redeeming feature about him, his clerk thinks. For the sake of appearances he dresses, if not well, at least tidily and clean. Lean, keen-jawed, grey-haired, iron-souled, methodical, merciless—that is how his clerk sums him up.

Godfrey Chatterton himself is also old, grey, and cadaverous, eking out a miserable existence on a mean salary, because his employer knows certain things about his past.

Business is slack this morning, and callers few. The spider at the centre of his web is not perturbed, for at the close of the year his victims do not care for many personal interviews; but in fastening his strands yet more securely round them per post and legal process, he always finds something to do.

Chatterton is glad when his employer, five minutes later than his usual time, goes out to dinner, leaving him in charge of the office and in sole control of the coal-box.

Outside the snow lies thick on neglected pavements, and Morgan Carlaw, buttoning his overcoat closely on his spare figure, creeps carefully along the dim streets to the cheap cook-shop he favours with his mean patronage.

So dense is the fog that traffic is almost suspended, and the shops, with their outspread Christmas cheer, make but a poor show in the gloom.

A street away from the restaurant, a small boy, coming round a corner, runs up against Mr. Carlaw, and but for the latter's outstretched hand, would fall from the recoil. He is a very small boy, of puny limbs and pinched face, with blue nose, and eyes that give evidence of recent tears.

"You should look where you are going, boy," says the moneylender sharply; "especially in this fog."

"Please, sir, I didn't hear you coming. Can you tell me the way to the big stores? I have asked ever so many, and they all tell me to keep on this way."

Morgan Carlaw looks closely at the small, cold, drawn face and the big, pleading eyes, a strange expression coming into his own.

"What's your name, my boy?" he asks quickly, but more kindly than usual for him.

"Gifford—Teddy Gifford—sir," says the boy, wondering.

Though the idea has occurred to him, Carlaw starts. These are *her* eyes; that is *her* very expression; the boy's voice is like her voice; and Gifford is her name now. And where has he heard the name during the past year?

"Come in here, Teddy," he says, taking the boy's hand and leading him into the shelter of an archway. "Now tell me, is your mother's name Mary?"

"Yes, sir. Father used to call her Mary."

"Umph! What do you want to go to the big stores for? What stores?"

"Please, I don't know," says the boy in a quavering tone, reverting to his misery. "Mother's poor, now—now father's gone, and we can't get nice things now to eat—and she cries often—and I heard Lizzie—that's the little girl in the next room—say that people get Santa Claus from the big stores at Christmas. And this morning a letter came, a blue one from Mr. Carlaw, who wants some money—and mother cried because she hadn't any, and I thought I'd go and find Santa Claus and ask him to bring us some money instead of other things."

The little fellow stops, out of breath with so unusually long a speech, and tears tremble in his eyes.

"Do you think he will do it, if I ask him?" he says.

"No, I am afraid not, Teddy," says the miser, in a tone that sounds strange even to his own ears. "He doesn't take notice of anyone but grown-up people. You had better be going back to mother, or she will think you are lost. It is not so dark now, see."

"I must go back if mother wants me; I never thought of that," says Teddy; then adds wistfully: "But will you go and ask Santa Claus for me, sir—you are a grown-up man, aren't you?"

"I think so," says Morgan Carlaw. "I will ask him for you. You must run back now. Wait a bit, though."

He hurries the boy to a confectioner's, goes in with a gait and air long foreign to him, and purchases a loaf of bread and another of cake. These he gives to Teddy, with a sense of immense sacrifice, and scarcely hearing or heeding the astonished recipient's grave thanks, hastens him off on his

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homeward way. Then, with the same strange gait and air, he pursues his own journey to the cook-shop and orders his usual dinner.

He eats the niggardly meal and goes back to the office like a man in a waking dream. The sudden revivifying of an old memory has pierced his soul to the core. Scenes of the past come before him—the past that he had thought buried out of sight and mind.

He had thought, as others had done, that his soul was all shrivelled to dry husk; and he finds that he is yet human within.

A few moments of reminiscence, aided by the speaking likeness of little Teddy's face, has undone the work of years of miserly scheming.

Morgan Carlaw has not always been as he is now. He remembers, as plainly as though it had only been yesterday, his courtship of Mary Howarth; their weekly walks and talks; some nights at a suburban theatre; a few excursions to Margate, and once up the river; her unfailing freshness of spirits and charm of face; his dim knowledge that she was too bright and good for his even then sordid temperament.

He remembers how the brief dream of happiness passed, and one more worthy of her, more fitting to win her love, had taken her from him. He remembers, bitterly, how he resolved to cast her out of his life, to crush down every thought of her, and to be revenged on the man who had robbed him of happiness.

He remembers, remorsefully now, how he compassed that man's ruin, and struck Mary down to poverty at the same time; and how, in a moment of repentant sanity, he made a will bequeathing all his possessions to Mary or her children, and would even have helped her temporarily had she not refused his aid with anger, and moving to another address, escaped his further notice.

It is some consolation to him now to reflect that he had never told her his profession, or his professional name—Carlaw. She would never think of him as the vulture he knows himself to be.

He knows how he has given himself up, body and soul, to money-getting, until avarice has become both first and second nature.

And he remembers having "business transactions" with several Giffords during the past year; and Teddy's pitiful story of the blue letter that made his mother cry, brings to his mind that one of them was a widow who had tried to raise money on a disputed will of her husband's parents.

He had put Chatterton in charge of the affair when the payments began to fail, with instructions to go on without reference to the woman's appeals for delay—she never came personally, always writing.

He sees it all clearly now, as he goes through the yellow mist and smudgy snow to his den—his Mary, left alone in the world, had sunk from poverty to penury, had tried to obtain the money left to her husband, but had been defrauded by his family; and finally, had borrowed, unwittingly, of *him*.

It was *his* order that had dispatched the pitiless letter that had sent Teddy into the streets to seek Santa Claus.

It affords him a sort of negative satisfaction to know that he has not destroyed the will made in Mary's favour. He had meant to do, but had put it off, thinking that there was ample time.

His first words, when he gets back to the office, startle Chatterton more than anything he has heard for many a year.

"You can go as soon as you like to-day, Chatterton," he says, "and I sha'n't want you back till Thursday."

"But what about business?" asks the clerk, staring incredulously at his employer. "We have always balanced the books on Christmas Day. It'll be the first time we've had a day off since I came here! Are you actually going to have a holiday?"

"Yes; I'm going to take a holiday," says Carlaw, testily. "I suppose I can do as I like without asking you? Take yourself off, and you needn't come on Friday if you don't like.

"All right, Mr. Carlaw," says the clerk, quickly changing his tone. "No offence meant. I'll come Friday. Merry Christmas!"

Morgan Carlaw does not answer this grim pleasantry. His mind is still busy with the past, and sub-consciously working out a problem of the future.

He sits in the decrepit chair beside the desk for more than an hour after Chatterton's departure, in a fixed attitude—his chin on his collar, his hands grasping the chair arms.

The fire goes out, its red heart slowly dying to grey ash; and the growing darkness outside seems merely accentuated by the puny gas jet over the desk.

At last he gets up, seizes pen and paper, and writes a brief note to his solicitor, then takes from a pigeon-hole a dust-grimed document marked "Last Will and Testament of William Carter, *alias* Morgan Carlaw," and incloses it with the letter, which he goes out and posts.

At any rate, that is safe now from Chatterton's possible tampering; and when he dies Mary's troubles will be at an end.

Back again, he sets to work to balance his books alone, poring over apparently interminable agreements, securities, deeds, approaching a total that he knows will over-reach five figures—a total that will all be Mary's.

Ten o'clock comes—eleven—twelve, and Christmas Eve passes into Christmas Day; two, three, four, five, and joy-bells ring in the city, and life becomes more evident in the snow-whitened streets; and still the miser toils on in gloom and cold, shivering, with cramped fingers, over the details of his hoarded wealth.

As the figures grow, he gloats over them in ecstasy, forgetting his discomfort, forgetting all but his overmastering avarice.

Six, seven, eight, strike and on the eve of nine o'clock on Christmas morning his task is over.

He sits up, stretching and chafing his chilled and aching limbs; then putting the balance sheet into a big blue envelope addresses to his solicitor and sealing it with red wax, pigeon-holes it.

Outside the snow has ceased falling, the fog has gone, and people are exchanging the old-time greetings in the fresh, cold, sunlit day.

A ray of sunlight, escaping the forbidding roof-angles around, shoots at last into Morgan Carlaw's office, and piercing its gloom and floating dust, settles on the chimney-piece.

The miser, seeing it, extinguishes the wasteful gas-jet, and takes from the crowded shelf a small, dark-blue bottle, black with smoke. He brushes it carefully with his coat-sleeve, exposing to view the red label upon it, and at what he reads on the label, smiles.

Yes, he thinks, he has chosen well. He is glad he made the will in Mary's favour; gladder that he had never altered it. It is the best way he can atone for the past—can prove himself worthy of something higher than greed of gain.

All his wealth will be Mary's—all—when he is dead. It is better than helping her whilst he is alive—and he always objects to charity, on principle—and he feels sure she would refuse his aid, even if offered.

Yes, it is best as he has chosen. Whilst he lives this wealth is his—all his; after his death it will be hers, and she will know at last that he is not quite all mercenary husk.

He picks up the little bottle, regarding it as a silent friend and long companion who promises a final consolation after the wreck of his wasted years, and uncorking it, sniffs the contents; then, with a quick, resolute effort, drains it.

A moment later he falls, face forward, on the desk. The ray of sunlight, journeying across the room, reaches the label of the empty bottle at the silent man's elbow, and picks out in letters of black on a dull red ground the one word: "Poison."

Morgan Carlaw, money-lender and miser, has set out upon his Christmas holiday; and before the New Year dawns little Teddy Gifford knows that the kind gentleman's intercession with Santa Claus has not been in vain.

Geo. Wallis.

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A Sense of Humour.

The Story of a Literary Lion.

By W. PETT RIDGE.

THE express train pulled up at the small station; the engine performing the act with a suggestion of unwillingnesss, as one unaccustomed to check itself at anything below the rank of a junction. The guard hurried to a first-class compartment, and Mr. Andrew Tite stepped out. The guard placed the portmanteau on the rustic garden-seat, and with one hand held his whistle to his mouth; with the other he received Mr. Tite's donation. A porter of amazing youthfulness strolled up from the signal-box at the end of the platform as the train started.

"Now then, ten-twenty," said the infantile porter to the guard, with much truculence, "'urry up."

The train hastened away, and the small porter watched it.

"That train ain't stopped 'ere," he said, with a reminiscent air, to Mr. Andrew Tite, "not for the last free months. Last gent it stopped for was Sir 'Enry——"

"I want this portmanteau taken up to the Unicorn," interrupted Mr. Tite sharply. "Do you know it?"

"Well," said the boy, "I ort to."

"Certainly you ought. But do you?"

"There ain't many men that knows the Unicorn better than me," said the small porter, with a knowing smile. "If I don't know the Unicorn, why nobody don't know it."

"That's all right, then. Bring this up there as soon as you can, and I'll walk on."

"You go through this orchard," explained the boy, "and you bear jest the least bit to the left, and you come to a——"

"I know the way quite well," said Andrew Tite. "I used to live here."

"What name, may I ask?" said the boy. He took a piece of chalk from his pocket.

"Tite," said Andrew Tite.

"It's new to me," remarked the boy. And he wrote carefully on the portmanteau with a piece of chalk one word:

TIGHT.

Mr. Andrew Tite crossed the line and opened the gate of the orchard. He had had so much of praise during the past year that he should have been glad to be exempt from it for a time; yet, somehow, he could not help feeling disappointment at the small porter's ignorance of his fame. To come back after a few years of absence to the village where he had spent his early days had occurred to him as a pleasing and an impressive thing to do, and though he had a special difficulty to face in the shape of a visit to the doctor's house—Florence Saxby was a niece of Doctor Parr—even there it would be agreeable to hear their opinions of his books. What he proposed to do was to call after lunch and just stay for half-an-hour or so.

"Poor little Florence!" said Mr. Andrew Tite.

He kicked a stone out of his way and adjusted his tie. It was rather a large flowing tie with a fine suggestion of the Boulevards about it, and when, of late, lady journalists had interviewed the newest literary lion, his tie was always made the subject of a separate paragraph.

"It's hard on her, of course," acknowledged Andrew Tite to himself. "Very hard, and very disappointing. And really up to last year I thought I should have kept up the correspondence and the love of years ago. But, good gracious, such a lot of things have happened since then. For instance, there's Miss Vanbury."

It was surprising to find how very small the small village seemed. In five minutes he was near to the one hotel of the place, and he had always had an impression that it was quite a long distance from the station. He looked up at his old school-house, and made a mental note to call in to-morrow and request for the boys a special half-holiday. This would be a genial, semi-regal, inexpensive action, which would be in every way gratifying.

At the Unicorn, a pleasant scent of lunch. A bustle and hurrying to and fro of white-aproned maids. A look of gay expectancy on the face of Mrs. Hostess, mingled with some nervousness.

"This way, sir," said Mrs. Hostess, bustling out of her room into the dim entrance. "We had your wire and the room is ready, and we sent word to Jim Turley, and he's going to call later on, and he says the links are in perfect condition, and there's no reason, Sir Henry, why you shouldn't begin to-morrow, and Jim Turley has got a cousin who can——"

"I beg your pardon," said Andrew crossly. "Pray don't talk so fast, and pray tell me what in the world you are talking about. I'm not Sir Henry Anybody."

"I'm afraid I am," said a big voice behind him. "Hullo, Tite, is that you? What the dickens are you doing here? What has induced you to——"

"I was born here," said Andrew. He dropped his pince-nez and took limply the hand which the breezy youth offered.

"Well, that's some excuse, certainly. Even a novelist, I suppose, must be born somewhere."

"Perhaps you will allow me, Rowlands, to ask what is your reason for coming to a place like this. It isn't Tooting Common, and it isn't Chingford."

"Wish to goodness it were. The links here are not good, but I'm down here partly for a bit of quiet practice, and partly for—well, that's about all. It does one good to have a change."

"What I want just now," said Andrew, "is not so much change as lunch."

"I'll see to that, sir," said Mrs. Hostess, interposing. "At the same table?"

"At the same table," said Rowlands. "Tite, you will be my guest for this feed?"

Andrew Tite fixed his pince-nez carefully on the bridge of his nose, and surveyed the impulsive youth before him. They happened to be members of the same club in town, where they know just enough of each other to quarrel on political questions. Rowlands was a man so accustomed to score at golf that he kept up the method in other games, and this brought him into conflict with other masterful players.

"Be my guest at lunch?" repeated Rowlands.

"You're very good," said Andrew Tite. "I will."

"In a quarter of an hour, sir," said Mrs. Hostess anxiously, "and not a moment later."

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"I'll see that he is punctual," said young Sir Henry Rowlands.

They strolled down the village together, passing *en route* the doctor's house. It stood well back from the road, and Andrew Tite, trying to look through the thick, short line of trees that protected it, stopped a lecture that he was making on the subject of agricultural stupidity. The thought of the old evenings came swiftly back to him, evenings when he used to stand near the gate and a note written in a schoolgirl hand used to be passed through the branches with much elaboration of wholly unnecessary secrecy, to be answered that night by a sealed communication delivered with similar mystery.

"I think we'll turn," he said.

Rowlands went up to the gate and peered through curiously.

"Come away, Rowlands," said Andrew; "people don't care for that sort of thing here."

"Thought I saw a girl," remarked Rowlands. "Such things do grow in the country, I believe."

"Pray be careful," begged Andrew. "I know the people there."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm hanged," said Rowlands, astonished.

At the Unicorn, such a lunch as the Unicorn had never before dreamt of. Mrs. Hostess, caring nothing at all for literary lions, had found herself spurred to most excellent performance by the presence of a baronet. There was no menu, but Mrs. Hostess obligingly came in at the beginning of the lunch, and mentioned in the manner of a dioramic lecturer, with a respect that was concentrated exclusively on Rowlands, a few of the important features.

"Fried soles," said Mrs. Hostess. "Fried soles, Sir Henry; lamb and mint sauce, game pie, Sir Henry; roast fowl, blue mange, Sir Henry, and cheese and salad. And"—this is a kind of *bon voyage* wish—"I hope it'll be to your liking, Sir Henry; and of course you, sir, as well."

Lunch, after several times threatening to come to an end, and not coming to an end, did come to an end, and the two men sat out in the shade at the entrance of the Unicorn, and lighted their cigars. The smoke went up to the nostrils of the rampant, white Unicorn over the doorway, and gave to that rare animal an increased appearance of being about to sneeze. Mrs. Hostess, red with encouraging nimble-footed white-aproned maids, went back to her room, and fanned herself with an *Advertiser*.

"And, as I say," concluded Andrew Tite, "there is something in the dull monotony of country life which seems to destroy, for those who live in it, all sense of humour."

"I see your argument," remarked Rowlands. "I daresay there's something in it."

"There's a great deal," said Andrew. "You don't know anybody here, I suppose, Rowlands?"

Rowlands blew a gentle puff of smoke at an insect on a leaf of the creeper at the doorway, and intoxicated it into somnolence before he replied.

"Nobody to speak of," he answered. "Of course you know everybody?"

"Well, no. A good many folk have died since I left."

"Because you left, perhaps."

Andrew Tite did not smile. It is never wise to encourage badinage directed against oneself.

"Who is the doctor?" asked Rowlands casually.

"Dr. Parr," said Andrew. "He has a niece who keeps house for him. That house you were peering at just now in the village. Rather decent sort of girl, too. Some pretensions to good looks."

"That's gratifying," said Rowlands, with some interest, "for all parties. And is Miss Saxby old?"

"How did you know her name was Saxby?" asked Andrew quickly.

"My dear fellow, didn't you say so?"

"She's young," said Andrew. "Still young."

"So much the better!"

It was a little irritating to Andrew, despite the fact that he had relinquished all claim to be considered Florence Saxby's *fiancé* for quite a year, to find young Rowlands showing this interest in her. But Rowlands' next remark put him again at his ease.

"I didn't tell you, perhaps, before lunch, Tite, did I? I'm going to be married next month."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Andrew, with much heartiness. "Very glad to hear it. And look here, Rowlands. I'm going to call on this Miss Saxby this afternoon. If you like, I'll take you along and introduce you."

It had suddenly occurred to him that the meeting would be less awkward if a stranger were present.

"I shall be very glad," said Rowlands. "I'm ready now, if you are."

"There's no great hurry."

"Let's go now and get it over."

So they went at once.

Dr. Parr was out. "Out," said the neat maid, "and wouldn't be back perhaps for hours upon hours. Miss Saxby? Oh, yes, she was in." The neat maid beamed in the direction of young Rowlands, who stood discreetly at the back of Andrew Tite. Would they kindly step this way?

"I hope this is not an inconvenient time to call, Florence?" said Andrew, as a slim, tall girl entered. "The fact is——"

"I'm very pleased to see an old friend at any time, Andrew."

"This is Sir Henry Rowlands. Rowlands, this is Miss Saxby. I found Rowlands at the Unicorn and I ventured to bring him along."

Rowlands said gravely tht he was very glad, and Miss Saxby, in her merry way, almost laughed with pleasure as she turned to him. It was a relief to the literary lion to find that at any rate she was in no maudlin mood.

"Are you here for long, Sir Henry?" she asked, smilingly.

"I'm here for practice. I want to score if I can this year in more ways than one."

"I hope you will succeed."

"I'm afraid Rowlands does not make himself plain," interposed Andrew.

"No one can say that I'm pretty," said Rowlands.

"What Rowlands means is," explained Andrew carefully, "that he is here practising golf, and he also intends to be married shortly."

"Next month," corroborated Rowlands.

"So soon as that?" said Florence Saxby, opening her eyes widely.

"It seems to me a long time to wait," said Rowlands.

"And you are fond of cricket, Sir Henry?"

"No, no," corrected Andrew, "not cricket. Golf."

"Of course. How stupid of me. Golf, I mean."

"I am fond of it," said Rowlands, "but just now it has the second place in my affections. The first is——"

"Andrew," exclaimed Miss Saxby, hastily, "I am forgetting you. But that only serves you right, because you had distinctly forgotten us. If it hadn't been for your books which we have found in Mudie's box and the little paragraphs about you in the papers——"

"Mr. Andrew Tite is not a Prussian," murmured Rowlands.

"Why, I am afraid we should have been disturbed about you."

"It has been rather a busy time," said Andrew Tite, importantly. "We literary men have few opportunities for cultivating the—what shall I say?"

"The garden?" suggested Rowlands.

"No, no, no. Nothing like that. For cultivating the society of our old friends I mean."

"I understand," said Miss Saxby.

"The world," went on Mr. Andrew Tite, with the frown of conscious notoriety, "the world expects a good deal from those whom it decides to honour. Directly your name gets to be known you are invited here and invited there; women journalists call and interview you——"

"Interesting," remarked Rowlands.

"Publishers pester you, editors worry you, and you don't

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know, I assure you, what it is to have in your own rooms a quiet chop from one month's end to the other."

"A quiet chop," remarked Rowlands, "is really a very pleasant companion. What I can never stand is the noisy, rollicking, talkative chop that——"

"Go on, Andrew," said Miss Saxby, interrupting Rowlands.

"I can assure you," said Mr. Tite, "that over and over again I have longed, absolutely longed, for the old quiet life in this little country village, where life goes so leisurely. The 'sturm and drang' of London life——"

"A foreign expression, Miss Saxby," explained the other.

"Begins to tell after a while even on the strongest brain It is like the continual clank clank of the machinery on an Atlantic liner, that never stops, night or day, from port to port. One feels at certain times that one is becoming used to it, but as a matter of fact, one never becomes used to it. Its determined, relentless, insistent clank, clank becomes a part of your existence it is true but it is always the ogre of your life, the demon that by his presence makes you old, worn and fatigued before your time."

"I always enjoy lectures," remarked Rowlands, when Andrew paused, "but I think they ought to be accompanied by pictures on a white screen, and a piano."

"So that you have had no time to write," said Miss Saxby, "anything but books?"

"Absolutely no time."

"At any rate we have not forgotten you. We have often talked about you whenever we have seen your name in the papers."

"I am glad," said Andrew, "to think that my memory has been preserved by some means."

"Do you really mean that?" she said brightly.

The challenge seemed to leave no way out.

"I mean," he said, softly, "a great deal more than that."

She smoothed the white gown she was wearing gently over her knee, and for a moment she was thoughtful.

"You can form no idea, though, Miss—Miss——" began Rowlands.

"My name is Saxby, Sir Henry."

"Miss Saxby. You can form no idea what a very important man Mr. Tite is in town. I know one or two men at the club who swear by him."

"I think I can guess. I know that when I was in town last year he was so much engaged that we saw very little of him."

"By-the-bye, Tite, are you really engaged? There was a rumour to that effect. The club fellows told me."

"If a public man," said Andrew, with some acerbity, "were to contradict all the incorrect reports that are sent round about him he would bring himself to an early end by overwork. I always argue that the private life of a public man has nothing to do with anybody but himself. Upon my word, though, nowadays that seems to be impossible."

"Shows how careful you chaps ought to be," said Rowlands. "Of course the report must be very annoying too, to Miss Vanbury."

"Was that the lady——" began Florence Saxby.

"I particularly want you, Florence," interposed Andrew hastily, "to show me, the garden round your lawn. I want to freshen my recollection of it. Rowlands, you can stay here if you like. I believe you are no lover of flowers."

"I think I would like, if Miss Saxby will excuse me."

"You will find the *Times* there, Sir Henry. I shall not keep you long."

"I hope you will," he whispered.

Miss Saxby handed the paper to Rowlands, and Rowlands, instead of taking the paper, touched her hand, and the paper dropped to the floor. Andrew picked it up.

"You are a clumsy fellow," he said.

Really it was very soothing and consoling and altogether agreeable, to be once more strolling round the small, square

He picked some mignonette, and she placed it, with her old smile, in her blouse.

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clean-shaven lawn with the slim girl in white at his side. He picked some mignonette, and she placed it, with her old smile, in her blouse.

"Do you remember when I last did that?" he asked.

"I don't think I am likely to forget. There are so few romances in one's life that it is quite easy to remember every page."

"What do you think of Rowlands?"

"He seems a straightforward sort of young man," she said, judicially, "as far as I can judge."

"He's not quite my sort," said Andrew, "but he's got a certain manner with him that enables him to get on with people. Only, of course," he laughed, "no one would claim that he was a man of intellect."

They stopped and looked through the open window into the room. Rowlands had relinquished the *Times*, and had taken up an illustrated ladies' journal, and was studying, with much interest, portraits of the current bridegrooms.

"I suppose it is natural that you should say that, Andrew, of almost anybody. Do you still live in chambers?"

"Yes, I shall live there until I cease to be a bachelor."

She looked up. He put his arm under hers and she turned to the window nervously.

"Florence, dear, I'm sorry that I behaved rather meanly to you. I ought not to have dropped you without a word of explanation. If you think you can forgive me, give me back one sprig of mignonette."

She took a sprig from her blouse without any hesitation.

"And we are good friends again?" he asked anxiously.

"Excellent friends, I hope," she said.

"I can't tell you how happy that reply makes me. I came down here to-day with the full intention of only just calling and seeing you, and now——"

Andrew was on the point of stating the truth. He stopped himself just in time.

"I say," called Rowlands from the open window, "I say. Will someone kindly tell me how it is all bridegrooms frown?"

"It is done," explained Miss Saxby, "to hide their natural gratification. I wish you would touch that gong, Sir Henry. The maid shall bring tea."

If Florence Saxby had been delightful in the garden, some superlative word was required to describe her as she presided at the tiny tea-table. The figure of Miss Vanbury (a gaunt lady of much cleverness—who wore convex glasses) forced itself upon Andrew's mind. He could see quite clearly now the mistake he had made.

"Wonder whether it's too late to repair the blunder," murmured Andrew. And he took a second cup of tea.

"I think I liked your last novel best," remarked Florence Saxby. "I fancy it shows greater insight into actual things; and there is a very pleasant strain of humour. Don't you think so, Sir Henry?"

"I can't say," confessed Rowlands, "that I've read any of them very carefully. But I daresay it is as you say, Miss Saxby. Tite is a rare man for humour. He argues that the leading characteristic of the bucolic mind is its want of that particular quality. I tell him that he is rather sweeping in his charge."

"I suppose women share that trait," said the young lady.

"It is easy to see the failings of other people," remarked Andrew with an impartial air. "I daresay as a matter of fact we all have our weaknesses. Are you keeping up your painting, Florence?"

"As well as I can. Would you care to see some of my work? Sir Henry, will you come too?"

"I don't know much about art," said Rowlands.

"Then you will be able to play critic. This way."

With Rowlands looking closely at a small portrait at one end of the small studio, Andrew found a second opportunity of speaking words of confidence. Rowlands really seemed a youth with a commendable amount of tact. When he noticed that the two were in earnest conversation near the large easel he increased his attention to the portrait.

"Florence!"

"Andrew!"

"I suppose it is quite understood that our half-engagement is at an end?"

"Oh, quite at an end."

"And there is no sort of bond between us now?"

"Excepting that of friendship, Andrew."

"There is no reason why we should not be capital friends."

"Capital friends," she agreed, smiling.

"What a good, sensible girl you are, Florence." Andrew sighed and touched lightly a fold of her white sleeve. "Do you know I have often thought of the old days, the days just after I left school, when I used to send stuff to London editors—and such stuff, too—and you and I used to wait at the post-office for the big envelopes that always came back? You were in shortish dresses then."

"I'm rather glad, I think," she said brightly, "to find that you still remember those days. I shall never forget them."

"However successful a man may become," said Andrew Tite oracularly, "he always remembers his first sweetheart."

"Especially if he marries her," suggested Florence.

"That," said Mr. Tite, "that does not affect the matter. Is this crayon work yours? It seems very fair."

The scent from the trees at the back of the house came lazily through the open window and contested in a slow, dogged way with the smell of the paint tubes. Rowlands, with his back to the two, put down the portrait and looked about for another.

"Just one more word, Florence. You were always the best of girls, and I am so glad we have not quarrelled."

"I don't think I could have done so, Andrew."

"Shall we shake hands?"

"With all the pleasure possible."

It was a small hand with a rather good ring on one of the fingers. It was a soft, white hand, too, and it lay in Andrew's with such a gentle pressure that for one moment the canvases danced before his eyes an intricate gavotte. But this was no excuse for the immediate action of Andrew Tite. In view of the existing circumstances—existing circumstances including Miss Vanbury—nothing, I am bound to say, could excuse Andrew seizing the small white hand, pressing it hurriedly to his lips, and murmuring hastily two words:

"Dearest love!"

Rowlands was really very sorry that he had dropped the canvas. He did hope that no harm was done. Miss Saxby assured him, after careful inspection, that no harm whatever had been done.

"I think we had better go, Rowlands," said Andrew Tite, with a flushed face.

"I'm ready."

"And perhaps you will let us call to-morrow, Florence?"

"I hope you will. And you too, Sir Henry."

"You're very kind, Miss Saxby. I hope we shall see each other again."

"You must try to call, Sir Henry, when my uncle is in."

"Even if he were not in——" began Rowlands.

"Now, come along, Rowlands. Good-bye, dear. Good-bye."

Andrew Tite ran back to the gate after the two had proceeded a few steps.

"May I send you a note this evening?" he asked hurriedly.

"You are one of my favourite writers," said Florence Saxby demurely.

Andrew Tite went up to his room and Rowlands, being called for by the excellent Turley, went for an hour's practice. Andrew's writing work consisted of one communication, and he did not commence that until he had walked about the room and considered a great deal. The letter began:

"Dear Miss Vanbury,—*I want to send you a few words on rather a serious matter. When you promised a few weeks since to be my wife, I——*"

There were two sheets of closely-written arguments. At the end was this:

"*Pray, therefore, consider that we are released from our engagement to each other. You are a woman of considerable*

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sense, and you will, I am sure, agree that all this is for the best.

"*My regards to your mother if she has returned from Nice. If I do not call on my return to town you will know that it is because pressure of work prevents me. With sincere regards, believe me, faithfully yours,*

"ANDREW TITE."

When he had folded this, he placed it in an envelope, addressed the envelope to—

"*The Hon. Miss Vanbury,*
"117 *Eaton Terrace,*
London, S.W.,"

and dispatched it by the postman who called at the moment for letters to take by tricycle to a post-office five miles distant. Andrew Tite felt that Volume III. of his life only remained to be penned. That evening he would write to Florence Saxby and renew his engagement with her, and——

Enter Rowlands. Rowlands, back from the links in the best of spirits, Rowlands, fanning himself with his cap, lounges on two chairs at the entrance and hails the literary man, descending the staircase in a loud, boyish way:

"Hullo, there!"

"Ah, Rowlands. Back from play?"

"Play, sir? It's hard work. Real hard work. That's what it is."

"I am rather anxious, Rowlands, to have your opinion. Can you spare a few minutes?"

"Hours."

"It won't take long. I want to know what you think of Miss Saxby."

"Miss Saxby!" said Rowlands wonderingly.

"You surely haven't forgotten the lady to whom I introduced you this afternoon?"

"Oh, that young person. You don't care for her, do you?"

"I'm surprised," said Andrew. "I should have thought she was just the kind to attract you. To me she seems the most delightful of women folk."

"Perhaps your experience has been limited, Tite."

"I don't know so much about that," answers Andrew Tite knowingly. "I know what they are pretty well. I was just wondering what most girls would say if they were proposed to by a man of position in the world."

"So far as I can judge," said Rowlands, "I should imagine that most girls would say 'Yes'."

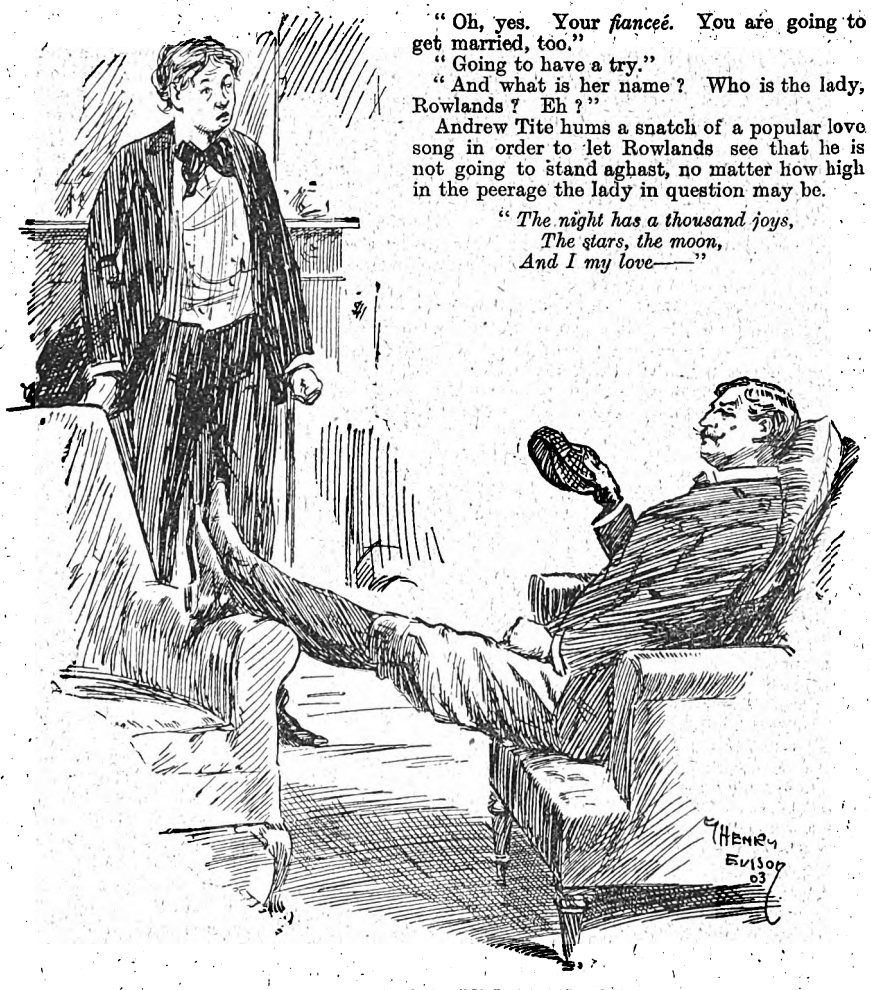
Andrew smiled.

"I don't think there's much doubt about that, Rowlands. It must be a great satisfaction for a girl to make a really good marriage. And, after all, Florence Saxby is a clever girl. Quite above the ordinary."

"I think so."

"Of course," goes on Andrew argumentatively, "all women have certain drawbacks. As I was pointing out this morning, in the case of the average provincial there is with them all that lack of a sense of humour which is so much to be deplored."

"But, Tite, I fancy there are exceptions. For instance, my *fiancée*."



"The name of the lady who is to be my dear wife," said Sir Henry, "is Florence Saxby."

"Oh, yes. Your *fiancée*. You are going to get married, too."

"Going to have a try."

"And what is her name? Who is the lady, Rowlands? Eh?"

Andrew Tite hums a snatch of a popular love song in order to let Rowlands see that he is not going to stand aghast, no matter how high in the peerage the lady in question may be.

"*The night has a thousand joys,*
The stars, the moon,
And I my love——"

"The name of the lady who is going to be my dear wife," mentions Rowlands deliberately, "and to whom I have been engaged for three months, is Miss Florence Saxby."

* * * * * *

Mr. Andrew Tite caught the 5.50 p.m. back to town. The infant porter recognised him and his bag, and took charge of both with an air of extreme friendliness. The infant porter, after he had booked three passengers, and had rung a big brass bell, shouldered the bag, and as he stood on the platform by the side of Andrew Tite, waiting for the up-train, essayed to while away the time by amicable talk.

"'Ad enough of it, sir?"

Mr. Tite did not answer; being absorbed in his own thoughts.

"I say, sir." The infant porter tapped him on the arm with the familiarity of a youthful official and nodded towards the village. "I say. 'Ave y'ad enough of it?"

"I have had, my boy," said Andrew Tite gloomily, "just a little too much of it, thank you."

W. Pett Ridge.

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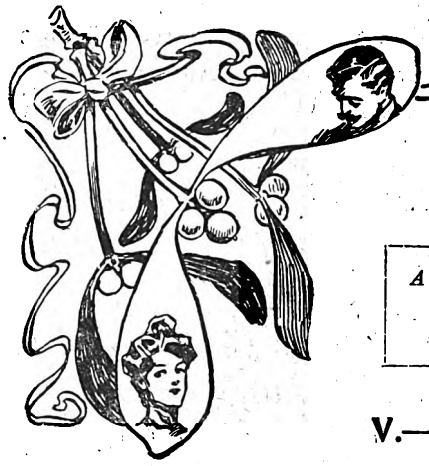

Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

V.—THE DUTY OF ROGER FORBES.

It was with a stern look on his handsome face that the young barrister, Roger Forbes, strode up the drive to Mansfield House.

An urgent telegram from his mother had brought him down from town. He knew only too well of late years what the trouble was likely to be, and he braced himself for feeble excuses from his father, and bitter words from his mother.

"Well, mother," he exclaimed, as she came slowly across the handsome drawing-room to meet him, "what is it *this* time?"

"The end," she replied. Mrs. Forbes had been a very handsome woman, but the havoc of mental and bodily suffering had long swept away all traces of beauty, and the hard expression of her face repelled all idea of love.

"What do you mean?" he asked with alarm in his voice.

"Your father, unable to meet his liabilities, has gone off to America or elsewhere, and like a true man and a gentleman, has left us to face what he could not," she said bitterly.

Roger, trained in his mother's school, showed no emotion at this announcement; he only asked:

"Is it *all* gone? Yours and Ellen's too?"

"All," she replied. "Oh, read his letter, and you will see his excuses, 'a sure thing, absolutely certain to succeed, and then he would get it all back and more'—only it didn't. Excuses, yes, plenty of excuses."

Roger took the letter and reading it in silence, handed it back to his mother, who, for once, let her stern self-control be broken down.

"Words—words," she cried fiercely, striking the letter on her open palm with her clenched fist, "all words!"

"Mother," said Roger, touching her gently with his hand, "you have always been just, can you not now be merciful also? Do not be too hard in your judgment of him."

She shook off his hand, she had never been a woman who cared for caresses, and she said in a hard, level voice:

"There is a man in possession now, and everything will have to be sold up by next week."

Roger let a groan escape him as he cried: "Poor Ellen!"

Poor Ellen, indeed! His invalid sister, who, in constant pain, only seemed able to live when surrounded by every comfort that money could buy, how would she bear to be uprooted from the corner where she had spent her life and go to a strange place to live with straitened means?

His mother, he knew, felt the shame the most. Deprivations she could bear and make no complaint, but to be unable to pay all they owed in full, he knew would break her heart.

"Well," he said, after a pause. "What do you propose as the best thing to be done?"

"I have thought it out last night," she replied. "How much have you saved?"

"£500," he replied, with a pang, as he remembered how joyfully he had put by each pound for his approaching marriage.

"Well, I suppose, to save your mother and sister from going to the workhouse, you will give half what you had intended to spend on that foolish child, Daisy Mitcham's comfort, to save the necessary furniture from this wreck, to furnish some rooms for us to live in. Then, I suppose, Ellen must 'take in' plain needle-work, and I must give music-lessons or whatever I can get employment in, to pay for our daily bread."

Roger was too much shocked at this picture, to object to the words in which she clothed it, and indeed he had long grown accustomed to her constant gibes at his *fiancée* and his engagement, for he knew only too well by now that she considered the girl he had chosen to be beneath him, and that she had besides taken a personal dislike to her own since she had seen her shudder at a toad, and heard her confess to being afraid of cows.

The woman, who being always ignored and unconsidered by her husband, had revenged herself by exacting implicit obedience from her children; and that the son of whom she was in her heart so proud, should have set her will at defiance in this important matter, and turned himself resolutely from the bride she had chosen for him, would have caused her to dislike anyone he might choose, and of all the world of women there were no two more likely to misunderstand one another than the girl who was to be his bride and his mother. This had naturally caused an estrangement between mother and son, but knowing what she had to bear, Roger had outwardly shown little sign of what he felt, and had always been willing to come to her assistance as much as he could. Now he said with genuine dismay:

"Oh, mother, you can't. and Ellen can't. Why, some days she is too bad to move a finger."

His mother nodded grimly, with some slight softening of her hard features at the thought of her child's sufferings, but she only quoted: "Needs must when the devil drives."

"Where did you think of living?" he asked thoughtfully.

"I have thought of that too," she replied. "There will be no money to spare for invalid carriages and such luxuries, and it will be too painful and dangerous for Ellen to travel far—we must take some rooms in the village."

"Oh!" he burst out, and then, with a compassionate look at his mother, "However will you bear it?"

"As I have borne other troubles, without a fuss, I hope. I do not think my pride has been indulged much in my married life."

Roger, who knew that the same fall that had stretched his sister on a bed of pain for life, had also given his mother a serious internal disorder, could no longer restrain himself, and he burst forth:

"I cannot allow it. I will spend every penny I have to make you comfortable, and you must both come and live with me, and I will work for all."

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His mother's face almost kindled into a smile, and she half-put out her hand, and then drew it back, saying:

"Think what that will mean before you decide. You could not keep us and a wife as well; your marriage would have to be indefinitely postponed."

Roger sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"I will say nothing," she continued in a calm, dispassionate voice, "it is entirely for you to decide. A part of your savings to make a shelter for your sister and myself, is all I ask. For the rest, I believe that between us we could make enough to live on. So it must be only of your own free will that your marriage be put off," and she left the room.

Poor Roger! on the one hand his mother and his helpless sister, and on the other, his dear little sweetheart Daisy, and the marriage that was to have taken place in three months.

The next day Roger sat in his chambers endeavouring to forget his troubles in the intricacies of one of the all too few briefs that came his way, when a gentle knock announced a visitor. Looking up, a glad light came into his eyes at the sight of the charming vision before him.

Daisy Mitcham, small, plump, dark, and lovable, with a broad, white forehead, wavy brown hair, exquisitely marked eyebrows, and most distracting dimples, stood smiling before him. "Why, Daisy, I was just going to write to you," he exclaimed, taking her into his eager arms.

"Never mind now," she cried, freeing herself at last and instinctively putting up her hands to straighten her hat. "Here I am in the flesh, and, moreover, I have come to be comforted."

"What! Are you in trouble too?" he cried in dismay.

"Yes, I am, but if you look so terribly downcast, I shall go right away and say nothing at all."

Roger smiled at her tenderly, and she continued:

"I may as well say it right out at once and have done with it. I have been turned out of the Fitzwilliams' at a moment's notice."

"You have? And why?" he cried, with ready indignation.

"Well—oh—well—you mustn't be angry—but—well—George Fitzwilliam is home just now from Woolwich, and he—he—tried to kiss me."

"The dickens he did, the young beast!" cried Roger, striding about the room.

"Now," said she, going to him and putting her arms round him, "don't be so angry, I knew it was coming, and—and—I didn't tell him."

"Yes, but my darling, this is dreadful, why did you not tell me before? And so you gave notice and left at once?"

"No, no," she said, a little sad look coming into her eyes. "We who have to earn our living cannot afford to resent insults. Mrs. Fitzwilliam saw him, and she was very rude to me and told me to go at once—and so here I am." And she ended with a little sob and her head on his shoulder.

With a furious epithet hurled at the whole family of Fitzwilliams, Roger strove to comfort the girl with caresses and promises of protection.

At last a sudden thought came to him, and he said:

"Has this ever happened before, in any family you have been in?"

Hiding her head still more, she murmured: "Yes."

"When? And how often?" he asked, trying to speak calmly.

"Pretty often," she said, sobbing. "It's generally the elder brothers, but its worse when its the—the—fathers."

There was a silence, and Daisy, frightened, lifted up her head, only to read such trouble in the eyes she loved, that she dried her pretty brown eyes and turned consoler, but as the thought of her friendless condition came to her again she could not help saying—

"If only I had some relation I could go to till we are married—if only your mother did not so dislike and despise me, and if I were not so afraid of her."

Poor Roger, here was his difficulty increased tenfold.

Should he allow his mother and sister to go into a miserable drudging poverty, or should he send this fair girl out again to earn her living amongst strangers, and be exposed to insult on all sides?

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

WELL, now you have our Christmas Number in your hands, and I trust that you are wholly satisfied with it. But I am in no trepidation as to that point, for I fancy that the most fastidious person must admit that the matter in this issue is splendid value for the money outlayed in buying it—twopence. For a few seconds glance through it, and see what is the result. There is a splendid new serial starting, hosts of good stories, plenty of pretty illustrations, two interesting competitions, another Unsolved Love Problem, a page of very funny jokes, and a further instalment of that engaging romance, "A Criminal Millionaire." Assuredly, I may say that it is an excellent twopennyworth!

A YEAR ago, in fact, in last year's Christmas number, I started the Love Problems that were so successful. In this number appears the fifth of a new series of Problems which have been even more appreciated by my readers; and, following my custom, I am offering a prize of one guinea to the person who sends in what I consider to be the best solution of the difficulty in which Roger Forbes is placed.

The number of words in your replies must not exceed one hundred, and must be written on one side of the paper only.

The latest day on which I can receive solutions is Monday, the 28th of this month, but replies may come in any time before then. None arriving after then will be considered.

My decision as to the winner will be final. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Xmas Love Problem" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner.

IN CONNECTION with the Problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret," I extend my heartiest congratulations to Mrs. Mabel M. Harvey, of 6 Harpers Lane, Guildford Road, Ash, Surrey, for her in every way excellent arguments bearing out her views that Betty Carteret should tell Geoffrey Hilton the state of her sister Kate's love. I have very much pleasure in awarding her the guinea that I offered for what was, in my opinion, the best solution.

I HOPE that you will all enter for the two competitions that are announced on pages 798 and 807.

The Statue Competition affords a splendid opportunity for testing your skill in artistic arrangement, and is of such a nature that it appeals to old and young alike.

I am sure that the Running Riddles Competition will also be one calculated to take your fancy. What more entertaining way to pass one of these long winter evenings could there be than puzzling out suitable answers to the conundrums given. I anticipate that my readers will show great ingenuity in this direction.

You will notice that I am offering as prizes, besides the money awards, cameras and complete camera outfits. These are very handy articles, and the best of results can be obtained from them. Do not miss these opportunities of becoming the fortunate possessor of one of them.

THAT you will all have a happy Christmas and a bright New Year is the last wish of **Your Editor.**

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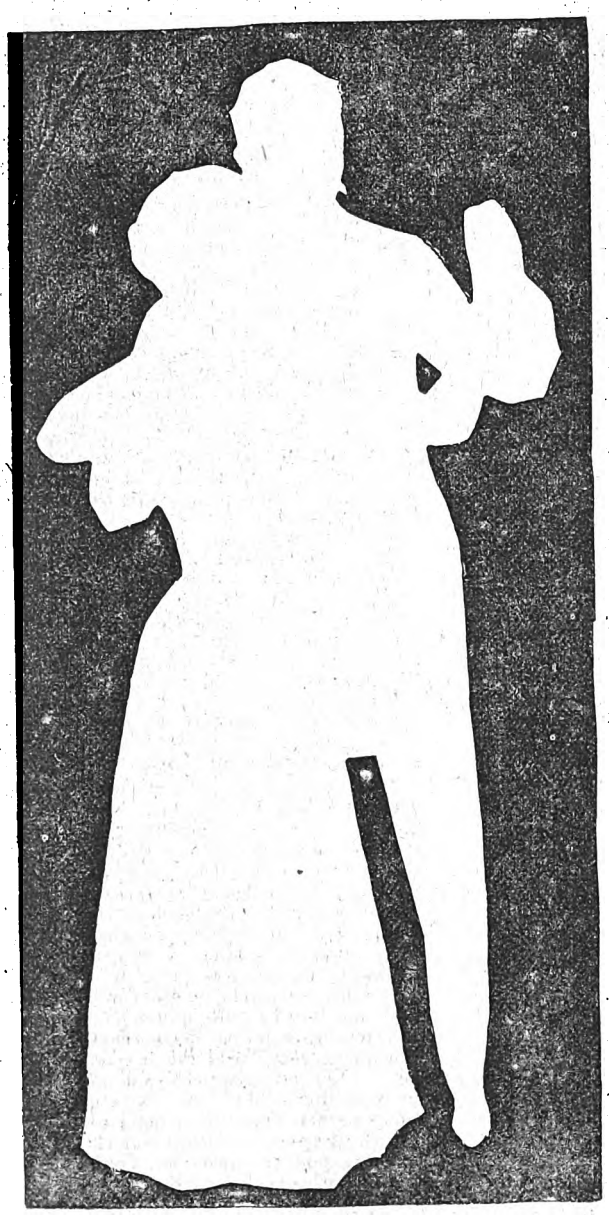
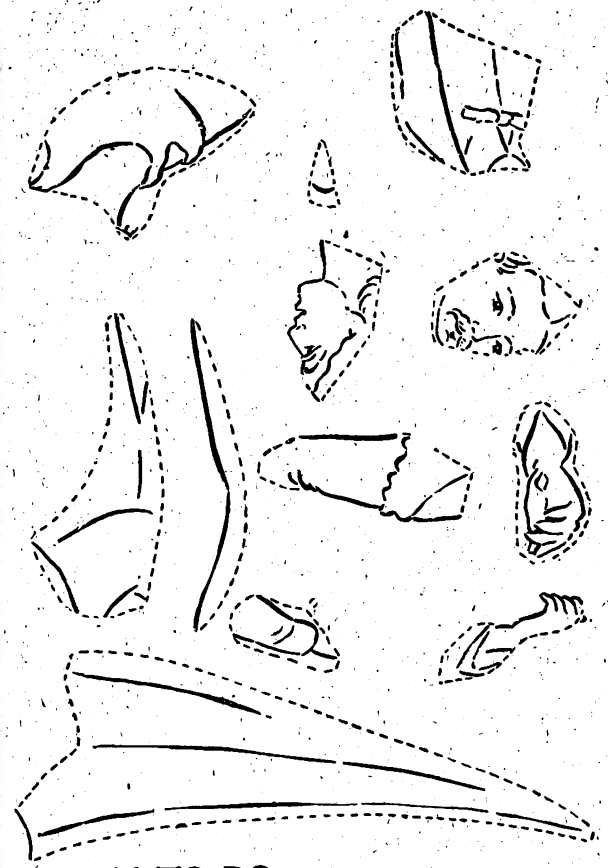
Statue Competition.

At the foot of this page will be found particulars of a very simple and entertaining competition. It will afford a very pleasant method of helping to pass away the time of a long winter evening, and readers should try to get all their friends to enter for it.

The prizes will be one of £2, and five splendid hand cameras, with complete photographic outfit.





WHAT TO DO.

Carefully cut out the twelve pieces above. Place them in the white silhouette so as to complete the picture.

To the readers who send in what the Editor considers to be the most correct and neatest pictures the prizes will be awarded.

The Editor's decision will be final, and competitor's entries will be taken as an acknowledgment of this condition. No correspondence will be entered into on the subject.

Readers may make as many attempts as they like.

All attempts must reach this office not later than Thursday, December 31st. None arriving after that date will be considered.

Address your envelopes: "Statue Competition," The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Name .....

Address .....

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The Master of Swan Hall.

How a Gallant Gentleman Won His Christmas Bride.

"Who's that coming?"

"That little villain, Phil Dudley," said Pedro moodily. "Hang the fellow! Is he coming here? Can't he stay at home one day in the week, I'd like to know? He's got the old place, and can't he be content and stay there?"

The door dashed open, and his dark face—a spirited, olive-tinted face, which had gained him the nickname of Don Pedro—softened, the "winter of discontent" vanished, and he nodded a greeting to the charming little gentleman in the black frame of the old doorway—a slim youth, in a grey Norfolk suit; a slender aristocrat, with curled red lips, luminous grey eyes, a bold, delicate nose, and a close crop of waving hair, his head stately poised, and a wicked dimple in one rose-and-lily cheek.

"Hallo!" said Pedro, wiping his gun-stock lovingly with his handkerchief while he eyed his visitor.

"Hallo!" responded Mr. Dudley, airily. "Who's your chum, old man? Introduce a fellow, can't you?"

"You've heard of him, Phil," said Pedro, laughing. "It's Tom Burgoyne, lawyer and—ahem!—lover. Madge's fate, you know. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Where's your backbone gone?"

Phil gathered himself up from the door-post, and put out a slim hand to the brown-bearded, brown-eyed young man, with the pleasant smile, who rose from the edge of the table to greet him.

His face was white, and the hand the lawyer clasped icy and trembling.

"I have heard of you from Madge," he almost gasped. "I am delighted to see you, Mr. Burgoyne."

"Won't you stay and have a cigar, Phil?" asked Pedro.

"No; I—I—— Where's Madge, Pedro? I came over to see her."

"Well, you'll find her in the kitchen, preparing a sacrifice of baked meats in honour of Tom here," said Pedro kindly. "She'll be awfully glad to see you, I dare say."

"I dare say," said Mr. Dudley, with an attempt at airy nonchalance under the observant legal eyes smiling at him. "Madge generally is glad to see a fellow. Well, I'm off."

"How did you come over?"

"I came on my bike," said Mr. Dudley coolly. "The governor goes frantic when he sees me perched on it, so I tried how close to the edge of the cliffs I could keep it all the way from the Hall here. He could see me from his window, and I hope he liked it, that's all. Good-bye, gentlemen."

"It's 'Good-bye' to some purpose," said Pedro, as he vanished, leaving an odour of violets behind him. "He half lives here. Don't set up the Othello business, Tom, but he is up to his pink ears in love with Madge—poor little cub!"

Burgoyne laughed—a mellow laugh, with a ring of truth in its manly music.

"And Madge?"

"Madge is very fond of him," said Pedro, staring down his beloved gun-barrel, "and so am I. His governor is a polished old beast, a bloodless tyrant, with etiquette for a heart, and Phil's poor little neck is under his elegant foot. He's a small dare-devil is Phil, but I've seen him lie a long hour with his head rolled up in Madge's flounces and frills, crying like a baby, after some shindy with old Dudley. He's very reticent, though, about domestic affairs. I tell you, your sudden appearance has cut him up. Don't notice his ways, old fellow; he's only a boy—nineteen next Christmas."

"He may weep on Madge's muslins as long as he likes," said the lawyer, laughing. "I'm not given to jealousy. And so you don't like his father? Well, that's natural under the circumstances."

Pedro groaned, and then laughed.

"Yes, you see poor old Cousin Tom Dudley rather sold me. He had disowned his only child, Phil's governor, years ago for very excellent reasons, and he adopted and educated Madge and me as his co-heirs. That was lovely; but when he died a year ago, his will left all his great

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wealth to us, with this proviso—that if his son, Courtney Dudley, had a living son, that son was to be heir. Well, Courtney Dudley was advertised for and turned up nine months ago from somewhere in Spain, with a son, Phil, and Madge and I took thankful possession of our legal crumbs—this old cottage and twenty thousand pounds divided between us. Courtney Dudley reigns at Swan Hall until Phil's majority. Come, old chap, if we're to have a shot at anything, suppose we start?"

"Pedro bears his disappointment with lots of pluck," thought Burgoyne. "And so young Dudley is in love with my royal Madge—it looks rather that way, I must admit."

"His royal Madge" was dusting the dainty little drawing-room, assisted by Mr. Phil Dudley, who was very pale about the lips, and very large and dark and pathetic as to the grey eyes, and while Pedro went to call the dogs, Burgoyne stood looking at them curiously from the narrow hall.

"Royal Madge" was certainly a lovely girl, very like Pedro, dark, glowing, magnetic, with two kindly brown suns under her sweet broad brows, and a lithe, slim, soft, strong figure, pliable as a willow, and at present draped in soft, flowing, woollen drapery of a deep red.

"Phil," said the richest and most sympathetic of voices, "if you stand so close to my elbow, I'll end by smashing this vase and my heart with it. It's Tom's last present, you know."

Burgoyne's trained, observant eyes flashed, for, with an almost imperceptible gesture, the boy brushed against the lifted arm wielding the feather duster, and, with a crash, the gorgeous bit of china lay on the carpet in fifty fragments, and Burgoyne turned away without having been observed, his lips set, the thin upper one curled a little, lawyer-like.

* * * * *

The next day a groom brought an invitation to dinner from Swan Hall to the cottage.

These civilities were frequently exchanged, for Courtney Dudley found his brilliant, accomplished, young cousins very entertaining from many points of view, and for Phil's sake they were cordial to his father.

"Mr. Burgoyne, your friend, of whom I have heard so often," was included courteously in the informal invitation, and the crisp, golden September sunset, with its grand, patient moon waiting whitely to shine on her throne, and hints of stars in the sky, found them walking up the solemn avenue to the fine old stone house, with angels' heads on its spouts, oriel windows for the sunrise, bay windows for the sunset, mellow stained-glass windows for the cold north, and conservatory roofs glittering on the south—phalanxes of really ancient trees, like groups of kings in coronation robes of September glory, and what gave the place its name—a long, narrow artificial lake white with swans, lying close under the drawing-room windows.

"Prepare for a very dandified lord of Swan Hall," said Pedro to Burgoyne. "Phil looks splendid in evening dress. Ask Madge!"

"Phil is unlike other young men," said Madge, with a rather troubled look, "and if Tom watches him he will see what I mean. Poor Phil!"

"Rats in his garret, Tom," said Pedro concisely—"a decided crack in his noddle. I rather imagine that's the true inwardness of his governor not sending him to college."

"Hush, here he is!" said Madge hastily.

He bounded down the six stone steps in a flying leap, landing before Madge, a jewelled hand on each of her pretty shoulders, the last of the solemn sunset on his spirited, beautiful face, and Pedro winked at Tom with open amusement.

A figure stood before them as nearly as could be approached in a knickerbocker suit of pale-blue velvet, with collar and cuffs of white satin, brocaded with delicate pink roses. Lace adorned his bosom, and fell over his slim hands, diamond studs flashed from the lace, and his exceedingly elegant legs were dreams of beauty in pink silk stockings, while diamond buckles sparkled on his arched insteps. He was simply radiant, but a little penitential.

"Am I forgiven about the vase?" he asked, archly. "I did not venture down to-day in dread of a scolding. I say, Madge, kiss and be friends—won't you, dearest and loveliest? I'll be more careful of your china next time."

He darted a swift, piercing look at Burgoyne, who was staring in open astonishment at the picturesque young gentleman on whom Madge was bestowing a comfortable, sisterly kiss of pardon.

"Come in, boys," he said vivaciously, as he gave Madge his arm, "the governor is in the drawing-room. Madge will go and placate him—he's in a temper—and you fellows come to the billiard-room. The new table came to-day, Pedro, and I want you to see it. It's a beauty."

He whisked Madge's fleecy white wrap off in the hall, flung it to the footman, and led her—a lovely figure in shining, beautiful, pink silk—to the drawing-room door and pushed her in gently.

"Here's Madge, governor," he shouted. "Come out of the blues and entertain her. She's awfully stunning this evening."

He came back, whistling until the grand carved oak ceiling rang.

"He doesn't care for a woman unless she's a beauty or a wit," he said. "Now, I'm more catholic—I like them all, eh, Pedro?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Pedro, laughing. "Madge is the one woman I love at present. I suppose my time will come, however, monsieur."

"Stave it off," said Mr. Phil Dudley, with solemnity, "as I do. 'Merry and free is a bachelor's revelry' when a fellow can't get Madge, that is—— Beg pardon, Mr. Burgoyne. Don't look so serious; though you *are* my successful rival, you need fear no poisoned daggers or unwholesome *entrées* at Swan Hall, I assure you.

"Get out, you little scamp," said Pedro. "What a volley of folly! Don't mind him, Tom."

The moon was shining in at them through a solemn arched window as they crossed a corridor to the billiard-room.

A polished cuirass hung directly in its beams, and, mirror-like, caught Tom's eyes. He half-paused, and then swung square round in time to catch Mr. Phil Dudley, who was swaying like a slender tree, his face white as the moon outside.

He placed him on the cushioned window-sill.

"Get wine—water—anything! He has fainted," he said quickly, and Pedro rushed away like a whirlwind.

Phil's eyes opened. He sighed heavily, muttered something to himself in Spanish, and sprang to his feet with a sharp cry, changing to a laugh as he met Burgoyne's eyes. The lawyer stood looking at him in the moonlight with strange intentness.

"I'm subject to these attacks," said Phil, pluckily keeping on his feet. "A dickens of a bore, isn't it, for a fellow as fond of adventure by flood and field as I am? Come, let's go back to Madge; we can see the table afterwards, and christen it with champagne—the dad has got a brand fit for the gods. Where's Pedro? Ran for smelling-salts, I suppose. Hallo! Give me your arm, Burgoyne; I'm shaky yet."

The lawyer silently passed his arm round the lad, and Phil leant against the strong frame quietly for a moment, sighing heavily, evidently sick and faint almost to death. At Pedro's step, ringing along the corridor, he released himself and looked admiringly at Tom.

"I wish I had your stamina, old fellow," he said, sighing; "but any I had is vanishing into thin air. I'm not half the fellow I was six months ago. I'm getting done up. The dad's cantankerous, and there isn't a girl except Madge to flirt with in the neighbourhood. When I'm dead put 'Died of the blues' on my funereal urn. See here, you're not going to take Madge away directly, are you?"

"Next month—next week—if I can induce her to come then," said the lawyer, briefly and coldly.

Phil lifted his rival's sinewy hand, and pressed his lips on it.

"You and she will be very happy," he whispered, tremulously. "In the wide world there is not another like Madge."

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"Thank you," said the lawyer, not unkindly. "Shall we go to the drawing-room? Here's Pedro."

In the drawing-room Mr. Dudley welcomed them with admirable polish—a lean, elderly man, with a hooked chin and quiet eyes, like grey stones under drooping lids—whom Phil treated with an odd mixture of impertinence and terror.

The evening passed brilliantly, though more than once Madge wondered what made Burgoyne so very silent.

Phil was in wild spirits, and Pedro's brow was clouded as the three walked back to the cottage in the misty, midnight moonlight.

"I'm afraid Phil is ill in mind and body," he said sadly. "There's a screw loose about the boy. He's as cracked as rare old china. No one can fail to see it."

"I fail to see it," said the lawyer, rather curtly.

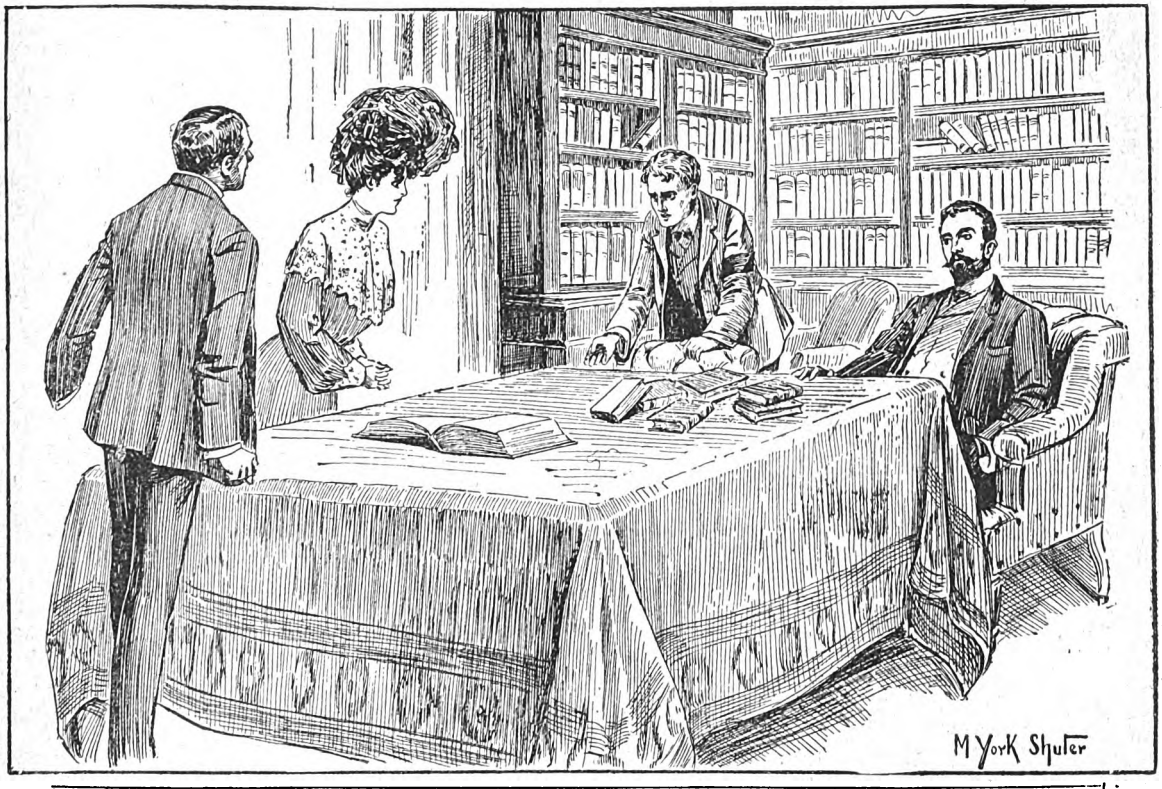
Burgoyne said no more; but early in the dawn he was still sitting in his vine-clad window, smoking and thinking.

At last he laid down his pipe and rose wearily.

"Two years to his majority," he said to himself, summing up the case finally. "There is not much lost by letting things alone until then. He may die in the interim, and Pedro and Madge get their own smoothly and without scandal; and if not—well, I shall know how to act when the time comes. Poor little Phil! poor little Phil!"

He gathered up a heap of documents which he had evidently been examining with great interest and care, replaced them in their envelopes and locked them into his bag, his face still dark and troubled.

"I wish I might confide in Madge," he thought. "But I can't—at least, until we are married. She shall decide the question then. My true woman! my royal Madge! Poor little Phil!"



"I sent for you and your sister," said Phil, "to say that I am *not* Dudley Courtney's son!"

"Oh, don't come medical jurisprudence over us!" said Pedro sourly. "I know him better than you do, and I say he's ill and cracked, by Jove!"

"His state seems to affect you profoundly, old boy," said Burgoyne, with a level look at Pedro's frank, handsome, dark face, bright in the moonlight.

"Pedro is as nervous about Phil as a hen with a solitary chicken," said Madge, with her soft, happy laugh; "and so am I. We love him dearly, Tom."

"Happy Phil!" said Burgoyne. "By-the-way, if he should die before his majority?"

"We are his heirs," said Pedro, "according to the will. I wish it were not so. To connect our gain with Phil's death seems unbearable. You don't know what a loving, generous, reckless, noble little scamp he is, Tom; but we—Madge and I—do."

But the question was decided before that.

* * * * *

"Apoplexy," was the verdict.

"A good riddance," thought Burgoyne, even as he and Pedro stood looking down at the hooked chin and mean, meagre head, still and heavy as a stone, on its satin pillow in the rosewood coffin.

Courtney Dudley had died alone in the night, even while Burgoyne had sat and smoked and read his documents in the moonlight; and now, after the funeral, Phil sent for them.

He had shut himself up since the death, refusing to see even Madge.

He had not appeared at the grave. He was ill, the servants reported, and Pedro and Madge were in despair, which, how-

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ever, lightened as they heard his light step crossing the stone floor of the hall to the library, where they and Burgoyne waited.

The door opened and the master of Swan Hall came in.

Pedro, nearest the door, strode to meet him. Burgoyne rose, and Madge sprang towards Phil, only to pause in amazement and utter dismay at the change in his appearance.

"Oh, Phil, Phil!" she said, in great compassion, and would have clasped his neck, but he recoiled sharply with a peculiar moan of intense agony, and dashing aside Pedro's strong brown hand, glided to the opposite side of the table, where he stood holding to a chair-back and trembling like a reed.

He was a mere ghastly shadow of the radiant little gentleman Burgoyne had first seen five days before. He was dressed in his usual dark grey Norfolk suit, with a crêpe badge on his arm; the dilated, luminous eyes were fixed and glaring, the oval cheeks hollow, the mouth set in fierce agony.

Burgoyne quietly took a chair so close to him that he could touch him without rising.

Madge again tried to approach him, but he waved her off. Pedro stood staring in blank amazement.

"Phil," he said, tremulously, "dear old fellow, what's this? Don't you know how Madge and I love you? And yet you repel us in this way, and, by Jove, I never thought you cared so much about your governor as all this."

Phil's hand went to his heart, and he dropped his stately golden head heavily on the back of the chair, then lifted it wildly, staring straight at Pedro.

"I sent for you and your sister," he gasped, "to say this to you—*I am not Dudley Courtney's son!* He had me in his power and forced me into the imposture. Phil Dudley died in Spain."

"Two years ago," added Burgoyne quietly, "in a village in the Spanish Pyrenees, and was buried there by the village priest, Father Antonio Baltro. I know all the details, Pedro. I have all my documents in this wallet. I stumbled against the truth in the tour of Spain from which I have just returned. You and Madge are the owners of Swan Hall. 'Phil,' as you call him, is——"

But with a cry, impossible to dscribe in its horror and intensity, the wretched lad fell at Burgoyne's feet, clasping his knees frantically.

"Oh, Heaven, not to Pedro and Madge! I have confessed all they need know. Oh, Mr. Burgoyne, I felt from the first that I must dread you. I am going away; they will never see me again. I have left a written confession with Pedro's lawyer—of all that is necessary. Let me go without telling them more."

Burgoyne turned his piercing eyes on Pedro, who, livid and breathless, was gazing at the figure writhing in anguish at the lawyer's feet.

"How shall it be, Pedro?" he asked. "It is for you to decide, and Madge."

He smiled. For Madge had already decided. White with horror and amazement, pity and love, she sprang forward and threw her soft, strong arms round the impostor's neck.

"Phil, Phil!" she cried. "I can't learn to unlove in a moment. Oh, my poor little Phil, I don't care what you may have been or done. I don't wish to hear. You shall be as dear as ever to me, indeed you shall, and to Pedro, and stay with us. Pedro, Pedro, tell him so."

Burgoyne drew back with a faint laugh. Pedro had taken Phil bodily from Madge, and was hugging the usurper of his rights cordially.

"You little scoundrel!" he said huskily. "So you were the tool of that courtly old ruffian, were you? And perhaps a pick-pocket beforehand? Well, never mind, old boy, you shall have a chance to be a credit to the name yet. Phil Dudley you are, and Phil Dudley you shall remain, that's fixed as fate. I'm like Madge. I can't learn to unlove, as she says, and now, Tom, when you've done grinning, put your legal brain to work, and help us out of the difficulty. I won't have Phil disgraced, not for twenty Swan Halls—by Jove, I won't! I don't care what he did to leave himself in Courtney Dudley's power. He's naturally an honest fellow and a true gentleman—as good a little rascal as ever breathed."

Pedro made a magnificent and knightly champion, his handsome dark eyes flashing, his chest well thrown out, and one large, long arm round the boyish culprit, but Phil burst from him and rushed to Burgoyne.

"Make them let me go," he whispered, "or I'll kill myself—I swear I will!"

Burgoyne put a heavy hand on the grey shoulder.

"And I swear," he whispered sternly, "to tell the truth on the spot, here to Pedro, in your presence, if you don't obey me. You will not be permitted to rush to ruin, Mr. Phil Dudley, allow me to assure you."

Phil's eyes flashed fire. The library window stood open, and tearing himself from Burgoyne's hand, he sprang on the sill.

Below glimmered the Swans' pool, and before either man could rush forward and prevent him, the light figure shot into the air and alighted magnificently on the opposite slope of green turf.

He reeled, recovered himself, and without one backward glance at the three white faces at the ivy-framed window, fled like the wind across lawn and slope, fled and vanished.

Late that night, as the train thundered into the station, Mr. Phil Dudley crept dejectedly out of the truck — a cattle-truck —in which he had stolen a trip to the city in the uncongenial society of a flock of sheep—and rubbing his dim eyes, looked up—into Burgoyne's face.

"You have had an agreeable trip, sir," said the lawyer grimly. "I trust you found your travelling companions entertaining. I *thought* I should find you on this train, Mr. Dudley."

Phil leant heavily against a hideous bale of rags awaiting shipment.

"Did—did you tell them—tell Pedro?" he gasped.

"No, sir, I did not. Come this way, if you please."

He led his captive to the telegraph-office and dispatched a curt message:

"*Have found Phil all right. Will write to-morrow.*"

"Now, sir," he remarked drily, "you will come home with me, if you are not afraid to trust yourself with your rival. I believe I have the honour of occupying that position towards you, Mr. Dudley. Much obliged for the honour you do Madge, I'm sure."

Phil hung his head, lifted it royally, and made a last spirited dash for liberty.

He wrenched himself from the kind, compelling hand, and fled into the very thick of the vehicles roaring down the gas-lit street.

Burgoyne plunged after him—a little fierce in the chase—and a policeman headed off the fugitive, who turned sideways, and the next moment was lying in the dust under the wheels of a passing vehicle.

He opened his eyes eagerly as Burgoyne bent over him, and smiled happily.

"It is all over," he whispered, gaily. "I'm smashed to atoms. Swear you'll never tell Pedro—swear, swear!"

"I swear I won't," said Burgoyne, hoarsely. "Poor little Phil!"

Phil smiled contentedly, settling into death.

"He said he loved me—give him my pearl ring—on my finger—and tell him I loved him. Good Heavens! so much!"

* * * * *

"As Phil declines to see me, I have nothing more to say," wrote Pedro, two months later. "I hope he will be more reasonable when I return from America. I am hurt and offended, by Jove! and can't see why I'm treated so scurvily in this affair.

"Tell him I won't mention his name again until he says he's ashamed of treating me in this style.

"I have made over half my share of the Swan Hall property to him. I don't know a little fellow worthier of good luck than Phil, and if he should remain crippled, he will need all the cash he can get to make life endurable.

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"You and Madge will do the best you can to make him happy, I know that; but I'm going away sad at the reflection that while Madge married you at two hours' notice in order to rush off and nurse his highness, I have been ignored, set aside, snubbed and sat upon. 'Don't come; Phil won't see you,' writes Madge in her last. Well, I won't, having a little spirit left; but tell my little Phil his place in my heart is as well aired as ever, and that his past is less than nothing to me, whatever it may have been. I am certain he was more sinned against than sinning. Be sure and tell him that!"

And so generous Pedro went his sunny way, to wander in the New World, and Phil's eyes grew greyer, larger, deeper, as they followed him in spirit from place to place.

* * * * *

"Hullo, Tim, Hullo!"

"'Tain't never! Well, this is good. So you're back, Pedro Dudley! Well, this *is* good."

"Yes, I'm back, Tim. I'm bound for Swan Hall to-night. Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne are there; but they don't expect me till next week. How are all at Swanville?"

"All well," said Tim concisely; he was Pedro's foster-brother. "Want a ride on the engine, like old times, I s'pose. It's a nasty night, though, Pedro."

"Oh, it's all right. I've come back as tough as ever. So here we are, homeward bound."

"It'll be a terrible ride! We're overdue an hour, and the mail is tearing after us—best go as an ordinary passenger, Pedro. Well, if you won't, you won't; so jump on. I fancy she'll do sixty miles in the next hour. We've got a clear track ahead—Heaven be praised for it."

Pedro's quick blood boiled with excitement as the train thundered through the windy moonlight of the December night.

The engine fairly leapt along the track, and the noise was indescribable as its iron pulses beat, and its giant breast hurled itself against the wind.

Tim stood to his work silently, a little grim as he felt the monster bounding under him, but enjoying the danger he was able to control, and Pedro smoked and stared ahead through the glass of the "cab," and pictured Madge's joyous welcome, Tom's hearty handclasp, and Phil's shamefaced delight—poor little Phil, dear little Phil, who had felt his disgrace so keenly that he would not even write a line to him during the two long years of absence.

Pedro smiled at these pleasant visions of home, sweet home.

On one side rose fields white and ghastly in the moonlight; on the other, a wood, black and bare, the boughs clattering in the fierce gusts.

"Down grade!" roared Tim. "We're waltzin', that we are!"

The next moment they thundered round a curve.

The fierce shriek of the engine gave its alarm, and "Down brakes!" rang out, while the burnished giant fairly bounded, maddened by an attempt to control its headlong rush.

Ten seconds—a minute, two—of Titanic struggle between man and machinery, and the engine quivered into stillness, conquered, and lamenting its defeat with wild outcries from its brazen throat.

"So the darned old bridge is bust," said Tim, in an easy, conversational tone. "I say, Mr. Pedro, look ahead!"

Pedro *was* looking ahead, and so were the other six hundred passengers who had so nearly continued their journey by another route and to another destination.

There was a moment's dead silence in the crowd, which had flocked from the train, and then a vocal thunder beat the air into quick pulses, as cheer after cheer burst from six hundred throats.

The bridge had been swept out of existence, except one gaunt beam projecting from the opposite bank to about the middle of the stream.

On the extreme end of this timber, which shuddered as the water bellowed against it, stood a slight figure in mists of white drapery, which almost seemed a part of the flying foam nearly shrouding the airy form.

She held aloft a carriage-lamp, and its light smote actual flames from her neck and arms as it struck on the jewels binding them.

Her position was one of terrible danger; and on the bank behind was visible a brougham, its driver wringing his hands in terror as he strode up and down, watching her.

There was a sudden blank of silence. She had saved them! Would she perish in the teeth of that hungry torrent?

No. She retraced her steps in safety, and, just as her foot touched the earth, the beam parted, rose erect in the whirlpool, plunged and vanished.

She sprang into the brougham, and while renewed cheers followed her, the carriage dashed away, and the heroine who had saved six hundred disappeared.

* * * * *

"And now for Phil," said Pedro, an hour later, when he had related his adventures to Madge and Tom, and sung songs to the heroine of the bridge.

Madge looked at some distant satin and lace curtains over a bay-window.

"Phil is there—ran and hid when you came striding in so unexpectedly."

"Little donkey!" said Pedro, in high good humour.

"Phil, you rascal, come out; or must I pull you?" he said.

He put in a large, strong hand, groped for masculine broadcloth, and drew back with a very scared face, his fingers full of wet tulle, and in the wet tulle a slim, tall, crocus-haired young beauty, with a white, quivering face, and solemn violet eyes, who plucked herself from his limp grasp, and rushed into Madge's comfortable and beauteous arms.

"Tom," said Mrs. Burgoyne severely, "it is really enough for Phil to have lost her Christmas Eve party at the Blessington's, where she was going when she saw the disaster to the bridge, and to come home drenched to the skin without *your* heartless grins, Pedro. This is the heroine of the bridge, also Philla Dudley, twin-sister of the real Phil, who died three years ago in Spain. This is Philla, whom her father forced by threatening his life and his own to personate the dead boy.

"She put off telling you this, she was dreadfully ashamed of what was really no crime of hers, and made no promise to remain silent until you would come home. Phil Dudley is supposed to have died in London, and no one is mystified by our loving his twin-sister, who is supposed to have been at school in Spain, very, very dearly. Phil and Philla were never parted until he died, and all Phil knew, Philla, the little wild thing, was taught, from smoking mild cigarettes to playing billiards."

* * * * *

"But you *said* you loved me—Tom told me *that*," said Pedro, the very next evening, while Madge sang Christmas carols to her harp, and Tom discreetly turned over her music, ignoring the pair in the distant bay.

"That—that was when I was a—boy, and I thought I was killed and it couldn't matter," protested Philla; "and it was very unkind of Tom to tell you, when he knew I was going to live—very unkind."

But the silent eloquence of the tiny pearl ring in Pedro's brown palm, the peculiar, steady, ardent flame in his brown eyes as he looked at her in the moonlight, broke down her little bit of defence.

She shook her delicate, stately head shyly.

"Couldn't you wait, and ask me again next year, if you *really* continue to—to feel this way?" she asked tentatively. "I am afraid you may grow sorry—it's too sudden. Ask me next Christmas Day, Pedro."

This, of course, was surrender, and the next minute she was crying softly in his arms.

"Poor papa!" she said, "I hope he knows that his crime has not darkened my life. Pedro, it was not my fault, it was not. It nearly killed me, indeed it did."

"My precious Philla!" said Pedro, "I'm quite willing to hope, however faintly, that your admirable father is tolerably comfortably situated in the Elysian Fields, for, but for his rascality I never should have met my dear little Phil, nor won My Christmas Love!"

Isabella Crawford.

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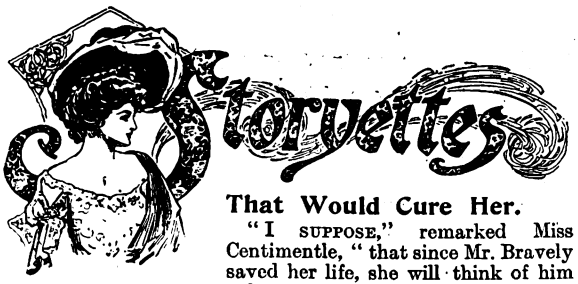

That Would Cure Her.

"I SUPPOSE," remarked Miss Centimentle, "that since Mr. Bravely saved her life, she will think of him as her hero all the rest of her life?" "Oh, no," replied Mr. Practical, "she married him last week."

A Monotonous Pastime.

"Do you care for fairy stories, Angeline?" "No, Beatrice, no. I've been engaged six times."

Rather Unkind.

"WHAT do you think of Charlie's proposing to me when he hasn't known me a week?" "I think that's the reason."

A Statement of Fact.

MRS. PECKEM: "I wonder if a man ever does get too old to marry." Peckem: "Of course not. Age doesn't always bring wisdom."

The Utterly Unutterable.

HE: "I love you, darling, more than words can utter." She: "Utter them just the same, Harry. I like to hear as much as I can."

A Good Squeezer.

MILDRED: "I believe Jack Scribley is a member of the Press Club." Millicent: "He must be, to judge by his actions with Mabel in the conservatory last evening."

She was not Giving Herself Away.

NOPURSE: "I proposed to Miss Manymillions on Christmas Eve." Gotbills: "Shall I congratulate you?" Nopurse: "I don't know. She told me she wasn't Santa Claus; and that's all she said."

Very Nasty.

"I HAVE such an indulgent husband," said little Mrs. Doll. "Yes, so George says," responded Mrs. Spiteful, quietly. "Sometimes he indulges too much, doesn't he?" They no longer speak to each other.

Can't Get at It.

ANNIE: "It's a dreadfully cold day, Claude, so you must put on your big coat. I suppose it is hanging where you put it last week?" Claude: "Yes, dear, it is all right and safe; but I have lost the ticket, so I can't get it."

He Was Disappointed.

SHE laid her cheek on the easy chair against his head, and murmured, "How I do love to rest my head against your head, Augustus!" "Do you?" said he. "Is it because you love me?" "No, because it is so nice and soft."

Did She Get Her Johnet?

MRS. PHOXY: "I was helping Mrs. de Style to put her winter things away to-day. Oh, she has the loveliest seal johnet possible." Mr. Phoxy: "What? What do you mean by 'johnet,'?" Mrs. Phoxy: "Of course, how silly of me; but then, dear, I'm not familiar enough with one myself to call it a 'jacket.'"

The Little Games they Play.

YOUNG WIFE: "What are you going to give your husband for a Christmas present?" Old Matron: "A hundred cigars." Young Wife: "And may I ask what you paid for them?" Old Matron: "Oh, nothing! For the last few months I've taken one or two out of Henry's box every day. He hasn't noticed it, and he'll be so pleased with my little present and the fine quality of the cigars."

A Natural Question.

MRS. FOWLER: "How do you like my new hat?" Mr. Fowler: "What did it cost?"

Very Likely the Case.

SHE: "Did you say anything to papa about your being too young?" He: "Yes, but he said when I once began to pay your bills I should age rapidly enough."

Where the Rub Comes In.

ETHEL: "I think I'd get married, too, if I could find a man I could live with." Carrie: "That isn't so hard, the trouble is to get a man you can't live without."

They're Awfully Good—Really!

BELLE: "Would you allow a man to kiss you?" Maude: "Um—well, I think it is our duty to—er—make allowances for the weakness of mankind, you know."

The Way Women Have.

"I WONDER why a woman never gives her husband the kind of Christmas present he wants?" "Because she doesn't try to! She gives him the present he ought to want."

And then She Kissed Him.

WIFE: "Oh, John, I was shopping at Joblotz's to-day, and I saw the sweetest thing there." Husband: (diplomatically): "Yes, that's a great scheme of Joblotz's to have mirrors all over his shop."

It would be Costly.

ETHEL: "I—er—suppose you know next week is Christmas—don't you, Charley?" Charley: "Why, of course I do! Why do you ask?" Ethel: "Why, you look so happy I thought you'd forgotten it!"

An Ambiguous Compliment.

MAUD: "I wish I knew whether I ought to feel grateful to Mr. Gaboy or to be angry at him." Irene: "Why?" Maud: "He told me yesterday he didn't know which he most admired—my sparkling eye or my blooming cheek."

Mr. Jones was a Bit of a Flirt.

BLANCHE: "Did you make any conquests this summer?" Lilian: "Oh, yes, Mr. Jones proposed the day before we came away." Blanche: "Doesn't he pop the question in the most awkward manner imaginable?" They meet now as strangers.

Mistletoe not Necessary.

DORIS: "Did you have a mistletoe bough in your house?" Phyllis: "No, I had one ready, but I forgot to put it up." Doris: "Of all things! Forgot it?" Phyllis: "Yes, you see Tom and I somehow or other became engaged the day before."

Would She Marry Him?

"I'VE thought of a capital *nom de plume*," said Henry, who sometimes writes for the newspapers. "What is it?" asked Henrietta. "'Will U. Marrimee.'" "Why, of course I will, you goose!" she answered. "Is that what you have been trying to say so long?"

How He Did It.

OLD GENTLEMAN (to a very rich old lady at a party): "Who is that handsome young man standing over there?" Old Lady: "That's my son-in-law. He's a very brilliant young man—made a large fortune by the law." Old Gentleman: "Indeed! How's that?" Old Lady: "The law made him my daughter's husband."

An Encouraging Sign.

"I'LL tell you a great secret, but you must promise not to give it away." "Of course not." "I believe Miss Birdie M'Ginnis is gone on me. I've almost made up my mind to pop the question." "What did she say to you?" "She didn't say anything to me precisely, but on Tuesday she patted my dog on the head. Isn't that an encouraging sign?" "Yes, that's the next thing to patting you on the head. Your turn will come next."

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ROBINSON'S CHRISTMAS DINNER.

A Tale of a Wager.

"NONSENSE!" cried Jones. "If you made your face into a regular hedge-row of whiskers, I should recognise your voice at the first word you spoke It is only natural when I've known you so long."

"I don't think so," replied Robinson; "but, look here, to-day is the 21st. I'll come to eat my Christmas dinner in your dining-room on the 25th and you won't know me; I'll bet you a new hat you don't recognise me."

"Right! By the bye, we dine at 7.30 on Christmas Day."

"I don't promise to be there exactly at that time," said Robinson, "but somewhere between seven and ten o'clock."

* * * * *

Punctually at half-past seven, an assorted lot of Joneses—pa, ma, and six others—sat down to a good old English dinner of roast turkey and sausages, to be followed by wedges of plum pudding and mince pies *ad indigestib.* For five minutes pa Jones slashed and prodded the poor bird, thrust him in several places, and at last left him without "a wing to stand on or a leg to fly with," as the pathetic Irishman said.

Just as he was nearing the end of his task and his patience, there came a brisk rat-tat at the front door. A grim look appeared in the carver's eye as he absent-mindedly dropped a wing of the turkey into the potato dish.

"The Doctor and a gentlemen to see you, sir," said the cook—the housemaid, by the bye, was away on special leave.

"Ask 'em in here," said Jones cheerfully, and in they came accordingly. The Doctor was an intimate friend of the family. As for the other man, whom he introduced as his brother, just arrived from the Colonies, nobody required an introduction. Even the youngest Jones present—he wore a "pinny" over his clothes, so you can guess how young he was,—recognised him at once. Robinson was a clean-shaven man, as are most amateur actors, and the stranger's face was covered with whiskers, overdone, in fact. And then his gruff voice and shy manner—oh, it was too evident.

"I went to Liverpool this morning to meet my brother," said the Doctor, "and when we got home again an hour ago, I found the housekeeper had disappeared, leaving a note to say——"

"Bunkum!" murmured Jones.

The Doctor stared hard but thought his ears must have deceived him.

"To say she had been called away to London soon after my departure—her sister dangerously ill——"

"Awfully sorry," said Jones, trying in vain to chase a broad grin from his face.

"And knowing your kindness," continued the Doctor, "I have ventured to trespass on your hospitality for my brother and myself."

"You want some di-di-dinner?" gasped Jones, whose face was all red and purple like a fine sunset.

"That was my desire," said the Doctor wonderingly, and the next moment he received a tremendous dig in the ribs.

"It's no go," cried Jones with a wild explosion of laughter; "you really mustn't come with a tale like that."

"Sir!"

"I say, it's no go, Doctor. Fancy thinking you could take me in with such a barefaced invention."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Oh, *you're* all right, Doctor——"

"I wish I could say as much for you."

"You're heartily welcome. But I really cannot entertain your—ha! ha! your brother! Good evening, old man, don't wait," and then he suddenly sprang forward and gave a sharp wrench at the stranger's whiskers.

The next moment Jones was lying on his back in order to observe a wonderful constellation of stars that had suddenly appeared on the ceiling. His wife rushed to his assistance, and then with rare presence of mind fainted away at once. As for the little Joneses, they felt indeed that life had its glorious moments and began to clamber from their chairs preparatory to a general scrimmage. But the Doctor dragged his brother from the room and out of the house, and the little warriors trooped back into the dining-room.

"Was that Mr. Robinson, pa?" said one of the boys.

"Silence!" roared pa. "I will not have my friends discussed by you children."

"Will you carve some turkey for Jane, my dear," said his wife meekly.

The manner in which these quiet little women turn the current of a man's wrath is wonderful. Mr. Jones grabbed his carving utensils and made a frightful onslaught, seized the poor bird in several places at once and flung it violently head over heels, and then slashed and banged and battered it until the eyes of the children positively bulged with admiration.

"Now, then," he said at last, panting but happy, "if you will add the vegetables, my dear, Willie can take the plate to Jane. She is alone to-day, eh?"

"Yes, Sarah was sent for——"

"But she ain't alone, pa," murmured a twelve-year-old sentimentally; "she has her policeman there."

"*What!*" roared Jones.

"And he does love Jane, pa. He comes to supper reg'lar."

"And has she her—her usual policeman to-day?"

"No, pa. He had to go on duty in another district when he didn't expect, and he's sent a friend—another policeman."

"What sort of a man is the friend?"

"He's very tall and he's thin like Rob——"

"Eh?"

"Like Robinson Crusoe in my picture-book. And he's got lovely sideboard whiskers and a beard."

Pa Jones rose thoughtfully from his chair. "Our constables represent the laws of England," he said thoughtfully, "and I don't see why the laws of England should dine in the kitchen. I will take Jane's dinner to her and if the man is presentable, I'll ask him to join our own circle."

He hastily pencilled a few lines on a sheet of paper and, having folded it in triangular shape, propped it up on the mantelpiece.

Then he departed for the kitchen with the fire of ambition seething once more beneath his manly waistcoat. When he presently returned with the Laws of England, seven pairs of eyes threw themselves bodily upon the poor policeman, causing him to blush painfully.

"Will you serve our good friend with a little dinner, my dear," said Jones affably, leading him to a chair. "By the bye, Willie," he added, pointing to the triangular note, "if he doesn't come before ten o'clock, take this note to Mr. Robinson's house."

The policeman's helmet dropped from his nerveless hand. He stared sheepishly at his host, opened his mouth as though

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to speak, and then pulled himself stubbornly together and sat down to dinner.

"You haven't quite such a large family as this," said Jones genially.

"No, sir, I ain't married."

"What a remarkably hoarse voice you have, constable."

"Yessir, wants oiling."

"Boys, be quiet," shouted Jones, "I can scarcely hear myself speak."

"It's the pleeceman's helmet, pa."

"It'll take no harm, sir, don't mind."

"They're playing football with it, pa, under the table——"

"Noisy boys, but very smart at times," said Pa Jones presently. "In fact, that's my motto with boys. If they're not smart, make 'em smart—ha! ha!"

"P'raps the smartness is heredary, sir," said the policeman.

"Hereditary—h'm—did you ever throw a red herring across the road, constable?"

"No, sir, can't afford to play with wittles."

"Ha, ha, very good—by the bye, let me ask you a little riddle I heard the other day. Some mince pie? You know what a riddle is, of course?"

"Yessir, a sieve."

"No, no, I mean a conundrum."

"Oh, you mean whensadoornotadoor?"

"Exactly. Well, if a man robbed his father, what would you call him?"

"Shouldn't call him nothing, sir. The judge is paid to do that."

"But what surname would suit him best? Have a glass of wine? Allow me. What name would suit him best?"

"Dunno, sir."

"Well, I should recommend—*Robbin'son!*" Pa Jones literally bellowed the last word, thrusting his face suddenly towards that of the policeman, who drew back in alarm.

"You seem nervous, constable."

"Yessir, thought you wos a-going to bite me."

"But what do you think of the name I suggested?"

"Didn't hear it, sir"

"I suggested that a man who robbed his father should be called—*Robbin'son!*"

The policeman shrunk visibly when he heard the word, and then straightened himself with a homely dignity, in which, however, Pa Jones saw nothing but "red herrings."

"I dunno whether you've some game on, sir, 'cos you keep a-mentioning of Robinson at hevery moment, but, if you have, sir, I don't take it kind of you. O' course, you've a right to report me to the inspector for eating here when I'm supposed to be on duty outside."

"I'm not going to report you."

"Well, wodger keep a-mentioning of his name, sir?"

"Whose name?"

"Inspector Robinson!"

Pa Jones positively roared with laughter at this.

"Splendid!" he cried, "splendid! What a stock of red herrings you must have."

The poor policeman glowered at him in dull resentment. "Haven't got no 'errin's," he answered somewhat sulkily, "and don't want none while there's turkeys 'oppin' about."

The front door bell tinkled at this moment. They heard Jane, whose beauty, by the bye, was not of the Miss Miggs variety, amble massively along the hall and then open the street door.

"Can I see Mr. Jones, please?" said a very gruff voice.

"It's Robinson!" gasped the policeman in terror.

"Whose Robinson?"

"The Inspector! I'm done for now, sir."

Poor Pa Jones was torn by conflicting emotions. He couldn't make up his mind even yet whether the man who sat beside him was his friend in disguise. On the other hand, the man might be himself so to speak, and might have been bribed by the real Robinson to pretend to recognise the last-named as his Inspector. In that case the new arrival would not be himself, but somebody else, and—and—and—there was just a possibility after all that neither the policeman nor Inspector Robinson was Robinson—and——

"Well, who in thunder is he, anyhow?" yelled Jones, tearing his hair furiously.

"He's Robinson, sir."

Next moment the door was opened, and Jane ushered the new-comer into the room. At the noise made by the turning of the handle the policeman groaned feebly and then in a twinkling disappeared from sight beneath the table. The children forsook the helmet to stare open-mouthed at these developments.

"Good evening, sir."

"Good evening," said Jones absent-mindedly. "You're rather taller, I think, and not so good-looking."

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Oh, excuse me," said Jones dreamily, as he stared fixedly at the length of his visitor's legs and the breadth of his shoulders. If Jones' mind was full of red herrings, it is only fair to admit that the Inspector unconsciously found a counter-thought in the subject of straight-waistcoats.

They stared at one another with a strange intensity, whilst the poor policeman, lifting a corner of the tablecloth, stared at them both.

"Much taller and better built," murmured Jones thoughtfully.

"I've knowed all sorts and shapeses go that way," said the Inspector in a stage whisper.

"More whiskers," murmured Jones.

"But less patience," growled the Inspector, raising his voice a little.

"I've got so mixed up," said Jones pathetically.

"So I should imagine, sir."

"That I've almost forgotten what Robinson is like."

This was too much for the Inspector. He seized Pa Jones by the arm and shook him vigorously, in real or pretended indignation. "Wake up, sir, wake up," he cried. "*I'm* Robinson!'

"Yes, yes, I daresay you are," murmured poor Jones sadly. "They're all Robinsons to-night somehow."

"You've had one of my men to dinner with your cook," said the Inspector gruffly, "and you've taken him off his beat to provide him with the said dinner. It's agin the law to move the property of the Crown without permission——"

"Give him some turkey or he'll report me." These words floated in an agonised whisper from beneath the table. The Inspector stopped suddenly and began to mop his face with a young tablecloth. He had heard the whisper without distinguishing the words, and felt nervous.

"I've stood too near him," he murmured; "it must be catching."

"One of your men, do you say, Inspector? Had dinner here?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm!—of course—er—is his name Robinson?"

"Give him some turkey," murmured the policeman again.

"Will you have some dinner?" said Jones miserably; "I don't know whether you're Robinson or not—and I don't care so much either. You're welcome to the victory——"

The Inspector, after accepting the invitation to dinner, listened to the rest of Pa Jones' speech in growing amazement. He was still more surprised when a long, blue-clad figure, whom he recognised at once as the very policeman he had mislaid, rose stealthily behind Pa Jones and presently threw an arm round the poor man's neck and then lifted him bodily from the ground.

The next moment poor pa was lying upon the hearthrug for the second time that evening, with a hard, bony knee to hold him down.

"Off his nut," said the policeman laconically. "He's been going wuss all the evening." Before any one could move to the rescue, there was a tap at the door and Jane entered with a telegram.

Mrs. Jones read it aloud to the assembled company:

"*Sorry cannot keep appointment to-night. Bet postponed.*—Robinson."

Wal Frank.

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RUNNING RIDDLES COMPETITION.

On this page you will find eight riddles; each riddle is described in the picture.

What you have to do is to find the answers to these riddles. Then write them on a piece of paper, using one side only, and send them in to me.

Address your envelopes The Competition Editor, SHORT STORIES, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., with "Running Riddles" plainly marked in the top, left-hand corner. All letters must reach this office by **Thursday, December 31st.** No attempts arriving after this date will be considered.

This page, signed in the allotted place, must accompany each list.

You can send in as many lists as you like, *but each list* must be accompanied by a separate page.

£2 will be awarded to the person who sends in what I considor to be the best list of answers to the riddles, and to each of the senders of what I consider to be the next best five attempts, I will award a splendid hand-camera, with complete photographic outfit. The Editor's decision will be final, and no correspondence can be entered into on the subject.

Name .....

Address .....

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A Sad Story of a Mother's Grief.

GREAT masses of roses covered the wall and grew in rank profusion along the roadside, and, when I left the pony-cart and climbed the bank, I could see that the yard was filled with them and the little cottage facing the sea almost hidden with their wealth of colour.

Thinking that the owner would not object to my gathering a small bunch from such an abundance I was proceeding to do so, when, from behind a bush, a little old lady appeared, her refined face delicately pink from her exertions, looking as sweet as one of the roses among which she was working.

"Please don't pick them," she said, coming forward a few steps. "Don't think I'm selfish, but they're Dedie's, and I can't let anyone else have them," and with implicit faith in my obedience to her request, she returned to her work.

For a few minutes I stood and watched her deftly loosening the earth around the roots of a young rose-bush, and then, with the guilt of a child discovered in some wrong-doing, I laid the few roses I had plucked upon the wall, and going back to the cart drove to my friend's house, where I was visiting.

A few days later, while we were passing the garden with its rose-covered wall, the sweet old lady appeared from among the bushes, her arms full of cut roses, which she pressed against her breast.

To my friend's greeting she replied with a pleased light of recognition in her eyes.

"Who is she?" I asked, when we had passed out of hearing; and I told the episode of yesterday.

My friend did not answer for a few moments.

"Hers is a sad story. Years ago she came here, a bride, to spend her honeymoon in the little cottage, which belonged to her husband. They were wealthy, and the weeks slipped by until the autumn, when they returned to their city home; but she loved the place so that every summer they returned here to spend a few weeks in the country, within sight of the sea. And here, one July morning, when the roses she had trained over her windows were hanging heavy with dew, a little girl came to bless the household. The husband, going to the open window, plucked a great spray of roses, and, placing them on a stand by the bedside, said, 'This shall be her lucky flower.' And he kissed the baby and the young mother. They named the child Edith, but she always called herself 'Dedie.'

"When the lady appeared among us the second summer after, she was accompanied only by her baby; and instead of the beautiful gowns that had been her husband's delight, she wore a widow's dress, and her dear face was haggard with grief.

"The child had grown into a little lisping tot, who followed her mother about the house and garden, which was the widow's great solace, and where she spent most of her time, only going each day to the high cliff, from which she and her husband used to watch the sun set across the ocean, and the beach where they had walked in the moonlight, two married lovers.

"The flowers that had graced the baby's entry into the world seemed to have possessed some occult charm, for never was anyone more fond of roses than this child. She always carried a bouquet in her chubby hand, or wore a spray pinned on to her little pinafore, and if, by chance, she dropped one, she always stopped to pick it up.

"She was a strange child, too, with little unchildlike notions and fancies that oppressed one with a feeling of eeriness. The ocean fascinated her, and ofttimes at night, when it roared upon the rocky headland, she would awaken her mother and say, 'Mamma, why does the sea want me? Why does it keep calling to me?' Or she would sit for hours on the sand, laughing and talking to the little waves and ripples that ran up the beach.

"One evening her mother tied a little hood over the curls, and together they went down to the headland, as was their custom, the child carrying a big spray of flowers; a strong wind was blowing out to sea, and the mother shielded the child in front of her. They had stood thus for some minutes, when the roses slipped from the child's hands, and the wind caught and blew them towards the edge of the cliff. She darted forward to save them, and was stooping at the very edge to pick them up, when there came a sudden blast, she tottered on the brink for a moment, and then, grasping the spray of roses in her little hands, pitched forward into the sea.

"Her mother never returned to her city home. Winter and summer she has roses blooming in the cottage or garden, and every evening she goes to the cliff with an offering of flowers for 'Dedie's grave,' as she calls the ocean."

As we returned home that evening, my friend pointed out towards the sea. On a high point overlooking the water a lone figure was outlined against the setting sun. As we looked, she raised her arms and threw a great cluster of roses out into the water, and then sank upon her knees and with clasped hands watched them float out into the pathway of the sun.

So large a grave; so small a child. **George Barnes.**

Are You Generous? Are You Clever?
Are You Mean? Are You Dull?

Whatever you are it is as well to know other things concerning yourself, so send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will reach you in return—this will give you the required information.

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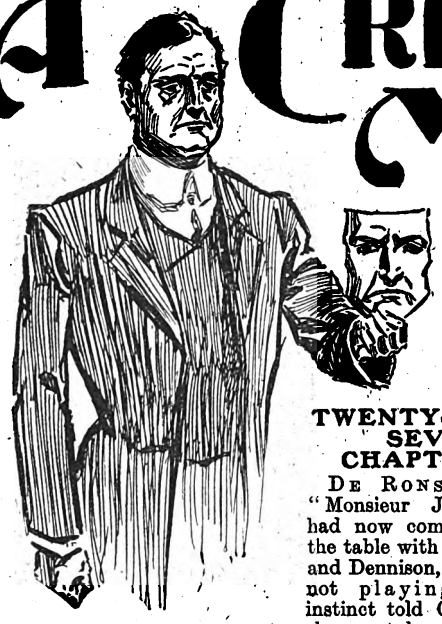
POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE



By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

De Ronski and "Monsieur Justin" had now come up to the table with the ladies and Dennison, who was not playing. Her instinct told Cora that she must have almost run her luck out. She was perfectly cool, and during the whole game no one had seen the flutter of an eyelid. It would have been difficult to know whether her father or her lover, each in his own way, admired her splendid nerve the more.

She began to experiment. A louis on red-black-red. Lost. Another on black-red-black. Also lost.

"That will do, Duke," she said, pushing the heap of notes and gold towards him. "I don't know how much I've won for you, but I can't play any more. The fire's gone out. You should never play when you find that sort of feeling coming across you."

"Ah, what a player you are!" he said with a look of frank adoration. "With your *sang froid* and daring you would go far with the bank, and you have learnt the best of all lessons—when to stop. I owe you a thousand thanks, Miss Cora."

He put the gold into his hip-pocket and rolled up the thick sheaf of notes. As they rose Kesteven leant over Darfield's shoulder and said in a low, angry tone:

"I reckon if I were you, I'd quit too. Just come out here. I want a word with you."

Darfield got up, his face pale and his eyes still burning with the frenzy of play. He was not affected by the loss of the money. He could replace that for the asking. It was only the fact of losing, of being beaten in a fight with Fortune, and watching a young girl apparently sway the fickle balance as she liked with every turn of her hand.

He followed Kesteven into the Gardens, whither, after they had received the congratulations of the others, Cora and the Grand Duke followed very shortly. Meanwhile, M. Justin excused himself and went away towards the offices of the Administration.

When the party assembled for supper at Ciro's, Mercedes looked hard at Cora for a moment and smiled. There was no mistaking the answering smile, and so she went beside her and murmured very softly:

"May I congratulate your Highness?"

She nodded and raised the back of her left hand for an instant. One of her rings, set with a single pearl, was gone, and in its place flashed and glowed a half-circlet of diamonds and rubies. Mercedes' right hand closed over it, and a gentle pressure told how happy she was in her friend's happiness.

When they got back to Nice they separated at the station.

Kesteven, the Grand Duke, and Darfield went with the two girls and Janet on board the yacht, where, late as it was, his Highness had a brief but entirely satisfactory conversation with Kesteven, and then, after a yet briefer but still more satisfactory interview with Cora, almost on the same spot on which Mercedes had given herself to her vanished lover, he went ashore to the Cercle, and finished the night at baccarat.

As he told her the next day, there must have been some magic in the money she had won for him, for, plunge as he would, it did not seem possible for him to lose, and when he strolled back to his house, puffing contentedly at a big cigar and glorying in the splendour of the sunrise, he left behind him a score or so of exasperated, and, in some cases, despairing, gamblers the poorer by nearly half a million francs.

Dennison and Justin accompanied the de Ronskis to Cimiez, for the night's work was not quite over for them yet.

The ladies retired as soon as they reached the hotel, and then the three men sat down to business.

"I think," said Mr. Smith, speaking in de Ronski's French for the benefit of his colleague, as he lit a cigar, "that the chain of evidence is now fairly complete. This Mr. Darfield, otherwise Culworth, will be invaluable, provided only that his wife is correct as to his courage and good faith."

"I think we can feel pretty safe as to that if she is prepared to answer for him," said Dennison, "she has enough strength of character herself for a couple of men."

"If my experience of men and women has taught me anything I am fully agreed with you," assented M. Justin. "And now, my friend," he continued, "now that we have got so far, perhaps a little revision would not be out of place. I should be glad to hear you recapitulate the points on which we have to rely."

"That would be useful," said Dennison, "we can't understand each other too completely."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Smith, getting up and standing with his back to the door. "To begin with, we have the fact that Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton did not fall overboard from the *Isola*. He simply disappeared somewhere into the interior of the yacht, and there we lose sight of him.

"Even Billaud cannot tell us whether he is alive or dead, and it remains to be seen whether Mr. Darfield, as we may call him for the present, can and will throw any more light on the subject. This much, however, is perfectly plain. He cannot have disappeared save by Staunton's orders, and Staunton would not have got rid of him without some very strong reason indeed.

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"In that reason, probably, lies the clue to the whole mystery.

"As we know Staunton to be a criminal not only of the most desperate type, but also of amazing resource and ability, and, moreover, with the most enormous interests at stake, it is necessary for us to face the conclusion, that, if he had reason to believe young Ellerton's existence dangerous to his own safety and that of his schemes, he would not hesitate for a moment to take his life.

"On the other hand, he may only have safely disposed of him until he has realised this dream of a South American Republic, and raised himself above the reach of the law.

"Now, I think you gentlemen will agree with me that this mysterious trip made by the yacht to the shores of Iceland, when she was ostensibly travelling from Leith to the Riviera, lends some colour to the latter supposition. He would hardly have sent the boat so very far out of her way merely to drop him overboard. He could have done that anywhere."

"To my mind," said Dennison, "that is the strangest part of the whole mysterious business. What did the yacht go there for? It can hardly have been to maroon poor Ellerton on one of those little islands up there. Staunton wouldn't have been such a fool as to run the risk of his being picked up by the first fishing boat that happened to pass. And yet she simply cannot have gone there for nothing. The thing's incredible."

"On the other hand," interposed Monsieur Justin, "since we have now assured ourselves that those counterfeit notes, of which Mr. Darfield passed no fewer than fifteen at the Casino to-night, have been imported by the yacht, may not this strange and secret visit to Iceland have some connection with the hidden manufactory of notes and coin for which the police of the world have been hunting in vain for the last five years?"

"It is possible," said Mr. Smith, "though scarcely probable. In that case we should have to look for Mr. Staunton's private mint somewhere among the volcanic caverns of Hekla. For my part I should be more inclined to seek them in some lonely gorge of the Andes. There are too many people in Iceland, and, besides, there are tourists.

"But to continue. Three days ago Staunton entertained a party of gentlemen at lunch on board the *Isola*. They were supposed to be his financial associates in those great operations in which we know he is the controlling power. So they are, but we know that they are something more. We know their histories, and everyone of them is intimately connected with South American politics. In other words, they are Staunton's political agents, and doubtless also channels through which his manufactured coin and notes get into circulation.

"Staunton went to Mentone this morning. One of our agents went with him. Three of these gentlemen met him there, and with them was a Signor Riccola, whose other name is Andrea Guardino, the head-centre of the Mafia in Southern Italy. What has Mr. Isolo Staunton, the millionaire financier, the friend and helper of statesmen and princes, to do with the Mafia?"

"That," said Dennison drily, "somehow seems to take one's mind back to the London murders. I hope our friend doesn't consider any of our party here inconvenient or superfluous. But surely he can hardly suspect anything queer about us."

"No one can tell with a man like that," said M. Justin gravely. "We have our spies, but depend upon it he has his watching them, and if he does suspect—well, after what our friend has told us, the atmosphere of Nice may soon get rather unhealthy. I should not wonder if there happened a murder or two in the Casino Gardens before long if that is the case.

"But, my dear de Ronski," he went on, suddenly changing his tone, "is not the chief question now what is to be done? Now that we know as much as we do and that we are sure of three good witnesses, I for my part am for immediate action. The French law will permit us to arrest him the moment he sets foot in Nice. Meanwhile, if we secure Billaud and Darfield and put them in safety, they will make statements on oath which will justify us in putting an embargo on the yacht, after which we can search her—and then who knows what we may find? What do you say?"

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you," replied Mr. Smith after a moment's thought. "In the first place, it is too much to do on the evidence we have got. You cannot arrest a man like Staunton as you would an ordinary swindler or thief. He is too big a fish for that net, and if he broke it away goes all our work and a good deal of reputation with it. In the second place some of us would probably die suddenly before the trial, if we got him as far as that, and that would be a waste of useful life.

"Thirdly, you will pardon me if I say that it would be the worst policy to lay Staunton by the heels until we have tracked him or some of his associates to this mysterious money-manufactory of his. If we did someone else would carry on the business just the same, only with greater precautions.

"Fourthly, such a course would destroy all hope of clearing up the fate of Wilfrid Ellerton, which something seems to tell me will somehow prove to be the key to the whole puzzle.

"Fifthly, we must not spoil the prospects of the concert. No, I am quite serious. As I will explain to you later, I hope for other than social and artistic results from that same function. Let us at least wait until that is over till we come to any decision."

"Oh, as to that, most certainly," assented the other, "there can be no harm in waiting that short time, and, besides, now that you have given your reasons, I am inclined to agree with you that caution is the best policy."

"And I am distinctly of the same opinion," added Dennison. "At any rate, for all the ladies' sakes, don't let us spoil the concert. Some of them will have trouble after that, and to spare."

It so chanced that just as this decision was come to, Staunton was saying to Don Ramiero, after a nearly all-night discussion in his room at the Hotel Colline St. Michel at Mentone:

"Very well. It is a desperate step to take, but if it really proves necessary, after the concert will be the time."

There was another man in the room with them. He was the servant who had ushered de Ronski and Dennison into the presence of "Monsieur Justin."

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
On the Yacht Again.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Lady Medcalf-Mears threw herself with all her zeal and energy into the congenial task of helping Mercedes to make the concert on board the *Isola* the great social event of the season. The original idea had expanded somewhat with consideration, and as it was unlikely that the yacht could get back to her anchorage before morning, it was decided to "make a night of it."

Hence all the guests were to be requested to bring a change of clothing with them, as they would sleep and breakfast on board, and return to Nice in time for lunch.

When the de Ronskis had definitely accepted the invitation, her Ladyship knew that the success of the function was absolutely assured. At least a hundred of the best people in the place were on her visiting list, and on the morning after Cora's triumph at the tables the three were assembled in her drawing-room engaged in the very pleasant occupation of selecting from these the most brilliant company possible—they had fixed the number of invited guests to fifty—when Mercedes received the following telegram from Mentone:

"*Keep concert party as far as possible to our own immediate circle. Not more than twenty guests, of whom I shall bring three. Spare no expense to do the thing well.*—Staunton."

"Well," exclaimed Mercedes, as she passed the telegram to Lady Medcalf-Mears, "I wonder what on earth papa means by that. We have plenty of room for fifty. What a mercy we had not sent the invitations out. What a lot of enemies we should have made."

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Yes, indeed it is," replied her ladyship with an undisguised look of disappointment on her handsome, aristocratic features. "Really, my dear, this papa of yours is rather annoying. He does not seem to see that when everyone who is anyone would almost go on their knees for a card, we shall make enemies for life of every man and woman—especially the women—whom we have to leave out, and here he vetoes thirty at one fell swoop. Really it is most difficult."

"I guess Mr. Staunton won't take much stock of that, though," laughed Cora somewhat unfeelingly, for there had already been a rumour that a favoured fifty were to be invited, and the fury of the disappointed ones had its comic side for her.

"It is, of course, a great pity from that point of view, and I quite see what you mean, Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Mercedes with a little chill in her tone. "At the same time I am quite sure that papa would not have told me to do this unless he had some very good reason for it. At any rate, no one can charge him with any lack of hospitality, so it can't be that."

"Oh, of course not, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears, who saw at once that she had expressed herself a little too freely, "no one would dream of that. He is the most hospitable and generous man in the world. You must forgive my little outburst. I didn't mean anything.

"But you know all my life I have studied entertaining as an art, and I have never had quite such an opportunity as this. A party of fifty on board that lovely great yacht of yours would have been just perfect. And I could have got *such* nice people, too. It is just the time."

"Yes, dear Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Mercedes with one of her sweetest smiles, "believe me, I can quite understand your feelings, and if papa cannot give me a very good excuse you can depend upon it that he shall have a thoroughly good scolding. And now let us decide who are to be the favoured twenty—or rather seventeen."

When Mercedes met her father at the station on the morning of the eventful Tuesday, he simply said in reply to her half-reproachful question:

"My dearest, I am sorry if I have disappointed you and the others, especially her Ladyship, as she has been so kind; but, well, in the first place, you know how I hate big parties, particularly on board the yacht, and I never really intended this to be anything more than a little treat to our immediate friends.

"It struck me afterwards that Lady Medcalf-Mears might think she had *carte blanche* and crowd the ship up as she does her own drawing-room. With ourselves there will be about twenty-five, and that, you must admit, is quite enough, especially if we are to have a little dance on deck afterwards."

Accustomed as she was to obey and trust him in everything, Mercedes at once acquiesced.

"Of course you are perfectly right, father, as you always are," she said, putting her arm through his as they left the station. "Twenty-five will make a perfect party, and we shall know them all well. I have made friends with the de Ronskis, and they are simply delightful—and Paula, she is so lovely that Cora and I are almost ashamed to look in our glasses. Oh, and Cora is engaged to the Grand Duke, and so, of course, he is to be one of the party. She won him nearly a hundred thousand francs at the Casino the other night, and he proposed 'right away,' as Cora would say. They will make a splendid couple, won't they?"

"Splendid," echoed her father somewhat absent-mindedly, for he was thinking many thoughts of far greater import to the world than even the marriage of a Grand Duke, "and from what you tell me he has shown sound financial judgment, as well as excellent taste."

Mercedes went with him on board the yacht to lunch so that she might have a final interview with Dinaud, the head steward, and to satisfy herself that everything was in order for the evening. Staunton went at once to the sanctum, where he found Don Ramiero, who had come on from the station direct, translating some code telegrams.

The Open Door.

A doctor recently received a written request for his professional services, worded thus: "My wife's mother is at death's door. Please come at once, and see if you can pull her through."

Now there are two sides to every door, as there are to every question, and it will be observed that the man with the sick mother-in-law neglected to state to which side of the door he wished the doctor to pull his suffering relative. But we will be charitable, and suppose that he desired to save the patient, though he expressed himself so awkwardly.

When Mrs. Cooper, of 17, York Road, The Hyde, Hendon, was ill about five years ago there was no question as to the anxiety of her friends to save her. Her second child was only a few weeks old, and her life was very essential to her husband and family. It was just then that she became subject to fainting fits, and betrayed great nervousness. The root of the trouble was indigestion—the complaint which only Mother Seigel's Syrup will cure.

"I was sometimes bent double with pain," said Mrs. Cooper on 24th March, 1903, "and was afraid to eat, knowing what the consequence would be. Besides, I had no appetite. Violent headaches, with floating specks before my eyes, assisted to make my life unendurable. Numbness of the hands and feet, and palpitation of the heart, were other bad signs. A doctor who attended me said mine was a case of severe indigestion and nervous debility. He appeared to understand my case, and sent me a great deal of medicine; but the only result of his attention was—*bills*. Instead of improving, I grew worse. At night I could get no proper sleep, being disturbed by dreams and in constant dread, as of some impending evil.

"It was last Christmas, when I was very ill, that my mother suggested that Seigel's Syrup might benefit me, having proved it to be a splendid thing in other cases. I accordingly tried it, and was greatly astonished at the result. Before I had quite taken one bottle, I felt better. The pain left me, and I improved rapidly. It gave me refreshing sleep, followed by an appetite for breakfast. Soon the headaches and dizziness ceased to trouble me, while my strength increased daily. It is four months since I began to take Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and now (thanks to it) I am as well as ever I was in my life."

Of late there has been much contention about the policy of the "open door;" but there can never be contention as to the value of what cured Mrs. Cooper. That was proved 35 years ago, and has been proved every day since.

A Novelist on Marriage.

Thackeray says: "To marry without a competence is dangerous, no doubt; but do not thousands of our fellow-beings commit the crime every year with no other trust but in Heaven, health, and their labour?" Alas, yes! and when (as often happens) the second of these three trusts fails, the third must fail also, and there is a social wreck. Mother Seigel's Syrup is a true friend to the poor and suffering.

Indigestion prevents a man or woman working properly. Its victims easily tire and are always drowsy. Business men cannot afford to employ them. Seigel's Syrup cures indigestion. It removes that load of oppression at the chest after eating, dispels headache, creates appetite, and brightens up the dull sufferer as nothing else will. Mrs. Mary Rogers, Fay Gate, Horsham, Sussex, writing on May 2nd, 1903, says: "I have pleasure in telling you of the benefit I derived from your Seigel's Syrup, when I was suffering from indigestion. My illness began with loss of appetite, and a general low and depressed feeling. I could not eat, and my strength failed rapidly.

"I suffered much from headaches, dizziness, and nervousness, and though I consulted doctors and took quantities of medicine, I got no better until, on the recommendation of a friend, I tried Mother Seigel's Syrup. After taking a few doses I felt myself getting better. My appetite returned, I was again able to sleep soundly, and soon lost the drowsiness, headaches, and dizziness, and was as well as ever. I think Seigel's Syrup is splendid, and shall always recommend it."

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"Ah," he said, taking one of them up from the table, "then they have replied. All of them?"

"Yes, all," was the reply, "and all say 'yes.' In a month, Señor, the new flag will go up, and we shall have the happiness of saluting you as first President of the United States of South America."

"I hope so, my friend and faithful ally," replied Staunton, flushing slightly, and speaking with a slight tremor of emotion which was not often heard in his voice. "But there is a good deal to be done, and many things may happen in that month. For my part I hold it as little less than a misfortune that our hands should be forced in this ridiculous way just when everything was going on in such perfect order. But some of them shall pay pretty dearly for their treason and their regrettable meddling with affairs which are infinitely above their conceptions."

"It will only be justice," said Don Ramiero, rubbing his hands gently together. "As you say, they have no idea of the great work with which they are interfering. But those who meddle with the machinery of Empire must not be surprised if they get crushed in the wheels. It is too soon to ask you, Señor, how you propose to dispose of—the more inconvenient? Will they become citizens of your other kingdom?"

"It would serve them right to make slaves of the lot," replied the Lord of the Underworld savagely. "As for Billaud, the lake would not be too bad for him, and I should like to make the others watch his last dive. That sham fiddler fellow, too, our old friend Mr. Smith. What an utter fool the idiots must take me for—I, who have the most perfect detective in the world, to be taken in by a childish device like that. Heavens! They shall learn something!"

"I shall be rather sorry for de Ronski, *alias* Smith," said Don Ramiero reflectively. "He has great genius, and it is a thousand pities that he ruined it by becoming also a policeman. His wife, too, is most charming—and his daughter; was there ever such a perfect union of genius and loveliness?"

"My dear Ramiero, you are getting quite romantic in your old age," said Staunton with a laugh that he would not have liked Mercedes to hear. "I'll tell you what," he went on, taking out a cigar and lighting it, "if it does become necessary to translate these good people to the Underworld, and to abolish friend Smith-de-Ronski, you shall have the reversion of the widow. As for the divine Paula, she will make a delightful diversion from those pale, soulless houris of my little paradise down yonder. How some of them will stare when they open their eyes for the first time after their drug-sleep—as I expect poor Ellerton did. I wonder how he is getting on. Well, I shall be able to pay him a visit, I suppose, before long."

"Ah, I like to see you in those rare moods," laughed Don Ramiero softly, as he rolled a little brown cigarette. "You are a great man, Señor, when you are conquering men by the might of that golden sceptre of yours, but you are most interesting when you let a little of the primeval savage be seen."

"Well, though it is necessary to keep him chained up pretty tightly, the best of us would be poor creatures without him," said Staunton, stretching out his powerful arms and clenching his fists. "But now, my friend," he continued in a changed voice, "let us leave these pleasant themes until we are able to turn them into still more pleasant practice, and get to business. We have a good deal to do before our guests arrive. I think you will find the Señores in the smoking-room. Oblige me by going and telling them that I am ready for them."

Don Ramiero opened the doors and presently returned with the delegates from Chili, Brazil, and the Argentine.

"Now, Señores," said Staunton, when Don Ramiero had closed the doors, "I think you will agree with me that, since we have been compelled to advance our plans so suddenly, there is much to be done and no time to lose, since everything must be in order before we start to-night. Do me the favour of making yourselves comfortable, and then we will get to work."

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.
The Dinner Party.

"Good heavens, how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears as she reached the gangway platform of the *Isola* a few minutes after seven, the hour for which the guests had been invited. "You naughty girl," she continued, as she shook hands with Mercedes, who, robed and adorned in the very perfection of costly simplicity, was receiving her guests, "then this is why you wouldn't let me come and help you with the final arrangements? Well, if you wanted to give me a surprise, you have done it. I never saw anything so exquisite in my life. You might have had the fairies working for you."

Her ladyship's praises were certainly well merited. The whole stretch of the broad promenade deck from the navigating bridge to the stern had been transformed into such a garden as Eastern romancers never dreamt of. The side rails had disappeared, buried behind sloping banks of the most exquisite flowers that the gardens and hot-houses of Southern France could produce. The Council Chamber, the glass-domed entrance to the saloon, and the smoking-room had vanished also, transformed into mountains of blossom and greenery. An avenue of alternate palms and tree ferns ran down the middle of the main deck. The bridge had become a fairy bower glorious with blooms of every conceivable hue.

Against the after end of the smoking-room and facing a broad stretch of deck, fenced by a semi-circle of palms, was an embowered platform covered like the deck with pale green cloth. At one end of it stood a cream and gold Bechstein grand, and in front a silver, harp-shaped music stand, mute witnesses of pleasures to come.

No more perfect night could have been given even if the weather had been arranged to order. As the sun sank towards the Western horizon behind a veil of mingled amethyst, amber and gold, the full moon rising in the east changed from white to silver, and from silver to pale, burnished gold.

"Ah, how beautiful!" exclaimed Paula, as she came out on deck from the saloon with Mercedes, Cora, and Lady Maud. "Look, look," she continued, gazing from east to west and west to east again.

The dinner was an artistic triumph. Mercedes had taken her father at his word, and there was nothing, solid or liquid, placed on the long broad table in the *Isola's* saloon which was not of the choicest that taste and skill could select or money buy. Never, even under the blue skies of the Playground of Europe had such a well-pleased company sat down to such an entirely delightful feast.

Thanks mainly to Lady Medcalf-Mears' selective genius the guests harmonised not only with each other but each with all, a result which is admittedly the highest triumph in the gentle art of entertaining. Mercedes, with her youth and her beauty, and her piquante, half foreign manner, suited the circumstances to a marvel, and so she made a perfect hostess. Her father somewhat astonished those of his guests who only knew him as the coldly-calculating, ruthless despot of finance by playing the host with such a modestly genial courtesy that even Kesteven himself began to speculate as to his possible reasons for this new development of character.

Coffee was served on deck about fifteen minutes after the ladies left the table, and when the guests came up they found that yet another transformation had taken place. The little floating fairyland which they had left growing dim in the fading light of the sunset was now glowing in the diffused shimmer of hundreds of tiny electric lights. Chains and wreaths of them hung fore and aft from the great pole-masts and the shrouds. Hundreds more of them glowed half-hidden among the flowers and amidst the gently waving fans of the palm trees. Only about the stage there were no lights visible. It was lit up as though it possessed a luminous atmosphere of its own.

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The land was already fading away into a dim, blue-grey haze, for during dinner the engines had been started at "dead slow" and the *Isola* had been slipping away seaward for more than a couple of hours without any of the guests being in the least aware of it, so smoothly worked the mighty engines which, at need, were capable of driving her more than forty miles an hour through the water.

Conversation over the coffee and cigarettes was somewhat scrappy and desultory. The subtle spell of a perfect dinner and the magical influence of the almost unearthly surroundings combined against the spoken word and in favour of the unspoken thought.

"No, no," his Highness of Warschaua murmured when he could keep silence no longer, and leaning in his chair towards Cora, "you are right, my dear. This exquisite half hour has not been for talking, no, not even to you. This is not a time to say anything with the lips. It is for the eyes and the souls of men and women to come together in silence—is not that so?"

"Yes," she laughed softly, laying her cheek on her hand and looking into his eyes, "and yet you are talking—but so nicely that I suppose I'll have to forgive you. Ah, see. There's Mr. Staunton taking Madame de Ronski to the piano. We are going to begin. Shall we go and find our seats?"

The stewards had cleared the space in front of the stage and filled it again with low chairs of Russian wicker covered with costly furs and furnished with cushions. Mercedes, as hostess, took the centre chair of the first row. Cora and the Grand Duke sat on her right, and Lady Maud and Iddison on her left. Lady Medcalf-Mears sat between his Highness and Staunton, Kesteven had devoted himself for the time being to Mrs. Corton Vansuyler, a brilliant and wealthy widow hailing from Philadelphia, who would not have had any insuperable objection to joining her millions to his, and the rest of the company arranged themselves according to their convenience and their affinities.

There was, of course, no formal programme. Staunton had decided that it should be an entirely "go as you please" affair. Mercedes and Cora had got a list of promises to "do something" and the order of the doing was left entirely to the performers.

As soon as everyone was seated, Madame de Ronski's fingers rippled over the keys and the Intermezzo from "Cavalleria" instantly hushed the murmur of conversation. There was no applause, as the last chords died away into silence because all the performers had asked Mercedes to let it be understood that none was desired, but people looked at each other and whispered their approval of the perfect rendering.

The hush fell on the company again as de Ronski came out of the smoking-room with his violin and his wife struck the opening chords of the Kreutzer Sonata.

No man with a reputation to keep had ever played before a more cultured and critical audience, and never had an audience heard the diabolical melody made to sound so entirely devilish. Men held their breath and gripped the arms of their chairs hard. Some of the women sat up straight and stared wild-eyed at the magician who was waking such evil echoes in their souls. Others shrank back into the depths of their big chairs and covered their eyes with their hands.

Staunton, to one side of whose nature music spoke as no other form of speech could, listened rigid with clenched teeth, and when the spell was lifted and silence came, he said in his soul:

"I wonder if our friend suspects anything, and whether he means that as a warning. It sounded very like it."

There was then a little interlude. As a matter of fact the audience looked as if they wanted it, so intense had been the strain of following the marvellously interpreted theme.

Then Mercedes answered an inquiring look from Madame de Ronski, who was still seated at the piano, and went on to the stage. She stood in the centre facing the audience but looking up to the sky so that her eyes shone strangely in the moonlight. There came from the piano a sadly plaintive and yet exquisitively sweet melody which only her father and Madame de Ronski had ever heard before, and then she began to sing in Spanish the once famous and now almost forgotten "Lament of the Moor."

As the song drew near to its end, Staunton clenched his teeth tighter and said again in his soul:

"Why did she choose that to sing? It is almost as bad as the Sonata."

He got up from his chair and walked away forward under the bridge.

For the moment even his inflexible purpose seemed to waver and his iron will was almost on the point of melting in that liquid flood of melody which had welled up from the warm depths of his darling's soul.

If she could only have come to his side just then and spoken to him as she had sung, everything might have been changed, but she had gone back to her seat and he heard the opening chords of the Marseillaise ring out from the piano.

He knew what was coming and went back to his seat.

Paula was standing in the middle of the little stage.

She paused for a moment and then the triumphant rhythm of the Marseillaise crashed out from the piano and the soldier's soul spoke again from her lips as she sang, her voice rising clear and high above the exulting tumult of the notes.

As the last defiant notes rang out his melting mood had passed completely away. The magic of the melody which had rung in ears of thousands of dying heroes had hardened his resolve into steel again. He got up and held out his hand to Paula as she came down from the stage and said in French:

"A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. That was magnificent. It was not only music, it was more, if that is possible."

Those of the audience who knew him were rather surprised to see Iddison get up next and borrow Cora's banjo. No one in the company had credited the quiet-spoken, reserved engineer with anything approaching a gift for entertaining, saving only Sister Janet who had heard him tinkle his banjo and half sing, half recite Kipling's "Soldier Ballads" to his accompaniment on the far-away veld.

When he went back to his seat Lady Maud put her hand on his arm and whispered:

"You dear. I had no notion you could do anything of that sort, and you did it perfectly. How did you learn it?"

"Oh, it comes to one out there, you know," he said a little awkwardly. "One has to do something to help the fellows through their troubles, and I thought it might be a bit of a change for them here."

"It was splendid," she replied, getting up, "and now it's my turn."

There was another interlude and then de Ronski came back with his violin.

In a few moments Paula had taken her father's place. Her mother turned away from the keyboard and looked into Mercedes' eyes until as though by some magnetic influence she drew her glance to hers and Paula began singing with all the strength of her soul and the sweetness of her voice:

"*When other lips and other hearts*——"

As she went on the echoing voices spoke louder and louder, and with ever-increasing insistence until they filled the long vacant chamber in the dwelling-place of Mercedes' soul. She sat still as though the magic of the old-familiar song had turned her into stone, until as the sweet, long-drawn notes of the last refrain—

"*Then you'll remember me*,"

went soaring up into the silence from the singer's lips, she started to her feet, clasped her hands over her eyes, and cried with half a sob and half a laugh in her voice:

"Yes, yes, I do remember now. Wilfrid, dearest, where are you?"

And then she fell back on to her chair, covered her face with her hands, and began to sob as though some great sorrow had suddenly fallen upon her.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Beware of Friends!

THE old saying, "Don't introduce your donah to a pal," has again proved its truth in the case of "B. C." He was "keeping company" with a girl for nine months, when he introduced her to two of his supposed best friends. On the sly, at different times, they have both asked her to give him up, and go with them. As the young lady likes him, she said she would not. He doesn't know whether or not to pay them out in the old English fashion.

* * * * *

The best way to pay them out, "B. C.," is to let them see that you and the girl are not to be separated by evil speakers. The "old English" method is not to be advised in any case, unless it is provoked by deliberate insult or injury. The best guard against slander is to ignore it, and let facts speak for themselves.

A Hapless Colonial.

"T. A. C." is in a strange position. He is an Australian, and has been in England for two months. In his own Colony he always got on well with the girls, but here he does not seem so fortunate. All the nice girls, he says, seem to be booked. How, he asks, can he get on with British girls?

* * * * *

Your complaint is quite unusual, "T. A. C." My idea is that Colonial men usually attract British girls more than the home variety. Their manners are more open and frank, they are usually sportsmen and manly, and, in appearance, can give the home-bred man many points. If you fail with the girls, it must be very hard luck on your part, or perhaps sheer incapacity to make yourself understood by them. Try again, very hard, in the Colonial fashion, and if it doesn't succeed, well, I fear there must be something a bit wrong about you.

Dances with the Other Girl.

"JESSIE" writes: "A friend of mine is in love with a young fellow. Sometimes he is very attentive to her, but at others he is just the reverse. They meet twice a week at a dancing class, every Monday and Friday. On Tuesday nights he has every other dance with my friend, but on Fridays he does not come near her, but dances all the time with one other girl. What do you understand this to mean?"

* * * * *

I think there is very little doubt that he is more in love with the Friday girl than with your friend, or why should he give himself up entirely to her on that night, whereas he only spares half his dances for your friend on Tuesdays? There is, though, just the bare possibility that the Friday girl dances very well, and that the young man gives her the preference on that account. Off-hand, though, I certainly advise your friend not to give her heart to a young man who is evidently not very deeply in love with her.

Cousins' Love.

"I AM going out with a cousin," writes "A." "Our names are the same, but she is three years older than I. My mother does not like my going with her. We have been together for two years. Is there any reason why we should not be lovers?"

* * * * *

Marriages between cousins are not, of course, always wise. But the exception proves the rule, when there is any very strong affection. However, be sure that you have a real love for her, and not merely a feeling of friendship. Companionships between cousins are often very delightful, but should not be mistaken for the affection of lovers.

An Awkward Vow.

"DORIS" writes: "I am eighteen, and a short time ago had two young men friends. I saw a lot of one of them, but he was jealous of the other and used to tease me about him. Once he made me so angry, that I made a vow never to speak to him again, but since then I have grown to like him much better, and he has asked me to walk out with him again. But I do not like to break my vow, so would you kindly tell me the best thing to do?"

* * * * *

Vows are very silly things to make, "DORIS," at eighteen. They are consoling enough at the time, but one regrets them afterwards—and rarely keeps them. If you really do like the young man—and I imagine you do—give him another chance, and go with him again. Perhaps he will have now learnt not to be too much of a tease.

A Quick Lover.

"A SHORT time ago," says "H. M. R.," "I met a widower who told me he wished to meet with a steady, respectable woman, with a view to marriage. A short time after he wrote to me saying he should like me, and wanted me to write to him. I did so, and in reply he said he wished me to become engaged to him. How would you answer the letter? I like him fairly well."

* * * * *

It seems rather sudden to ask a lady to become engaged after one meeting and two letters. He is evidently a man of little ceremony. Perhaps he is the better for that. Anyhow, "H. M. R.," I should not advise you to marry on such slender acquaintance. Tell him you wish to know him better before committing yourself, and then make up your mind after future meetings.

Jack's Predicament.

WHEN "JACK" was in the country during the summer, he met a girl who made herself very agreeable to him. Being of a gallant disposition, "JACK" thought it only right to return the sentiment, so took her out a lot and was generally very nice. But he did not feel anything else towards her than mere amiability. "JACK" however, rather fears she misunderstood his attentions, for she has now written asking him to meet her in London, evidently with a view to developing their friendship. Should "JACK" take any notice of the request, seeing that he does not himself care for her at all?

* * * * *

If "JACK" was amiable and friendly with the girl in the country, I see no reason why he should not be the same in London. I do not see why he need commit himself to seeming to be in love with her. Certainly let him meet the girl in London, and make himself as agreeable as before. She would be offended if he refused to do so.

Cynthia

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SHORT STORIES

No. 782. Week ending December 26. 1903. [Price One Penny.

"I THREW MY LOVER THE KEY! WOULD HE BE IN TIME TO SAVE ME?"

(A Dramatic, Thrilling Episode from the Story, "AT THE MERCY OF A MANIAC." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 782.] [One Penny.

Week Ending December 26th, 1903.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover

AT THE MERCY OF A MANIAC.

The Thrilling Story of how a Young Girl was Rescued.

"*Staysails, February* 22, 18—.

"Dearest Kate,—'*My Kate*' *you used to be in the old schooldays. You and I have seen too little of each other these last seven years. Whether the fault be mine or yours, let us retrieve ourselves. Come to me on the* 26*th and make a charming addition to my Lenten house party. I hear the most delightful things of your music, and that your two years in Leipsic did wonders for you. Come and verify this, as well as all the other nice things I hear said of you. You will if you are the same old Kate you used to be. Let me know your train, for which I enclose a ticket, and I will drive over to meet you at the station.—Yours, with love and the usual hurry,*

"Fanny Colgate-Rives."

"I want you to go, Kate," said my brother after I had finished reading this letter to him. "I want you to go and have the very best time of your life. Heaven knows you do not get any too much pleasure out of your studies and a lot of stupid pupils, confound them! It is a shame that a woman like you should be wasted on such a life."

"But, dear," I cried, with a quick rush from the piano stool over to the lounge on which he lay before the little open grate. "I am not wasted on you, and really and truly, Tom, I am happier with you than with anybody else in the world." Which was quite true, although Tom and I lived in a flat, six flights up, without a lift. The neighbourhood suited us admirably, 'unfashionable' and inexpensive, bordering close upon the confines of Abingdon Square.

Ever since a crushing reversal of fortune had come upon us, Tom and I had tried to make the best of things, and, truth to tell, we had succeeded, he, as an illustrator of magazine stories, and I as a teacher of music. We both worked hard, and I think that the fact that we did so was the secret of our content, that, and not trying to keep up appearances, which is after all the surest way of letting down one's temper, unless it be to live for acquaintances. We dropped all ours. We had had them by hundreds. And, in their stead, we took up such friends as cared for us for ourselves.

With Mrs. Colgate-Rives' letter of invitation still in my hand, I sat down on the rug in front of Tom, and he began to play with my hair and to blow rings from his cigar through its curls.

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"Kate," he said, after a little, "I wonder if that last remark of yours is quite true?"

"It is quite true," I said, putting my cheek against his hand, "you are the best and dearest of all, and I am always happy with you."

"Oh, what a blarney stone it is!" answered Tom. "But, do you know, my girl, I only half believe you. I cannot help believing that—that——" and he hesitated, as people who are sensitive do when they are treading on delicate ground.

"That what, dear?" I asked very softly, knowing very well what was coming.

"Well, then, I have sometimes thought about Crawford." Seeing that I made no reply, he went on: "Crawford is just the best fellow I know, and it breaks me all up to think that anything should come between you and him."

"But nothing has," I said.

"Yes, something has," he said. "Something has, Kate, and, by Jove, it's an infernal shame, for if ever two mortals ought to be together, it's you and Doctor Dick Crawford."

No response coming from me he continued: "He doesn't come here any more, and he used to be here every day. And the last time he did come, you were cold to a degree. You barely looked at him; you treated him outrageously, really. And, Kate, now that I look back upon it, you were not attractive, sitting up like an iceberg on the piano-stool, playing classical tunes and boring us both to death. What did you do it for? What on earth did you do it for, Kate?" he repeated, putting his hand on my shoulder with something that came very near being a shake.

"Why I treated Dr. Crawford as I did, is a matter of very little consequence either to him or to me," I flung out with a sudden rising inflection to my voice. "But, since you take it so much to heart, I will tell you. It was," I cried, throwing back my head with a tilt, "it was because you and I have made a mistake. He is not at all the kind of man we thought he was, and," with a throb in my voice which I could not control, "he does not care for me, and I have been a fool, a fool," I continued, crushing back the tears, "and the sooner I am cured of my mistake the better."

But for once the sympathy I looked for was withheld.

"Rot—tommy-rot!" was all my brother said.

"It's like a man to take the part of another man."

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"But I don't take his part, he doesn't need it."

"Go on, go on!" I retorted, drawing away from him. "Next, I suppose, you'll be taking her part."

"What!" he cried. "Her part? Do you mean to say, Kate, there is a woman in it?"

I nodded my head in sorrowful triumph.

"Well, then, some meddling idiot has been lying to you, Kate. In all the years he has known you, Dick Crawford has never looked at another woman."

"But he has," I asserted sadly, "I've seen it."

"Go on, tell me about it, Kate."

Once more the kind hand was on my shoulder.

"Well," I said, "the first time I noticed it was at the last Military Tournament. It may have been going on before, but that was the first time he made his admiration for another woman apparent to me. You remember, we three went there together. You had left us, and he and I were laughing and talking together, when, all at once, he became silent, preoccupied. I made some trifling remark to him, to which he made no reply. I saw that he was looking away from me over to one of the boxes. In fact, his eyes were fastened upon a woman who sat there. She was a beautiful woman, exquisitely dressed. A crowd of men were about her, and, although she smiled upon them, yet I could see they bored her. Somehow her eyes never seemed to smile with her lips, but flashed with a cold glitter, as though the tenderness of tears was too little known to them. His gaze was so riveted upon this woman that I was obliged to speak twice to him before he heard me.

"'You seem to find her interesting,' I said.

"When he became aware of my existence, he replied: 'I do, overwhelmingly so, more than I thought she could be,' and, with his gaze still resting on her beautiful face, he went on:

"'I came here to-night because I hoped for this opportunity to see her.'

"His frankness made me indignant."

"Naturally so," said Tom.

"Murmuring something about her beauty, I tried not to betray my agitation. I need not have given myself any uneasiness on that score, for his looks, as well as his thoughts, were still on the mysterious stranger.

"'Who is she?' I said at last.

"This time, not because it was I who had asked the question, but because the woman had left the box, he answered me. He drew his hand wearily across his eyes, as though he had been undergoing a severe mental strain. And then he answered in the tone of one awakening from a dream, 'She is a Hungarian, the Countess Czarmay.'"

"What," said Tom, sitting bolt upright on the lounge, "not the woman they call the Countess Lara?"

"Yes, I remember that was her name. Do you know her, Tom?"

"Only by reputation, and that is quite enough. For if all that is said of her temper and her tantrums is true, wildcats are angelic animals in comparison with the Countess. She is as cruel as she is charming, and as shameless as she is wellbred. She is received at every court in Europe. But, to my mind, there is only one court where such ladies should be received, and that is the police court.

"But, Kate," he said, with a vicious dab at the fire with the poker, "it's preposterous that Dr. Dick," falling into our familiar name for him, "should have any other than a passing interest in such a creature. He is too earnest a fellow, too thoroughly a man of the world, and, above all, too much given over to his profession to go mooning about at a blue-eyed wildcat."

"But he does, all the same," I cried. "Why, he goes to the Opera every night she is there, although he gave us the impression that life was too short to spend his time away from his studies, anywhere but here. He goes to the Opera, and, from my seat in the dress circle, I have seen him, night after night, with that same absorbed, intent look with which he regarded her that night at the Tournament."

"So you might see me looking at every smartly dressed subject for my sketches. Why, hang it! I've followed a woman for miles, just to get the proper effect of her skirt."

"Yes, dear, but this is different. I am not fanciful about it. I tell you the Countess has cast her spell over Dr. Dick, and all that I can do is to cure myself of my folly, and so," I said, "I am going to accept Fanny Rives' invitation."

"Well," at last said Tom, "if it is true, but, mind you, Kate, I do not say it is true, Dick Crawford is the fool, not you, and I am glad matters have gone no further between you than they have."

"Tom is right," I said to myself, as I put my braided locks down on my pillow that night. "It certainly is fortunate that I did not commit myself to a formal engagement of marriage to Dr. Richard Crawford."

But just how fervent was my gratitude to Providence it would be hard to say.

"Kate," said Tom, before we were off to our work the next morning, "do you know that you are rather a good-looking girl, but"—looking me over with a critical eye—"yours is the beauty that needs adornment. Here, put this in your purse and buy yourself some swell togs, and you'll be the handsomest woman at Staysails, and, what's more, you will have all the men at your feet."

"Yes, and all the women at my head, pulling my hair. Oh, Tom! Tom!" I cried, with my arms about his neck, "you are the best and most generous, but listen to me, dear. Your money would be wasted. The women whom I shall meet at Fanny Rives' only care for clothes when they are on their own backs, and for a music teacher to approach a millionaire in the smartness of her attire would be put down against her as a crime. If they like me, it will be because they cut a much finer figure than I do. And as for the men, all that they need is appreciation, which costs nothing, poor dears! But you may give me something for tips to the servants. That is all I shall need."

Tom only half acquiesced in my views of the situation, and looked on somewhat disapprovingly the morning of my departure, at the sparse contents of my trunk. As he shut down its lid I said:

"There is one thing I wish I did have, Tom, a tea-gown. I have nothing in that way but that hideous, old, grey atrocity, which you detest so. Women at house parties are supposed to chatter in each other's rooms in lovely gowns. I can't chatter in mine with any satisfaction."

But that afternoon, when I unpacked my trunk in my pretty room at Staysails, lo, and behold! what should I come upon but a lovely tea-gown of Liberty silk, heavenly blue, with waves of white lace foaming all over it.

"It looks like that," said Fanny Rives, pointing to the sea outside my window, where the white caps rose and fell upon the blue waves. "What a dear your brother must be. It's very becoming," reverting to the wrapper. "Keep it on for five o'clock tea in the music-room. We dine at eight. You won't see the men till then. The women will be there. Let me see, we have had so much to talk about that I haven't told you who is here. There's Kittie Cruger, and Sallie Neilson, the Lawrence girls, and Belle Wetmore; Constance Cushman, Angelica Bayard, yourself, myself—that makes eleven," running them over on her fingers, "the twelfth is the most extraordinary creature," she said; "she is your next-door neighbour. The other women are all more or less pretty and agreeable, but they are no more like her than a bullet is like a globule of quicksilver. Whilst they are content to sit still, she is here, there, and everywhere. She goes in all directions, each one more charming than the other. She speaks every language, paints, models in clay, is a superb horsewoman, sings divinely. Hush, hear that!" she said, with upraised finger.

It was a woman's voice, singing to herself a melody in a minor key which sounded like a wail from an Irish wake. But I knew it, the air was not Celtic, but Hungarian, an old song of the Tzigane, which Brahms had transcribed for the piano. The voice, sweet and sensuous, fell on my soul with a prescience of evil to come. I looked at the pine trees where there were no birds, and beyond them across the snow to the

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sca, where there were no ships, and I thought of the friend I had lost, and life's emptiness swept over me, just as that beautiful voice swept over the twilight, and filled its dusk with sadness for things lost and remembered.

For a moment a nameless horror made me tremble from head to foot, and then the singer was in the room. I suppose that Fanny presented me to her in due form, but I really don't recollect. I only knew that the Countess Czarmay, a cloud of fluttering pink chiffon, a wealth of lovely fur, golden hair, piled high on the picturesque head, smiles and blue eyes, stood before me, and that both my hands were in hers, with the long, slender fingers, in their turquoise rings, twined about mine, and that, looking into the Madonna-like face, all the ugly tales I had heard about her were forgotten, and I was telling her how glad I was to meet her.

"Come," said Fanny, with a light laugh, "let us go down to the music-room," for I was talking to the Countess of my passion—music—as I had rarely spoken to anyone, "the others are there, and you," turning to me, "will be delighted to play the Countess' accompaniments."

Fanny's music-room was an apartment of so much beauty that I could not keep from commenting upon it. "Ah!" said the Countess, "that is because it is better to love music than to be a musician, for musicians have no sense of the æsthetic. They never feel discords of form, or colour. I sometimes think that all beauty, except that of tone, is wasted upon them."

The only light in the room, which was long and high, fell from tall stands of carved wood, on which were placed branches of silver, whose twisted arms held clusters of wax candles. These stood on either side of the piano. All the rest of the room was shadowy and dim, except when the great logs of wood on the open hearth sent up a flame more ruddy than usual. Then I could see that the faces of the women who reclined on low divans and cushioned chairs, grew soft and tender, as they listened to our music. Between songs I felt like one in a dream. But the Countess busied herself about the tea-table. She was like a child at its first party, making a pretty little comedy over heating the water in the samovar, and putting the tea to steep in its silver urn. That harmonious half hour was the prelude to the days that followed.

I was constantly in the companionship of the Countess.

"I am enthralled by her," as I wrote to Tom. "You ask me if I like her, this enchanting Countess? I can only answer, 'I am fascinated by her.' She leads me round by the nose, as she does all the others. Soon she will have me smoking cigarettes and drinking Sliwitz, a kind of Hungarian brandy distilled from bomb-shells. Her influence is not unlike these two pet indulgences of hers. It stimulates, but does not revivify, so that after I leave her a sort of collapse comes on, where I was buoyant I am depressed. In fact, I go to pieces. But, all the same, I am anxious to get back to her."

I might have added, with truth, that it flattered my vanity that the doctor should have left me to pay court to a being of such incomparable charm as the Countess. But I did not say this, in fact, the doctor's name never passed either my pen, nor my lips, and in the pleasurable ease of my life at Staysails, I was cheating myself into the consolation that he was forgotten.

It was the last day of my visit, but the Countess had been persuaded to stay on a week longer.

She and I were sitting in her room after luncheon, indulging in a "little chat," before her open wood fire.

"Here's a pretty to do," cried Fanny, putting her head in at the door, "Ned" (her husband), "has just had a telegram from an old college friend of his, saying that he will run down to-night on the 9.45 train from town. Ned won't put him off, and I think it's too provoking, when he knows the house is full, and there isn't a place for the man to lay his head."

The Countess took a puff at her cigarette before she spoke. "Let him come, my dear Fanny, it is the unexpected in life that makes it worth living. See!" pointing to a curtained alcove where her maid slept—"there is Ilma's bed. Send her to the servant's quarters, and let Miss Robertson come in here with me, if she will," she said, with a smile to me.

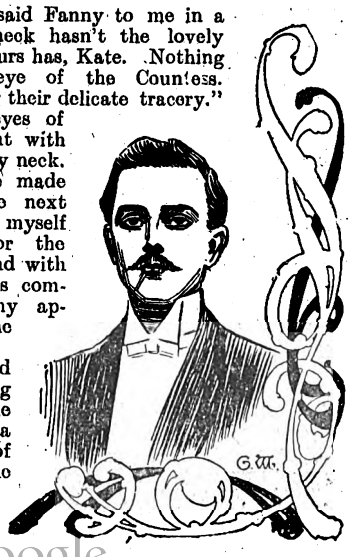
And so matters were settled to Fanny's satisfaction, as well as my own.

A snowstorm had set in that morning, and I gave a commiserating thought to the traveller, who would have to brave the drifts which, by this, were making the roads almost impassable. Fanny had persuaded me to put aside, for our last dinner at Staysails, the high-necked bodice which I usually wore, and, in its stead, to wear a low corsage of jet and lace which she gave me.

"How well you look in it, Kate," she said, when we met just before dinner. "I wish this man whom Ned is precipitating upon me could see you. And that reminds me that I never even asked his name, I was so provoked at Ned."

Here a little stir among Fanny's guests told that the Countess Czarmay was in the room. She was as lovely and fresh as the Spring-time, in a gown of green gossamer, the tint of the earliest buds on the trees. Embroidered on its delicate fabric were garlands of oak leaves and acorns, in glossy shades of brown and green. Bands of Russian sable bordered the low corsage, and set off the creamy tint of her neck and the firm swell of her bust. A court train of green velvet, edged with the fur of the sable, fell in graceful lines from her waist. Her jewels were emeralds. The necklace about her throat was fashioned in the form of a serpent, so flexibly wrought that it moved with every breath its wearer drew. Through the wonderful gold of her glorious hair gleamed the green radiance of still more emeralds, wrought by a cunning artificer, in smaller forms to match the serpent around her throat. The long gloves of Suede that wrinkled over her restless arms, were of a soft wood colour, and at her breast she wore an immense bunch of Parma violets.

"She is a dream," said Fanny to me in a half-tone, "but her neck hasn't the lovely blue veins in it that yours has, Kate. Nothing escapes the artistic eye of the Countess. See how she is admiring their delicate tracery."



True enough, the eyes of the Countess were bent with a peculiar look upon my neck. Something in her gaze made me shudder, but the next moment I called myself morbidly fanciful, for the Countess, in French, and with her sweetest smile, was complimenting me on my appearance, as she led the way in to dinner.

She was the life and soul of that last evening at Staysails. As the storm rose with a mighty crescendo of wind and snow, the recklessness of her mood grew wilder and wilder.

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The songs she sang were all in praise of wine, and love, and death. "Tokay! Tokay!" She flung the words from between her clenched teeth, as she would defy the gale. "Tokay! Tokay!" she screamed in the face of each fresh blast. Her excitement was infectious, and soon she had all the men and women lifting their glasses high in the air, and shouting the refrain. "Tokay! Tokay!" And then, the fever of her spirits rising still higher, she asked me to play her a Hungarian dance—a gipsy dance.

Whilst the others were clearing a circle on the polished floor of the music-room, she was freeing herself, with impatient hands, from her long train of velvet and sable. At the first bar of the music, she tore it from her, as if glad to be free from its restraining dignity, and flung it roughly aside. Her face was no longer that of a Madonna. She had tossed that off, as a woman does a mask at a revel's height. The whirling figure, with the glittering green serpents writhing about her head, was like a gipsy. I doubt if any of the women, I cannot speak for the men—knew what abandon meant before they saw this dance, as danced that night by the Countess Czarmay. Beholding the lawless grace of her supple body, I could well believe one of the tales I had heard of her—that she was gipsy born. No one but a gipsy could have danced as she did. So fleet were the circles of her flying feet that her skirts curled about her in spiral lines of green. She seemed like a flame licked into life from unholy fires, and had she suddenly darted up the chimney, to disappear into the forces of the storm, which was now at its height, it would have seemed only a fitting fulfilment of Nature's law of restoration.

But nothing of this sort happened. Panting and quivering, with white face and dishevelled hair, the dancer finally flung herself down among the cushions of the divan. Here the men gathered about her, but the women stood aloof in shocked little groups, whispering among themselves.

It was now close upon midnight. The storm had somewhat subsided. Fanny went to the window, and drawing its curtains aside, we saw how white the world was with snow.

"I am looking to see," she said, "if there is a sign of Ned's man. He sent the brougham over to meet the 9.45 train, but I doubt if it gets back to-night. The storm is frightful."

Nobody seemed to care very much whether it did or not, and after a few commonplaces the party broke up, the women going to their rooms, and the men following their host to the smoking-room, to await, over their pipes and toddy, the arrival of his friend.

The Countess and I were at last alone. It became manifest to me that an unusual silence possessed her. But I put this down to a reaction from the gaiety of the evening. As I made my preparations for the night, I could see, from my little room in the alcove, that she had got herself into a loose gown of scarlet silk, in which she sat, with her back turned to me, before the fire.

Her head was bent forward, and her hair fell on either side of her face in great sweeps of gold. She was intent upon something which she held upon her knees. So absorbed was she in this object, whatever it may have been, that she sat like one turned to stone. The rigidity of her attitude made me apprehensive of—I knew not what.

I turned to go to her, but just then, I saw that the long right arm of the Countess was moving back and forth with the mechanical regularity with which one sets out to accomplish some well-defined task. She had once told me that she was an expert maker of lace.

I tried to reassure myself that this was what she was now doing, or, perhaps, polishing the long, shell-like nails of her beautiful hands. But in the motion of that arm, in its hanging red sleeve, there was nothing feminine. The storm had sunk into a stillness as profound as that of the Countess. I am not naturally nervous, but I now felt myself possessed by an unaccountable feeling of terror.

It was with a sensation of security that I heard, far in the distance, the air stirred by the sound of carriage-wheels. I was glad to know that the next room would not be empty, and that its occupant would soon be within reach of my voice. The carriage was slowly approaching the house, but the Countess, still crouching over her task, paid no attention to it. Unable to longer sustain the suspense of a situation which was fast throwing me into a panic, I suddenly cried out:

"What are you doing there, dear Countess Lara?"

"Come here," she said, without turning her head. "Come here, and see for yourself what I am doing."

In my nightdress, and with bare feet, I lightly crossed the room to where she sat. Bending over her, I saw that in her left hand she held a slab of some hard, greyish substance, and in her right hand, the hand which never stayed its motion, she held a long, thin knife. There was something so unlooked for, and, at the same time, so sinister, in the aspect of that blade with the cruel edge, in the delicate, muscular hand, moving backwards and forwards, with diabolical monotony, that, involuntarily, I exclaimed:

"Good Heavens! What are you going to do with that horrible thing?"

"I am going to cut your throat from ear to ear."

The voice in which these words were spoken, more than the words themselves, froze my blood with horror, for it was the voice of the insane. I am gifted with what musicians call the acute ear, and voices to me are character. The voice of the Countess Czarmay, as I now heard it, conveyed to me the intelligence that she was a maniac. The words were nothing. Had she merely wished me a pleasant evening I would have known that the voice which enunciated the words was that of a being from whom reason had fled. I made no reply, trying to think what I could do to save myself. She had locked the door, I remembered, after we had entered the room, and a hurried glance showed me that the key was not in the keyhole.

Meanwhile the carriage had come to a standstill. The men were out on the front steps, giving the belated traveller welcome.

My frenzied thought was to rush to the window beneath which they were laughing and talking, and to cry out to them for help. But to do this would be folly, for before they could have reached me, the knife would have done its work. I realised that my only hope lay in being able to outwit the Countess, and to temporise with her until I could find means to escape. At all events, until the man should be established in the next room. Not that I knew how he could save me, but, somehow, I felt that in him lay the one chance of saving my life.

But he must come swiftly, for I saw certain signs of restlessness that told me the Countess was growing impatient.

Good Heavens! What if he should join the men in the smoking-room? A cold sweat broke out over me. Ten minutes there might be fatal. I could hear the voices growing fainter as the door closed on the men. Fortunately, the Countess was so completely dominated by her mad desire, that none of these sounds had made themselves audible to her. There was but one object in the world of which she was cognisant, the object on which her eyes were fixed with a raving glare, the little blue spot on my neck, where the vein lay under the flesh. With her eyes still fastened there, I saw that she was trying to speak, but she was so rocked by a horrible transport that the words came from her in clotted incoherence.

"Temptress, temptress!" she hissed out. "It's your fault that I am going to do this. I like you, I don't want to kill you, but I have to do it. I never thought of it until I saw that—that—that," she said, pointing with the knife at my neck. "It arouses a craving which nothing can satisfy but blood. I cannot resist it. Once before," and her voice died down to a whisper, "I was tempted in Buda Pesth. She was a pretty creature, and the blood in her veins was young, and when it streamed on my hands," and she softly rubbed her palms together in diabolical reminiscence, "it made me warm, too. Oh, so warm!" and a low laugh gurgled in her throat and was drowned there, with a torrent of words which came from her like a hemorrhage. "They tried to lock me up. They watched me for days—days—days! But I fooled them all. Doctors! Bah! I had money to buy them, and beauty to beguile them. They called me mad, but there was

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more reason in my madness than in their sanity. Besides, I am not mad. By nature I am gentle, tender, loving, until I see that—that, and the craving comes to make me cruel. When I sung and danced this evening I was a demon and it was you who made me so. You made me so with that. Do you hear, with that?"

I did hear the sickening words, but notwithstanding the terror they inspired, I moved nearer to the Countess, for lying, not two steps from me, I saw, half hidden in the long, white fur rug, where she must have dropped it in her preoccupation, the key to the door. I slid my bare foot along very stealthily until it was in such a position as made it easy for me to slip my toe through the handle of the key. If fitted like a ring to a finger, and the folds of my long nightdress fell about it and hid it from view.

My courage rose from the contact of the metal on my instep. Besides, I heard the door of the smoking-room open, and the voices of the men in the hall, bidding good-night to the man who was to be in the next room, and I knew that in a few more moments he would be there. But, until he should get there, it behoved me to successfully divert the Countess. However, before I could speak, she had bounded from her chair, to throw herself roughly in front of me and to hold the knife up to my throat. Had I flinched, that moment would have been my last. By a superhuman effort of my will, I kept under control the overcharged battery of my nerves, and managed, for the first time, to catch and to hold the shifting eyes of the Countess.

"You are too calm—too calm!" she muttered. "Are you trying to fool me? Do you know what I am going to do?"

My words had to pass over the steel of that awful knife when they left my throat, but I kept the tremors from my voice, and my eyes looked straight into the eyes that were trying to get away from mine.

"Yes, I know what you are going to do, dear Countess, but I am not ready yet to die. Let me have a few moments in which to prepare to meet my Maker."

With bursting eardrums I could hear the man's footsteps mounting the long flight of stairs. The conviction that he was coming, this stranger, not alone augmented my courage, but filled me with a mysterious sense of security. As the steps came nearer and nearer my brain grew clearer. I took a rapid reconnoitre of the room. In a flash my course was decided upon. The walls were high, fully sixteen feet, and near the ceiling a transom window was cut, and standing directly under it was an old-fashioned piece of furniture. Its four bowed legs supported drawers which rose, tier upon tier, till they were ten all told, each drawer having at either end a hanging handle of brass. As if to favour my plan, standing in close proximity to this was a *prie dieu*, of carved ebony and purple velvet.

"Do you want to pray?" she spat out the word as if it were venom.

"Yes," I answered, "I want to pray," pointing as I spoke to the *prie dieu*, which stood, luckily, behind the tall back of her chair. Slowly, and as if loth to leave my flesh, the knife was withdrawn from my throat. I must gain time, for the steps halted on the top of the stairs. The man was talking in muffled tones to his host. "Are you sure your knife is quite sharp enough, dear Countess? I am a coward, I confess, and I want it over quickly. Look, does it not seem a little blunt? There, near the point. And while I am praying, why will you not take the time to make it sharper?"

To this she agreed, saying: "I will give you five minutes, but if you raise your voice, if you whisper even, if, in any way, you try to call out for help, I shall not wait for you to finish your prayers. Do you promise me?"

"As I hope to save my soul, I promise you. Not a word shall pass my lips."

Just then the little clock on the mantel struck one. "Go! I will leave you to yourself on the conditions I have named. When the time is up I shall come to you." She watched me as a cat does a mouse, as I sank upon my knees upon the *prie dieu*. My clasped hands, and my eyes raised to Heaven fooled her, as I meant they should. Fooled her so completely that she once more resumed her seat in the great arm-chair, to become absorbed, as I knew she would, in the work of sharpening her knife. I shall for ever believe that the God whose religion she compelled me to travesty that night, heard the prayer I had no time to offer. For, as if to help me in my extremity, a great wind arose and struck the house with a mighty roar which set all the shutters banging and the windows rattling. And in the din, the mad woman, making ready her knife, did not hear, as I did, the door of the next room open and shut. Nor did she hear me when I sprang from my knees to the head rest of the *prie dieu*. From there to scale the rungs of a ladder which I made by pulling out such of the drawers as I needed for ledges on which to set my feet. With the key between my teeth, I climbed till my hands grasped the fluted woodwork about the front of the piece of furniture. Stealthily I drew myself up over this, to crawl along its dusty top, till I could get a good look through the transom.

When I did so, my promise to the Countess came near to being broken, for my voice well-nigh rang out in the gladness that possessed me, for the man in the next room was Dr. Dick Crawford! Then it was, to the shame of my human woman heart, that this joy receded, leaving in its place a jealousy so fierce and so desolating that it might well have been a question which was the more insane, the Countess or I. He was there, not because of me, but because of the woman for whose madness I would, in all probability, have to die. In the face of that death which was pressing close upon me, the strongest of all human passions had come to rack me, and to usurp all wiser and gentler thoughts.

This aberration was of such duration as is a flash of lightning, gone by the time my eyes, anguished and wild with terror, drew his eyes to mine, looking down upon him from my transomed height. In that one look I saw—but this is not a love story, never mind what I saw. Let it suffice that it made life a thousand times more precious to me than it had ever seemed before. And, if death must be, remembering that look, I could die almost content.

There was no time to lose. I dropped the key from my hand to his. Once more his eyes rested on mine, and then he was gone. The thought that perhaps I should never see him again smote me with despair. If he came in time to save me it must be quickly, for I saw that the mad creature, with the knife in her hand, had risen from her chair and was moving towards the *prie dieu*. For reasons best known to herself she had not turned up the gas in the room, and the fire had burnt low by this, leaving us in semi-darkness. But the figure gliding towards me in the long, red robe seemed, in my distempered fancy,

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by her passing through it to turn the air red. When she reached the place of prayer and found me gone she burst into oaths and cries horrible to hear.

Crouching down, flat on my face behind the woodwork which only half concealed me, I could feel the piece of furniture rock and tremble beneath the blows she struck it with the knife. She jabbed down deep into its wood, ripping and tearing it in her frenzy. A wild shriek of laughter told me that she had caught sight of me. I heard the brass handles rattling as she clutched them in her maddened hands. She was climbing up after me.

Her breath came in quick gasps, I could hear it. Suddenly she shot a long arm over the railing, and twisted her fingers in my hair until she tore it from my head. But I kept my face pressed close down to the woodwork, knowing it was the little blue spot in my neck she was trying to get at. My strength was no match for hers. With a sudden wrench of the hair, which was bleeding at the roots, she jerked my head back, leaving my throat exposed to the knife which hovered above it.

And then I thought the end had come. But before the blade could descend from where she held it high in air, her arms were seized and pinioned in a grip as strong as that death from which he had saved me. And the Countess Czarmay, snapping, snarling, foaming at the mouth, was powerless in the grasp of Dr. Crawford.

I saw the knife drop from her hand. I saw the others, brought by her shrieks, rushing in at the door. And then, I let myself think of the one being on earth whom I had kept all through that terrible hour from my thoughts, knowing that to think of him would unnerve me—my brother Tom. And thinking of Tom, I burst into a tempest of tears, which ended in a dead faint. How they got me down I never knew. When I opened my eyes it was on the lounge, in Fanny's room, it was now an hour later, and she was with me.

"Only think, dear, I never dreamt that Ned's man was the distinguished Dr. Crawford, the eminent authority on diseases of the brain. It seems that he had imposed secrecy upon Ned, because he wished to come down here *incog.*, so that he might study from personal observation the case of the Countess. All his previous diagnoses had been made simply from watching her at a distance. He has noted every gesture, every expression, every movement; no detail has been too trifling to escape his notice.

"And, do you know, Kate, that the very first time he set eyes on her at the Tournament, he knew that she was possessed by the homicidal mania? Just think what a great diagnostician he must be! Her case has baffled all the specialists of Europe, and such a dance as she has led her poor husband, Count Fedor Czarmay, who, by the way, is an old Heidelberg friend of Dr. Crawford's. And it was only out of sympathy with him that he has devoted himself so untiringly to her case. Poor Countess! How sad it is. So long as she lives, she will have to be caged, like a wild beast! And, only to think, that this is the very first time that Dr. Crawford has met her! How fortunate it was for you, dear, that he came just when he did!" she said, with a smile, for at that moment Dr. Crawford entered the room.

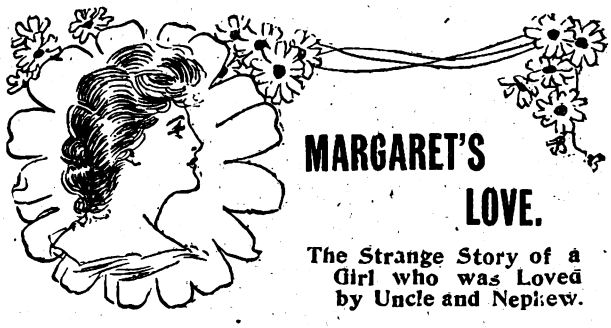
"You were saying something, Mrs. Rives, which I did not quite catch; may I trouble you to repeat it?" he said, coming over to where I lay, and standing quite close to me.

"I was telling Miss Robertson how fortunate it was for her that you came just when you did. It certainly was a night of events in the household of the Colgate-Rives."

Before he answered her, Dr. Crawford stooped down and kissed me on my lips. "More fortunate for me, Mrs. Rives," he said, "than for her."

Harley Gwynn.

"You'll be sorry some day that you didn't get married, if you don't." "Well, I'd rather not be married and be sorry I wasn't, than be married and sorry I was."



MARGARET'S LOVE.

The Strange Story of a Girl who was Loved by Uncle and Nephew.

It was a strange story, though a simple one; but then most of the stories of real life are strange. Margaret Griffiths had loved her husband; that was the one thing in the whole world of which she was sure. When she read stories and poems about love, as she did read them often—for she was a young creature, even in her widowhood—she always felt a little sympathetic thrill at her heart, and said to herself:

"That is how *I* loved my husband."

Yet the fact that she had loved him at all was a puzzle to the Ryefield people, who speculated about the matter, as country neighbours will. When they were married, Llewelyn Griffiths, as everybody called him, was already forty years old, and Margaret was only seventeen. Her father had left her to "the trusty guardianship of his good friend, Llewelyn Griffiths," as he said in his will.

Mr. Griffiths settled the estate, looked into the girl's affairs a little, as in duty bound, and then rather suddenly asked her to marry him. She had grown up, admiring her guardian. He was tall, handsome, full of strength and power—just the man for a romantic girl to make a hero of; and Margaret Fay was romantic to her very finger-tips. Moreover, she had been brought up by her father since her mother's death, when she was too young to remember; and naturally she shared all his likes and dislikes, and the strongest feeling he had in the world, next to his love for his daughter, was his attachment to his lifelong friend, Llewelyn Griffiths.

Llewelyn had certainly not wooed his bride in any story-book fashion; but then she had felt that she could not expect that—he was so much older and wiser and better than she in every way. He had talked to her very gently about her loneliness, and then he had said that *he* was lonely too; and if such a thing were possible as that she could make up her mind to come home with him and be his child-wife, and live with him always, he would be very, very good to her. And then he added, with something that would have been shyness had he not been such a self-possessed man:

"You know, Margaret, that I am only two years younger than your father."

"As if that mattered!" she cried, with her brown eyes shining and her cheeks glowing softly. "As if that mattered! You are *you!*"

"That means that you will come to me?" he said, and then he took the little fluttering hands she held out to him into his own, and gave her a kiss so like the one which her father used to give her at night and morning, that it brought the quick tears of memory into her gentle eyes. And so Margaret believed that she was in love, and that this tall, handsome man, who had been her admiration ever since she could remember, was her heart's lord, her knight, her hero, and a dozen other high-sounding titles, which she had taken out of the story-books.

Her lover had said nothing to her about money, and she did not know whether she had much or little. She supposed it must be a good deal, however, since in her father's time they had always lived freely, and none of her wishes had ever been denied her.

They were married on a lovely morning in early June; and it was past midsummer when they came home from their

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wedding tour. It was just at twilight when they arrived; and I think there is no hour so full of mystic solemnity as a midsummer twilight in the country. Pretty Margaret felt the strange spell of it as she stepped into the shadow of the elm drive, as the broad path was called which led up to her future home. Her very heart stood still. It seemed to her that her destiny had taken ghostly shape, and stood in front of her; and involuntarily she moved to one side, that she might not brush the phantom with her garments.

"This is home, little wife," said the kind, cheery voice of her husband; and the spell was broken. She went on then cheerfully enough into the stately old house, where one Llewelyn Griffiths after another had lived and ruled for generations.

They lived there for one peaceful year—a very happy year to Margaret, though so quiet. She went on dreaming her own dreams, investing her rather silent, yet always tender lord, with all the qualities of the heroes of her books, and honestly believing herself to be the very happiest little wife that the sun shone on. She half wondered sometimes that her happiness was so quiet; there were always tumults of one sort and another in the story-books, but that must be because the course of her true love had run so smoothly, and Llewelyn had none of the faults of temper which the other heroes had.

It was midsummer again when the horse upon which her husband had ridden away came home riderless; and Llewelyn Griffiths was brought in afterwards, by some neighbours, who had found him lying placidly upon the grass, with no sign of injury about him, but a smile upon his face so full of light and joy that at first they thought he must be alive, and then were frightened, as if such a smile on the face of the dead were unseemly.

The doctor came—the old village doctor, whose patients were to him almost like his children; and then it came out that both he and Llewelyn Griffiths himself had known for some years that just this end was sure to come.

The family lawyer came, too—but that was after the funeral—and made Margaret understand that she was a rich young widow, since all her husband's estates were hers, unreservedly; and then she found out for the first time that her father had left no fortune at all behind him—absolutely not enough money to pay his debts.

"What should I have done?" thought the poor little widow, "but for Llewelyn?"

She was scarcely more than eighteen then; and she shivered as if she had felt a cold blast when she asked herself the question—for she had never known a want or a care in her life, and the thought of struggling with the world for her daily bread came to her with a sort of horror. If anything could have made her hero's memory more dear, it was the knowledge that his love had saved her for ever from such a fate.

Her grief for him was not at all passionate, but it was very deep. She felt an intolerable aching want of him in her heart; or was it really the want, not so much of *him*, as of the love, and tenderness to which he had accustomed her? Sometimes she felt like a little child whom its mother had left in a great desert. The child would stretch out imploring arms for its mother to come back; but those arms would welcome any kindly comer who would take it out of the awful loneliness.

If a thought like that ever crossed Margaret's mind, she rejected it with hot indignation at herself. She always would mourn for Llewelyn—always—always; Llewelyn who had married her when she was utterly poor, utterly alone, and had made her life henceforth like that of a sheltered flower in a perpetual summer. She would be Llewelyn's, and Llewelyn's only, till she died; and then Heaven would *be* Heaven partly because she would so certainly find Llewelyn there waiting for her.

One day, when her husband had been dead six months, she beguiled the dreariness of a winter afternoon by looking through the contents of an old desk that had been his. She found some things that surprised her—one drawer in which was such a book as she did not know that Llewelyn cared about, an actual novel; and there were passages marked in this book, sometimes heavily, sometimes lightly, as if two people had read it together. And there was a deep, vivid, red rose of long ago, which crumbled when she touched it; and its ghost seemed to come out and fill the room with a passionate, despairing fragrance.

She wondered a little over this rose and this book, which had a drawer all to themselves; but she did not think much about them, because in another drawer she found a letter, and this, too, had a drawer to itself. On the outside of it was written:

"*For my child-wife to read on the day when she is twenty-one, if before that time I am dead, as I think will be the case.*"

Margaret took up the letter, and a strange thrill shook her, and she grew a little cold. It was as if her husband had put forth his hand out of his grave, and touched her. She was so very lonely, that she longed to read this message from him, and she questioned awhile with herself whether she might not do so. But she had an almost superstitious dread of disobeying him in anything; and she shut the drawer hurriedly lest she

Llyn was always over bold—he bent down his head and kissed her.

should be tempted, and went away and sat down in the firelight.

She began to think how very young she was—only eighteen and a half now, and it would be two years and a half more before she could even read that letter. Oh, how many, many weary years, if she lived as long as most people do, before she could go to Llewelyn! She *must* read his words after all; but, no—ten thousand times no! she would do his will now that he was gone even more sacredly than if he were alive.

She got up and went back to the desk. She took one look at the drawer where lay the crumbled red-rose petals, with their dying, despairing scent; and then she looked at the letter—the very last words her husband could speak to her until she, too, was dead. Then resolutely she locked the desk, as one who would hold no further parley with temptation; and, bringing the key away with her, threw it into the very heart of the glowing fire.

When Llewelyn Griffiths had been dead two years, one of his nephews came home from the medical studies he had been completing in French and German hospitals. It was Llewelyn's money that had sent him abroad; but Margaret

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did not know that until afterwards; and Llewelyn had arranged for him, when his foreign studies were completed, to come home to Ryefield and begin his medical career as partner of the old doctor who had killed and cured so many generations of the Ryefield people, that it seemed almost time he should enter into his rest.

The young fellow was another Llewelyn Griffiths, though everyone called him Llyn; and it had been the uncle's dream that this younger Llewelyn Griffiths should live after him in the old place, and keep up the old name there. That dream came to its end, however, when he himself married Margaret, and bequeathed to her all his possessions, as I have said, leaving her absolutely unfettered as to their future disposition.

Naturally, when the young doctor came to Ryefield, he went to see his uncle's widow. She was twenty years old then, and a daintier, sweeter little lady had never been mistress of the stately old house, in all the generations of Griffithses, who had lived and died there.

Dr. Llyn found it impossible to regard her as his uncle's widow, though she still wore her unmitigated widow's mourning.

He looked into her soft, brown eyes, and watched the blush-roses come and go in her fair young face, and he fell, at once and altogether, in love at first sight. He hardly realised just what his own symptoms meant; but he presently "diagnosed" the case, as he said, and he knew it was a mortal wound which his heart had received.

He tried to be very discreet, and not to shock his "rare, pale Margaret" by any too hasty demonstrations; but he actually haunted her in spite of himself. And she rather liked it, and began to think it was very nice to be an aunt by marriage to somebody.

He thought that, in waiting from midsummer until the middle of winter before he asked her to marry him, he had shown himself a model of discretion. He was not prepared for the look of shocked surprise that dilated those soft eyes of hers, when suddenly, one winter evening, he told her that he loved her, and asked her to be his wife. She just looked into his face, with sudden amazement in her own, and said, with an air she tried to make very dignified indeed:

"It seems to me you forget yourself strangely. I have some regard for your uncle's memory, if you have none. I shall be Mrs. Llewelyn Griffiths until I die."

"That is just what I have been hoping," cried wicked Llyn; and then, suddenly, his meaning, and the quiet humour of his cool answer, touched that chord in her that quivers between smiles and tears in all women, and she burst into a laugh that made her, a moment after, hate herself and him.

"I am not laughing because I am pleased," she cried hotly, almost beginning to weep.

"No, I understand," said imperturbable Llyn; "you are laughing because you are displeased."

"Yes, I *am* displeased, and shocked, and grieved; and I thought you were a real friend and a relative, and now I know——"

"That I love you," put in Llyn, "as *I know* nobody ever did before, and I don't believe anyone ever will again; and I want you for my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, until death us do part."

"We will not wait for death to part us," she said, with a quiet strength that astonished Llyn more than any of her charms had ever done; and she rose and walked steadily out of the room, her long black robes trailing behind her.

Llyn stood still for a while in front of the fire. I believe he whistled. Perhaps he thought she would come back again; but, if so, he reckoned without his hostess. She waited quietly in her own room until she heard the front door shut. Then she knelt down, and leant her head against her husband's desk. She longed desperately to open it and read her letter. She thought that to read that letter would be as if her dead love should take her into his arms, and thank and bless her for being true to him when she had been tempted—yes, she owned to herself that she *had* been tempted just a little. But she had thrown away the key; and, after all, there were only six months to wait, and she must do Llewelyn's will.

The next morning she sent Dr. Llyn a very dignified little letter. It said:

"Dear Llyn,—*You will please not come here again until you are ready to forget what you said last night, and to respect your uncle's memory as you should.—Your well-wishing aunt,*

"Margaret Griffiths."

His well-wishing aunt! This time Llyn whistled; there was no mistake about it. He put the little letter in his pocket as if it had been a love-token, and went off to make a round of medical visits.

Really it was very lonely for Mistress Margaret all the rest of that winter. But she never had more than a moment's temptation to recall Dr. Llyn.

And somehow the Winter wore away, and Spring went by; and then Summer burst upon the world, all bloom, and pomp, and radiance. And with the June came Margaret's twenty-first birthday.

She dressed swiftly, and then she sent for a locksmith, and in five minutes more Llewelyn's letter was in her hand.

She barred the door of her room. She sat down, and broke the seal, and then she put her hand over her eyes, and said a silent little prayer before she began so read. This was the letter:

"My Little Margaret,—*Other husbands have put out a grasp, from the very grave, to draw yet closer the chain by which they held a beloved woman in bondage; I stretch forth mine to set my child-wife wholly free. You have never loved me, my Margaret, with your uttermost love; and perhaps you yourself will have found that out before this letter reaches you. Nor have I ever loved you as those lovers love of whom your girl's heart has dreamt. I did love once, with all the passionate young heart of me; and she whom I loved died.*

"*I never meant to marry anyone else; but when your father—my best friend—left you in my charge, I knew no other way to care for you so well as to bring you home, my wife. I should not have dared to take this responsibility; but I knew well, as Dr. Leland could tell you, that my life must needs be brief—a matter of months, perhaps—of two or three years at the very most—and so I ventured to take you, and care for you tenderly, knowing that before your girl's heart was ready for the deep love of womanhood, I should have set you free.*

"*When you read this, you will be twenty-one, young, beautiful, prosperous, with all the world before you where to choose. You have a nature unusually capable of happiness, and I predict for you very great happiness some day. When that day comes, be sure, my little Margaret, that if the happy dead can know the joys and sorrows of those they leave behind them here, we shall look down from our far place, and bless you—she and I.*

"Llewelyn Griffiths."

Do you think Margaret's first thought a strange one. It broke from her lips in a happy little cry:

"Thank Heaven, he never really—*really* loved me!"

I suppose *she* knew why she thanked Heaven for that.

That afternoon she dressed herself in a soft, simple, white gown, that made her look more lovely and more girlish than ever. Her eyes were bright with some new, dear brightness, and the fitful blush-roses came and went in her cheeks more fitfully than ever. It was no wonder that the maid who answered her summons when she rang the bell, looked at her in surprise when she said:

"I wish you would fetch the doctor. I don't mean the old doctor; bring Dr. Llyn. Say I don't feel very well."

"What is it, dear aunt?" said Llyn, half-an-hour later, pretending to look at her anxiously. "Is it your head?"

"No, Llyn, I think it's my heart. It's—it's this letter."

And, as she spoke, she put his uncle's letter into his hand.

And Llyn read, and then he smiled; and then—for Llyn was always over-bold—he bent down his head, and kissed her.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I see how it is. You will be Mrs. Llewelyn Griffiths until you die."

Marion Montague.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIAL YOU CAN START TO-DAY.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

PROLOGUE.

A YOUTH is in the private room of Messrs. Samuel Sharpe and Quirke, solicitors, awaiting the head of the firm's announcement as to whether he is the heir to the baronetcy of the late Sir Basil Wingate or not.

Mr. Sharpe says:

"You will remember, Mr. Rust, at the reading of the will, the title, which by special remainder he had power to dispose of, and the money were left by Sir Basil Wingate to the elder son of his run-away only daughter, Helen Jerningham, *should* she have one; and failing a son being born to her, the title and the money *with* the estate, should go to you, his nephew; afterwards to *your* son—should you marry, or to the *son* of your daughter; no child of the feminine sex directly inheriting it."

He then tells Cyprian Rust that, hearing Helen Jerningham went to Australia, he has extensively advertised for her in Australian papers, but with no effect. Therefore he congratulates his listener on becoming Sir Cyprian Rust.

The solicitor is called out of the room, and Cyprian Rust sees on the table an unopened letter with an Australian stamp. The address he recognises as being in the handwriting of his cousin Helen Jerningham!

Is it written to announce the birth of a son and heir? If so it would rob him of the legacy at the eleventh hour!

A step sounds outside the door. Quickly Cyprian Rust thrusts the letter into his pocket. He hurriedly says good-bye to Mr. Sharpe, and when he reaches his hotel he reads the missive. It tells how Helen Jerningham has left Australia, so that the future heir—if a boy—may be born in England!

Sir Cyprian Rust carefully burns the letter that might have dealt the death blow to his ambitions, and mentally resolves to go to any extremes to retain the title.

Meanwhile Helen Jerningham is dying on board an ocean liner in giving birth to twin sons.

From incoherent remarks that she makes, the physician who attends her is led to believe that a secret is attached to the boys' history. But she dies ere she reveals her name or the boys' identity!

Many years later.

MARCELLA RUST, daughter of Sir Cyprian, finds a spade guinea which a mysterious man has hidden underneath the mat outside a certain room which she has been forbidden to enter in their home, Wingate Court, Crawley. Her curiosity is naturally aroused, and she tells her father of the occurrence. He seems annoyed at her alertness.

Sir Cyprian learns, through the Rev. Philip Nullius, that a dying woman wishes to see him.

He goes to see her, and she shows him a later will of Sir Basil Wingate, by which all his property is left to the descendant of Helen Jerningham unconditionally. Sir Cyprian snatches this will from her, and she dies before she can inform anyone else.

Sir Cyprian visits Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, where he meets Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, millionaire and city magnate, who is in love with the hostess.

The baronet, speaking in private to Lady Violet, and referring to Johnson, says:

"The house of that millionaire chap contains a valuable lot of plate, and you have the *entrée* to it. When next you visit it there are certain details I wish you to note, and——"

"Not *that* house!" she gasps. "I cannot, even to you! He will be here to-night, as my guest."

He looked at her curiously. "You either do this for me, or Marcella will know that for a certain sum her—aunt—sold her!"

For one brief moment the woman hesitated, then her answer came, slowly:

"I will do it; for my task-master is a hard one!"

Late in the evening Johnson proposes to Lady Violet. Knowing her position, she, of course, refuses him.

"Why," replies he, "is there any just cause or impediment?"

As he speaks the palms in front of the window part and a man lurches heavily into the room.

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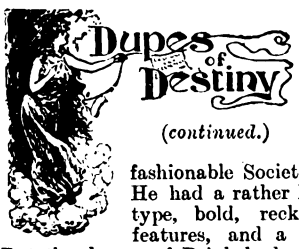

(*continued.*)

SIXTH CHAPTER.

An Unbidden Guest.

He was not an ordinary ruffian the man who had so unceremoniously interrupted a prospective engagement between the fashionable Society beauty and a millionaire. He had a rather handsome face of a dissolute type, bold, reckless, blue eyes, well-shaped features, and a dare-devil, sneering mouth. But the demon of Drink had marked him down as its own, and in bloodshot eyes, discoloured skin, and loose lips of a bluish tint there waved the black flag of the fatal vice

His coat was shabby, and his linen not of that hue usually connected with the attire of a gentleman; but he wore his clothes with a certain careless swagger that only a man who has originally been within the magic circle of the "smart set" ever retains through the many vicissitudes that his degradation takes him.

He gazed with an amused smile upon the silent woman in her beauty, who, grasping her fan with one white hand, rested the other on a marble statue of the goddess Pallas Athene.

The financier, Caleb J. Johnson, was the first to break the strange stillness.

"Look here, my fine buccaneer," he said in his curiously-crisp tone, "this kind of entrance into a lady's drawing-room may look very well from the front of a theatre, when you expect a little applause for it, but just now it has fallen sort of flat. Only the presence of this lady prevents me from introducing my foot to you in a way not always agreeable but sometimes effective. And if you retain any sense in your head you will just put those words in your pipe and smoke 'em. D'you hear?" he went on in a slightly-louder key. "You had better get out of this, or I'll call for the police!"

The intruder smiled slowly, his eyes glinting narrowly as he gazed from the face of the speaker back to that of the woman, whose dark eyes seemed to burn like living coals of fire as they met his.

He took a cigarette from his pocket, and poised it jauntily in his mouth.

"Thanks, awfully, for the advice," he said carelessly. "As to going out of the house, much as I dislike appearing disagreeable in interrupting an amorous *tête-à-tête*, I am afraid I must regretfully decline to leave you to make your proposal again to Lady Violet."

The millionaire flushed darkly, and took a step forward.

"You drunken hound," he said thickly, "you will pay for this insolence dearly!" Then, turning to the white-faced woman at his side, he said: "Forgive me, Lady Violet, but I think it will be better for you to leave the room while I deal with this fellow as he deserves."

A slow smile parted the lips of the stranger as he looked leisurely at the silent woman whose eyes had never left his face.

"I think it will be wiser if you restrain your—friend's martial spirit, Vi. I don't wish to be disagreeable, but if I am forced to assert myself I may surprise him."

As one roused from a dream, she woke to life at his words. With a light touch on the millionaire's arm, she said, with an effort:

"Don't touch him. He is not what you imagine; he has a right to be here."

"A right!" muttered Caleb J. Johnson sarcastically. "Yes, as much as a lackey or a 'boots'! Let me kick him out, Lady Violet; even old servants have not the monopoly to be insolent."

Her face flushed warmly, and she flashed a warning glance at the debonair intruder, who still regarded them with a cynical smile.

"One moment; I want to speak with you alone." She murmured. Then, drawing him aside, she said slowly:

"Mr. Johnson, as a man of the world, you know that there is a skeleton in every family. That man is the skeleton of mine. He is a disgraceful member of it—a creature we would be glad to hear the last of; but, still, when he appears in our midst we are forced to acknowledge him."

She spoke bitterly; but the eyes of the financier were scanning her face keenly, and he noted the ebb and flow of colour on her pale cheeks.

"Who is the fellow?" he said abruptly. "Anyway, relationship is no reason why he should behave like a low-down bounder."

"No," she answered bitterly; "but it is sometimes an excuse." Then she went on rapidly: "I want you to leave me now, Mr. Johnson. If I don't return to him he will only make a scene among my other guests, whom I do not regard in the same light as I do you."

"But I thought Sir Cyprian Rust was your brother-in-law?" said the financier slowly.

"That is no reason why I should make him the recipient of my confidences, Mr. Johnson," Lady Violet answered briefly. "My brother-in-law and myself are quite friends; but there we stop. I do not put my trust in princes."

"No," he replied with an arrogant touch; "but you will in financiers—won't you? Remember, when you have done with that oaf of a hanger-on I shall return for my answer. You nearly gave it me, and I am almost certain what it will be."

She flung a nervous glance behind her, where, standing with his elbow against the statue of the Pallas Athene, was the shabby man who had interrupted their *tête-à-tête*, waiting with imperturbable patience for her to join him.

"Not to-night" she said hastily, "another time. I—I am not in a mood to be acquiescent, Mr. Johnson. Perhaps I may say what you will not like, through sheer *ennui*."

"You can never say what I will not like, Lady Violet" he retorted gallantly, "least of all to-night, when your answer will, I am certain, be the one I intend to have, notwithstanding all the undesirable relatives in the world. I have fought and won hard battles in my life, and will not admit of defeat in the most important of all my undertakings."

A sense of being in the grip of a stronger will than her own made Lady Violet wish for a moment that she had not asked the "Gold King" to dine with her that night. His voice was so quiet, his glance so serene, that she feared to come in contact with the iron hand beneath the velvet glove lest she should be bent to his might, even as she was to that of her brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust.

"As you are strong, be merciful!" she smiled faintly. "At present I cannot even consider the question you made to me, let alone decide upon my answer. Now go, please, and let me hear the unfortunate creature who stepped so inopportunely into our conversation."

"I will do your bidding now," said Caleb J. Johnson suavely; "and shall wait near, in case that ruffian grows unpleasant. But before I leave your house, Lady Violet, it will be with the right to protect you from further insult at the hands of ne'er-do-well cousins."

As his enormous figure strolled towards the conservatory she sent a glance of wonder after him. He was so assured of her answer that she felt it would be useless to go contrary to his wishes. If it were not for that—— She bit her lip, and turned back into the drawing-room. She knew she had some moments to herself, as her guests were nearly all visitors in the house and accustomed to being left to their own devices, while Marcella was in the conservatory with Edward Day.

"Well?" she said, in a low, even tone, addressing the languid figure of the man who had prevented her from sending the announcement of her engagement to the *Morning Post*. "As it is more than eight years since you honoured me with any correspondence or requests for money I naturally deduced that you were dead, since all your allowances during that time were returned to my solicitors."

He stretched himself lazily, and chewed the end of his cigarette.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Vi, old girl, especially as you

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seemed to be on the verge of forming new ties with that man of opulence and bulk. I suppose you would call me the 'little rift within the lute' of your expectation, eh?" and he laughed softly.

She looked at him with quiet contempt.

"It is not my desire to discuss my friends with you. They believe me to be a widow, which I am, God knows, in every sense of the word!" she flashed passionately.

"Except the practical one," he sneered. "And I don't fancy, my Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, that you will gain your practical widowhood for some time."

"Why have you come here?" she said in a hard voice, ignoring his remark altogether. She was calm again, and nearly as white as the statue against which the man was leaning. "Remember, the conditions upon which I allowed you £300 a year were that you should never return to England or attempt to annoy me in any way. You have after twenty years—during twelve of which you received the money through my solicitors—broken both parts of your compact. Why do you come here, when for eight years you have not applied for the money that was the means of providing you with drink?"

She spoke bitterly, but the shabby intruder only smiled gently as he replied:

"My dear Vi, do keep your temper. I found that it was not so difficult to make money, after all. There were many more ways open to a scamp addicted to drink than to a major in the Army with a reputation to hold together. When I discarded the Army—or, rather, when I was cashiered from it—I was content to make shift on your pittance of £300 while I did nothing——"

"Except drink," she said coldly.

He smiled pleasantly. "Precisely; but I had sufficient sense left to keep drink *my* slave, than to be the slave myself. Then I suddenly found that there was a good chance of making money at—other things"—and a curious expression crossed his bloated face. "So that explains my reason for letting you revel in the luxury of imagining yourself my widow for eight years."

She turned on him sharply.

"Spare me any more details, please. All I wish to know is what you want here? My solicitors could have dealt with you without you forcing yourself on me. I have no money here—at least, not the amount you would require."

He looked at her narrowly. Her dark, passionate face, alive with bitter contempt, only served to amuse him. He was dead to all other feeling.

"I don't particularly want money, Vi," he answered insolently; "though when I do, I shall not hesitate to ask for it. But you seem to have forgotten, my precious wife, that scamp and social pariah as I am, I am still your husband; and Major Richard Frayne-Lennox intends to live with his wife once more, and so scare off would-be suitors to her lily-white hand. That is a masterstroke of policy, isn't it?"

"You would not dare!" she panted, her face flushing hotly. "Even my brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust, believes me a widow; and all my friends think that Major Richard Frayne-Lennox went to South Africa when he was cashiered from the Army, and, enlisting in some Yeomanry company, was killed in action. You won't be such a madman as to dare to do the thing you suggest—to rake up, by your presence in Society, the story of your disgrace?"

He laughed quietly, and stroked the ends of his moustache with long, white fingers.

"Why not? I am not the only Society blackleg that faces the music. And," he sneered, "with the support of my lovely wife, who receives me back, the Society sheep will follow her example and forget the past."

"Never!" she said in a low, tense voice. "You shall never receive any support from me! I will never acknowledge you again!"

"How will you prevent my coming here, then?" he retorted. "What force will you bring to bear upon me?"

"We are joined together by holy matrimony, and only death can break our tie!"

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sir Cyprian is Startled.

She leant forward, her dark eyes flashing with suppressed excitement, and her breath coming and going in quick gasps.

"A force you do not think I possess! I have only to furnish a certain person with the knowledge that you are in England again, alive, and you will be arrested on the charge of doctoring the figures on a cheque that was trusted to you! I knew of it, and was always prepared to use this threat should you ever attempt to see me again or annoy me. Now you know that unless within twenty-four hours I receive a tele-

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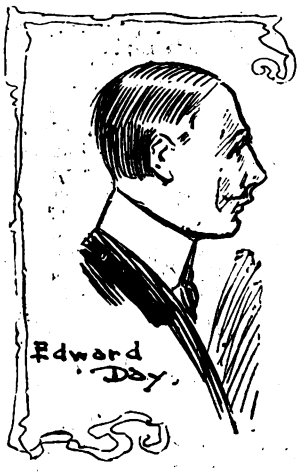

gram to say you have left England I shall acquaint the proper person with the fact that you are still living and in London."

While she had been speaking the man's dissolute face had turned to a livid colour and his eyes had sent a furtive glance round the room in case she had been overheard.

"So you knew of that," he muttered. "You would fling your husband into gaol?"

She laughed a chilly laugh. "I have long since ceased to regard you in that light. To me you are a blot on the escutcheon of my happiness, and unless you swear to go away from me I shall do as I have said—and you know best whether you can prove your innocence."

A low imprecation escaped the lips of the man who had once been a major in His Majesty's Army. Then he said sullenly:

"All right, I'll go. You've got the whip-hand this time; but you needn't fancy," he continued, with a savage snarl, "that I shall allow you to receive further proposals of marriage. The moment I hear of your name being coupled with that of any other man I shall return and chance everything. You can't get rid of me, my lady! We are joined together by 'holy matrimony,' and only death can break our tie."

She shivered, and her face grew very pale and icy as she said contemptuously:

"To me you are dead already. But I still retain my self-respect, notwithstanding the fact that I am your wife and, keeping it, I am not likely to commit the crime of bigamy; since I see that I am linked by a chain of hate to the effigy of a husband. Now leave me," she went on; "the window through which you came may be your exit."

He laughed coarsely.

"Then I'm hanged if I don't go through the hall door, as any of your other guests, my lady! Should your well-bred acquaintances question you as to the identity of the shabby loafer who came out of your drawing-room you may acknowledge me as your husband, Major Richard Frayne-Lennox. I shall not object."

With a supercilious gesture towards the silent woman, whose dark eyes sparkled with suppressed loathing, he moved in the direction of the door, and, passing through it, found himself at the top of a wide staircase opening into an alcove, flanked on either side by tall palms, and in the centre was a fairy fountain, half hidden by foliage and tobacco-plants, only the soft sprinkle of the water revealing the fact that there was anything behind them.

As the eyes of the outcast dwelt with a cynical smile at the luxury round him, a man's voice making some laughing remark sent a strange expression into his eyes, and he drew, back with a sudden glide behind a velvet portière.

Three figures had come out of an adjoining room—that of a girl, radiant in white, and two men. They paused with their backs to the portière to gaze at a picture to which the girl had referred.

"Yes," said one of the men—and the listener behind the arras recognised the voice of the man who had threatened a few moments ago to kick him out of his own wife's drawing-room—"it is a very fine picture, Miss Rust, but I fancy that I could show you a better one of the same subject on my own walls. You must come and see it one day with your aunt, if Sir Cyprian will allow you."

The man pressed against the wall strained his ears to catch, not the reply of the girl, but that of the man who had spoken first and had been silent since the three paused before the picture.

"I will be very pleased for Marcella to accompany her aunt," said the suave, aristocratic tones of Sir Cyprian Rust. "I am sorely tempted to plead for an invitation also, Mr. Johnson. I am a collector myself of originals and rare prints, and were I not obliged to return to my hermitage shortly I would love nothing better than to criticise your old master."

"I shall be pleased to submit it to the judgment of so keen a critic," said the financier drily.

He was inwardly amused at the meeting with the wealthy art-collector, who had been a seedy young artist in the days when his cousin had made her unfortunate marriage. He wondered cynically how the baronet would have fared had that cousin put a son in his shoes.

He turned to his companions suddenly. "While you are admiring the beauty of Leonardo di Vinci's masterpiece, Miss Rust, I will go in search of Lady Violet, whom I left in the drawing-room."

Marcella smiled an assent, and as the ponderous figure of Caleb J. Johnson strolled away the eyes of the baronet sparkled with satisfaction.

Inside the drawing-room the financier paused. It was empty save for a motionless figure in a robe of shimmering sequins.

"Now the family scapegoat has departed," he said softly, "we will pick up the thread of our conversation, Lady Violet."

She flung out her hand, with a hard little laugh.

"Ah, Mr. Johnson, a thread once broken can never be cemented together again. We must let the loose strand go now and consider new ones."

"You mean——" he said quietly.

"That I must forget that there was a question to answer," she went on gently. "And you, Mr. Johnson, must forget that there was an answer to your question."

The financier laughed shortly. He had not expected this resistance from the aristocrat whom he had decided would make a fitting mistress of his wealth—like a jewel in a setting of gold. And her sudden change of front piqued him, making her ten thousand times more desirable in his eyes.

"If you go down into the City, Lady Violet," he said quietly, "you will learn that Caleb J. Johnson always sticks to his guns and never gives up what he has set his mind on. And opposition only strengthens his determination to gain his ends. He has conquered where most men have gone under, and—he's going to conquer now. Do you know why?"

She shook her head wearily. His strength was beginning to frighten her.

"Because he has not only thrown his mind into this deal but his heart as well, Lady Violet. And the game must be to him."

"Stop, Mr. Johnson!" she cried. "You don't understand. I can never say 'Yes' to your question. There is a barrier that even your brain and will cannot overlook."

He took a step towards her, and the twinkling, star-like eyes shone with the light of conquest.

"A barrier, eh, Lady Violet? One that concerns that scamp of a—relation, eh? Oh, don't start," he said blandly. "I am quite able to understand that there are wheels within wheels; but a clever man may sometimes stop those wheels from going round, Lady Violet."

She looked at him with startled eyes. "What—what do you mean, Mr. Johnson?"

The financier leant forward, smiling with that exultant expression well known in Wall Street and Capel Court when a crisis had loomed perilously near the impregnable position of the "Gold King."

"I mean that within a very short time, Lady Violet, you will be sending a notice to the *Morning Post* announcing your engagement to the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson, of New York City."

* * * * *

In the meantime Marcella and her father, Sir Cyprian Rust, were admiring the pictures in the hall, while the figure behind the portière waited impatiently for them to move.

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"Marcella," said Sir Cyprian's soft voice, "come here, child; I wish to speak to you."

He drew the girl away from the fountain to a portion of the alcove away from the curtain.

The man seized his chance. Creeping softly from his hiding place, he quickly concealed himself behind the palms and foliage that hung over the fountain, and peered furtively at the man and his daughter who now faced him.

"Yes, father," said Marcella obediently; "what is it?"

Sir Cyprian turned his head sharply. "What was that noise, child?" he said suddenly. "It sounded as though someone had pushed past the palms."

Marcella laughed. "It's only the wind, father; I heard it too."

"I wish you to observe minutely," continued Sir Cyprian, "the difference between the copy of the 'Mona Lisa' here and the one that Mr. Johnson says he possesses. I am unable to stay in town myself, so wish my little girl to be eyes for me and to learn to discern between the real and the unreal. Besides, Mr. Johnson's Park Lane residence teems with priceless gems in art and jewels."

Marcella looked interested. "I will be so glad to help you, father," she said softly, "and will specially notice all that you point out to me in the future. You are sure I can help you, father?"

Sir Cyprian smiled slowly. "More than you think, my dear. I shall be pleased if my little girl can assist me. You know my weakness for such collections."

The figure behind the palms stifled a chuckle by waving the branches of one of the palms violently to and fro.

"This is a wretchedly draughty place," Sir Cyprian muttered; "you had better join your aunt, my dear."

As the girl obeyed him he looked after her with a curious smile on his blonde, handsome face, unconscious of a pair of keen, blue eyes peering at him through the leaves not far away.

"That is rather a neat idea to use *her!* Besides, I am not sure that I can rely on the other. She knows too much to be trustworthy."

He drew out a cigar-case, and fingered a cigar with thoughtful fingers, a slow smile still curving his well-cut mouth.

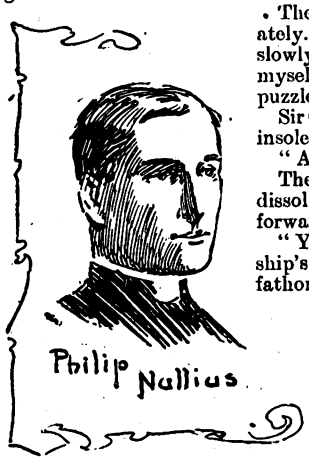
"A very good idea" he muttered—"a very good idea!"

Suddenly the anxious gaze of the man who had once been a gentleman flashed with a strange expression. The cluster of charms that hung from Sir Cyprian's broad gold albert came under the sudden glint of light which danced in particular upon a tiny bright coin, something like a sovereign, hanging among the rest of the baronet's trinkets.

The man drew in his breath with a sibilant sound and made a sudden rush forward.

Quick as lightning the baronet sprang forward and clutched the stranger's collar.

"So, you rascal!" he exclaimed, "that was your little game—was it?"



The man looked at him desperately. "I am no thief," he said slowly; "I only wished to assure myself of a certain thing that had puzzled me."

Sir Cyprian laughed: the fellow's insolence amused him.

"And what was that?"

The shabby outcast with the dissolute, reprobate face leant forward and whispered hoarsely:

"You cannot summon her ladyship's lackeys, Sir Cyprian; I have fathomed something that has baffled and worried me for some very long time. I recognised the sign of one of the secret leaders of a certain society of which I know a little. It is the Sign of the Spade among your other charms, Sir Cyprian. The order is honoured by such a noble member, whose face has been withheld for so long, but whose brain has done such good work for it."

Slowly, and with a curious tightening of his blonde skin, the baronet let go the man's collar.

"You had better make yourself scarce, my good fellow!" he said slowly after a pause. "Others may not look upon you as the harmless crank that I do."

As the man, with a mocking laugh, ran swiftly past the astonished servants out into the street Sir Cyprian fell back into his chair, looking strangely old, and the hand that swept his brow trembled slightly.

"A very awkward meeting," he muttered; "but I shall not allow it to go further! That fellow must not recognise me again. He may become dangerous, and—on the other hand, he may not!"

A gentle sigh fluttered to his lips, and a steel-like gleam flickered in his seraphic eyes as he repeated softly:

"On the other hand, he may not. I must see Debenham to-morrow. There is no time to be lost"

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Marcella Makes an Enemy.

THE following day Sir Cyprian Rust returned from Crawley, and after spending the whole of the morning in the City, he appeared at lunch looking as though everything had gone well with him, for his smile was gentle, and his voice softly sympathetic as he asked his lovely sister-in-law whether a drive would not do both her headache and Marcella good.

Lady Violet looked at him sharply. "How do you know that I have a headache?" she said wonderingly.

Sir Cyprian smiled deprecatingly. "It does not tax my ingenuity to suppose that the dinner of last night has had the morning effect of making you feel just a little fagged," he answered suavely. "Most women would feel the strain of entertaining a millionaire like Mr. Caleb J. Johnson!"

A faint colour stained Lady Violet's creamy skin, which the baronet's smiling blue eyes were keen to note.

"Mr. Johnson," she said, slowly, "is not so objectionable as his wealth suggests. And as for entertaining him," she smiled slightly, "I think he did that for himself."

"I am glad you constitute yourself such a champion of the Gold King," laughed Sir Cyprian genially, "for he has invited you and Marcella to tea, I believe, one day this week. I trust you will accept it," he went on, gazing steadily at the white, set face. "I particularly desire Marcella to see that original of Leonardo da Vinci's he claims to possess, so take her with you, Violet."

Lady Violet's eyes rested for a moment on the fresh beauty of the girl, who was looking particularly happy and radiant in a gown of simply-made, blue serge that fitted the lithe young figure to perfection, and her lips trembled with a momentary weakness.

"I shall most certainly take Marcella with me," she answered slowly, "but she must curb her impatience until Mr. Johnson invites us, though," she added, her mouth breaking into a sudden smile, "I must warn Marcella that the original 'Mona Lisa' of Leonardo da Vinci hangs in the Louvre! And it would be difficult for even Mr. Johnson's money to buy that! However, his copy may be a very good one!"

Marcella laughed brightly. "I am afraid, Aunt Violet," she said, "that I have not inherited father's taste for originals, and am quite happy with a copy! I have not the artistic temperament. I suppose I am like my mother. Father tells me she was no artist."

Lady Violet did not answer, but under her breath she murmured: "Thank God for it!" Then she raised her eyes

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(*continued.*)

to her brother-in-law's face, and after a quick, half-questioning, half-appealing glance into his boyish blue eyes that told her nothing, averted her head.

"By the way," said Edward Day languidly, turning his fair, insipidly handsome face towards Lady Violet, "are you aware, Aunt Vi, that you had a most undesirable guest last night?"

Sir Cyprian, who had entered into a conversation with Marcella, suddenly paused, and watched his sister-in-law's face intently. He had puzzled greatly over the presence of the shabby, swaggering man who had appeared so suddenly from behind the foliage round the fountain, and a brief suspicion had taken root in his mind that perhaps his lovely sister-in-law could throw some light on it.

Lady Violet raised her brows with a puzzled expression.

"An undesirable guest, Edward?" she repeated. "Surely not! We were almost a family party last night."

"Anyway," Edward Day said, with a laugh, "I saw a beggarly-looking chap running down the stairs and out into the hall! It occurred to me at the time that he was discovered in some pilfering in one of the rooms, but as he was allowed to go scot-free, I concluded he must have been admitted in the ordinary way."

"Really, Edward, I am afraid I am not informed of the coming and going of all the inmates or visitors in the house!" Lady Violet laughed. "Possibly it was one of the tradesmen leaving something!"

When Sir Cyprian was saying "good-bye," his sister-in-law drew him aside.

"Is it any use my asking you to let me off taking her with me? Can you not release me from that pain?"

He looked at her with mild reproof.

"My dear Violet, it is my wish that my daughter should accompany you to the house of Mr. Johnson, or to any other friend whom you may be visiting. She is a clever girl, with a marvellous gift of description and assimilation. I shall make her a most useful companion in time!" and a mocking smile curved his fine mouth.

Lady Violet's pale cheeks grew even paler, and her dark eyes flashed with suppressed emotion, as she said pleadingly:

"Don't sully that spotless nature with your diabolical genius! Let her at least keep outside the mire and the gutter that our feet are embedded in! Have you no mercy—no sense of humanity that will deter you from making a tool of that most precious creature?"

Sir Cyprian smiled satirically. "Surely, Violet," he murmured gently, "you are labouring under some mistaken idea? How should I want to do anything that would hurt my own child? I only wish to cultivate in her a love of the beautiful in art! Do you blame me for that?"

With a spurt of sudden courage she replied in the same low voice. "You need not keep up that pretence with me, Cyprian! I know you through and through, and I warn you that if I notice one single change in Marcella that your evil influence may work, I shall brave everything, be hated even, and put her on her guard! Tell her *who* and *what* you are! Don't drive me too far; a worm will turn, you know, and I am a desperate woman!"

Sir Cyprian looked at her without replying. She had for so long been passive that he was secretly taken aback by her new attitude. It suggested a stronger influence in her life than his had been, one that undermined the power he had wielded for so many years.

Was it the influence of another man? he wondered, or an even deeper one—the love of a woman of the world for an innocent girl? He was inclined to think it the latter; the one he could stem in its course, but the former would take her for ever out of his reach.

"It rests with yourself entirely, my dear Violet," he answered in a kind tone, "whether Marcella remains a happy girl, ignorant of those things of which you would inform her, or in a very much worse position in life.

"Think," he went on, "how would you improve her prospects by telling her what you threaten? Would she thank you for the information? I think not. Marcella is a proud girl, with a hatred of anything underhand or mercenary. You would lose her altogether then!"

A change passed over the mobile face of the listening woman. She could not but admit the truth of his statement.

"One thing more!" she murmured. "Suppose I were in a position to repay you all the money you had given me—since—since then, would you let me have her? She could come without knowing the worst! I would tell her nothing of the past. I would be so glad to keep her with me on any terms."

The baronet's handsome face hardened. "On no conditions will I ever allow Marcella to remain with you longer than a week—or so long as I desire," he replied curtly. "And, as to repayment, I shall never consent to receive such a thing at your hands! So, my dear sister-in-law, you must consider the subject closed from now! Neither of us can afford to go back! If you play your cards properly you may enjoy Marcella's society as often as you like—with reservation—but so much as hint to her one little thing, and she will be dead to you!"

When the waiting carriage had driven off with Sir Cyprian to the station, Lady Violet went slowly in search of Marcella. She was thinking of the last speech of her task-master, and her expression was a curious one.

As she left the library the butler met her with a telegram on a salver.

She took it up idly, and opening it, read:

"*Have left England as promised, shall not worry you again.*"

With a sense of relief she crushed the orange-tinted envelope into a ball. That episode was finished then. She need no longer live in dread of a scandal. The other portion of the skeleton in her cupboard had kept his word. She began to think kindly of this man she had once married—how many years ago she hardly liked to think. Nothing remained to bring him back to her thoughts—nothing.

A sound fell upon her ear with a sinister mockery. It was the light, sudden laugh of Marcella, ringing and bell-like, innocent of the effect of her mirth.

Lady Violet bit her lip sharply. She realised for the first time that she could never quite forget the man in the shabby clothes.

At the door of her boudoir she paused. Marcella was talking to Edward Day, her nephew, who was also her secretary, and for whom she entertained a kindly pity rather than love.

"Please don't ask me again, Mr. Day," Marcella was saying in her honest, straightforward way. "I could never marry you, because I do not love you! Please let this be final between us! I know you very slightly, and don't think I could ever be anything more than I am to you now—a good friend!"

"But I love you, Marcella!" Edward answered eagerly. "And will teach you to love me! Besides, it is my aunt's dearest wish that we should marry; she has told me so, and I know you love her!"

The girl's voice softened. "Yes, I love Aunt Violet, but I know she would not wish me to sacrifice myself in marrying a man I did not love! It would be unlike her!"

The young man's fair face clouded. He had calculated that with the daughter of the rich Sir Cyprian Rust as his wife he would be able to settle his most pressing debts without letting his aunt know of them. And the knowledge that Marcella was not so pliable as he thought was an awkward awakening.

"Come!" he said, forcing a smile to his lips, "you are naturally startled, as all girls are at their first proposal, and don't know your own mind. But you will think this over, won't you, and see if you can give me any hope?"

Marcella shook her head. She was sorry to hurt him, but her mind was made up for all time

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"I can never say anything else, Edward," she answered sadly. "I do not love you, and I will not marry you! Please drop the subject."

An ugly look stole into the weak, dissipated face of the man.

"I suppose you have met your future husband already?" he sneered, "among the classic population of the village of Crawley! What is he? The village doctor, or the village curate?"

A sudden wave of colour stained the girl's pale face. "You are impertinent!" she said quietly. "Surely such manners are a drawback to success! Will you kindly leave the room, or shall I?"

"Oh, don't get on the high horse!" he said sullenly. "I suppose I am a fool to speak as I do, but, in spite of my manners, I really love you, Marcella. And considering all I know about you, you ought to be glad that any decent chap should wish to make you his wife. Money's not everything, you know!"

Marcella caught her breath with a sudden gasp, and the silent woman at the door imitated her unconsciously.

"I don't understand," Marcella said haughtily. "Were you not my aunt's nephew I should be inclined to think that her footman was in the room. Explain yourself at once!"

"Will you marry me, Marcella?" said Edward Day. "Will you be my wife?"

An uneasy laugh broke from Edward Day, the craven coward. He had expected tears, not hauteur.

"I mean that you can't have everything," he retorted. "And in spite of being an heiress, you would find most men fight shy of you if they knew what I do, although you are handsome and unlike other girls!"

Marcella eyed him contemptuously. "Say what you have to say, don't suggest. I am quite able to bear it, I can assure you!"

He flushed darkly. "Are you? Then all I will say now is, ask your father, Sir Cyprian, where your mother died, and why there is no headstone to her memory in the churchyard at Crawley! There is something strange about the different reports of her supposed death!" he added maliciously.

There was a silence alive with signs of a coming storm, then Marcella spoke.

"When you asked me to marry you, I was sorry I could not say 'yes,' because I considered that you had done me the greatest honour a man can do a woman, but now that I see you can stoop in your jealous spite to insult not only myself but"—and her voice quivered slightly—"the memory of a dead mother, I have only the most bitter contempt for you."

"And I also!" added another voice in tones of deep indignation, and Lady Violet came forward slowly, gazing with blazing eyes at the crestfallen young bully. Then she said slowly:

"I will speak with you later. I need only mention now that your conduct is the most pitiful and disgraceful exhibition I have ever witnessed. I am only glad that after all you have no blood-tie with myself!"

Muttering an excuse, and with a sullen expression on his weak face, Edward Day left the room, but when he got outside he shook his hand at the door and whispered hoarsely:

"All right, score as much as you like now, I shall have my innings soon, and pay back the snub I have received, my haughty Miss Marcella! I'm not good enough for you, eh? We'll see! I shall never rest now until I find out *something* that will give me a hold over you. And then," he laughed vindictively, "you will be glad to come off your pedestal when I choose to ask you!"

NINTH CHAPTER.
Fortune's Wheel.

When they were alone, Marcella went up to her aunt with a tremulous laugh.

"You must think me very foolish, dear aunt Violet, to have been so easily annoyed with Edward," she said timidly, "but I do not mind him abusing me, though that was very uncalled-for, but when he suggested fearful things about—about that dear mother whom I do not remember, but whom I love and honour with all my heart, I—I—could not restrain my temper!"

Lady Violet clasped the girl to her tenderly. "Dearest," she said in a low, earnest voice; "I love to see that the memory of the mother you have lost is still fresh and dear to you. I am sure that—that——" her voice faltered, "could she see you now, as I do, and hold you in her arms as I am holding you, she would rejoice in the love of a daughter like you."

"And you are not vexed because I could not give Edward any other answer?" Marcella queried after a pause.

Lady Violet shuddered. "No, darling; I am glad you gave the answer you did. In every respect Edward is no fit husband for you. He is weak, and without any sense of honour or principle. I am sadly disappointed in him, but he shall not annoy you again!"

"And you don't think," Marcella continued in a low voice, "that he meant anything by what he said about my mother and there being no headstone or plate to her memory in the church at Crawley, or even her grave there?"

Lady Violet frowned and her eyes did not meet those of the girl as she answered soothingly:

"Edward was in such a rage, dear child, that you must not heed anything he said. Your dear mother died abroad, so that accounts for her grave not being in Crawley churchyard. It was her wish, I believe, to be buried in the place where she died, and you know how absent-minded Sir Cyprian, your father, is! It would not occur to him that he should put a plate in the church."

Before Marcella could make any comment, Lady Violet continued quickly: "I want you, Marcella, to promise me that you will let me know at once should you ever need a friend in any great trouble, or write to me should you notice anything that puzzles you at the 'Court.' Promise me this, dear, because I shall know then that I may consider myself bound to you in any trouble that should befall you! I can only see you so rarely, dear, that I would be very happy with such an assurance from you!"

Marcella laughed softly. "Dear aunt Violet, why, of course, you are the first person to whom I should fly in any trouble or worry! In fact, I sometimes wish you were always with me," she added impulsively; "you are just the best substitute for the mother I have lost!"

Lady Violet winced, then smiled through sudden tears.

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Dupes of Destiny

(*continued.*)

"Then that is a bargain, dear," she said gently; "I am your mother by proxy! That will be a secret between us!"

"Why don't you return to the 'Court' with me, aunt Violet?" Marcella asked, with a bewitching smile.

The eyes of the woman of fashion, whose name was being linked with that of a millionaire, contracted suddenly:

"I am a town product, dear," she said lightly, "the country bores me unutterably. But my heart will be with you, and sometimes your father will allow you to come and stay with me."

"I love the 'Court'!" said Marcella thoughtfully; "though it is fearfully dull at times! Even father grew morbid one day," she laughed. "He made his will, leaving everything he had to me, and I made mine making him my heir and sole executor! What I don't know, but it amused us!"

Lady Violet caught her arm suddenly.

"What—what—made him do that?" she stammered; "you have nothing, Marcella, to leave! By Sir Basil Wingate's will that made your father his heir, the money and the title at his death have been willed to an elder son of yours, should you marry—but—but you have no right to make a will, dear! Sir Basil hated women, since his only daughter ran away from him and so left everything that would only benefit male heirs. Had your father had a *son* he would have been that heir—but as it is, the estate and title with the money will revert to *your* son!"

Marcella laughed. "What a stupid idea! But I don't want money! I shall be perfectly happy, just having you, aunt Violet!"

The older woman smiled wistfully, as she moved towards the door.

"One day you will marry, dear, a man you love, I hope; and then I shall take a back seat, naturally!"

A slight flush stained the girl's clear skin as the vision of a dark, earnest face with steadfast, grey eyes rose before her—the face of the village curate, Philip Nullius.

Lady Violet noticed the blush, and woman-like, knew that there was a rival already in the field for the love she had so long been deprived of. But when she was alone her thoughts went back to the sentence in which Marcella had said that she and her father had "made their wills in each other's favour!"

What did it mean? she wondered anxiously. That there was an undercurrent of danger she could not but think, knowing the nature of the man who never did the most simple action without one or two powerful motives as the outcome of his simplicity.

"The life of poor Laura was insured!" she murmured, "for twenty thousand pounds, and the child's also! But that was nearly twenty-one years ago! Had he wished to benefit by it surely such a thing would have happened—earlier! It cannot be now—that some diabolical plot has occurred to him!

"No—no—how foolish I am," she muttered with white lips; "that cannot be; it would be too dangerous, and so far he has avoided that measure! No, something fresh has happened to cause him to think of making wills. I must watch carefully without letting him suspect that I am doing so, or I shall only hasten the plan he has in his mind, and be prevented from seeing her."

Still thinking deeply she rang the bell and requested that Mr. Day should be sent to her if he were still in the house.

When, after a few minutes, Edward Day presented himself before the woman who had been his best friend for so many years, he knew that he had lost his one chance of making anything out of the future generosity of Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox.

She looked at him coldly. "I wish to come to the point at once," she said distantly; "I will not touch on the subject of your insult to my niece, Miss Rust, but will inform you that I no longer desire your presence in my house! You are utterly unworthy the name of gentleman, and honour has no place in your vocabulary."

"Aunt Vi," the young man exclaimed incredulously; "don't kick me out like a cur because I fell in love with Marcella like any ordinary man!"

A sneer played about the mouth of Lady Violet.

"Unfortunately, like 'any ordinary man' you could not take your dismissal like a gentleman! But I am serious in telling you that I wish you to leave my house."

"Surely, aunt——" began the fair-faced young coward, "you are just a little hard on a chap!"

"I am not hard," she answered, "and now that you are leaving my house, I wish to tell you something that, had I seen you grow up as a gentleman and man of honour, I would always have kept from you, but your conduct and many extravagances have so disappointed me, that your final insult to Marcella Rust decided me in acquainting you with a fact that may perhaps be the means of making a man of you, though it may lower your vanity to the dust!"

"Tell me," he said hoarsely, "aunt Vi, don't bait me! I am in agony! What can you know about me?"

"To begin with," she went on slowly, "I am not your aunt! I took you out of pity from a fate for which you were probably intended. I was a first-class passenger on board a ship coming home from Australia, and a poor woman among the steerage passengers gave birth to two children. Out of pity I adopted one. That child—intended for a foundling, was yourself! Had you conducted yourself with the slightest sign of gratitude towards me," she finished coldly, "I would have spared you this!"

"And—and—I am a beggar?" he said painfully.

"No! I will allow you £250 a year because you grew up with extravagant ideas, for which I was to blame, and I am also giving you a chance of making a living for yourself. I have here a letter of introduction to Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, the financier. He may find you a post, and if you are steady, there is a good chance of your still doing well."

Unsteadily, and with a livid face, Edward Day found himself in his bedroom, with the letter of introduction to the man whose fellow guest he had been the night before. The change in his fortunes was so great that he could hardly feel it yet. He was only conscious of a deep hatred for the girl who had sent his prospects tottering, and a loathing for the woman who had opened his eyes to his real status! He drew out the letter and read:

DEAR MR. JOHNSON—*I am introducing to your kind notice my secretary, Mr. Edward Day, in the hope that you may be able to find him something to do. He is clever, and under an influence like yours, may be a credit to his sex yet, though he is still young and impulsive. Trusting you may oblige me in this, as I am now dispensing with his services, and do not like to throw him aside—I am, very sincerely yours,*

VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX.

For a few moments the secretary's face was not pleasant to look upon. It was vicious and vindictive.

He put the letter on the table and read it several times, carefully tracing the words with a dry pen over and over again. At last he seemed satisfied, and smiling grimly, he pulled a sheet of paper towards him, stamped with the address of the town house Lady Violet was occupying; and after spoiling several sheets of the paper, he turned out something that appeared to satisfy him.

"A pauper, am I? A nameless brat! All right, my dear 'aunt'! You have kindly turned me adrift, and it will be your letter of 'introduction' that will set me on my feet far above my expectations!"

Then, pulling the blotter towards him again, he began to write carefully a letter that seemed to require a great deal of care and thought.

At last he flung the pen on the table with a satisfied sigh, and laughed softly:

"Here begins my new life! I am armed *cap-à-pie*!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial next week.)

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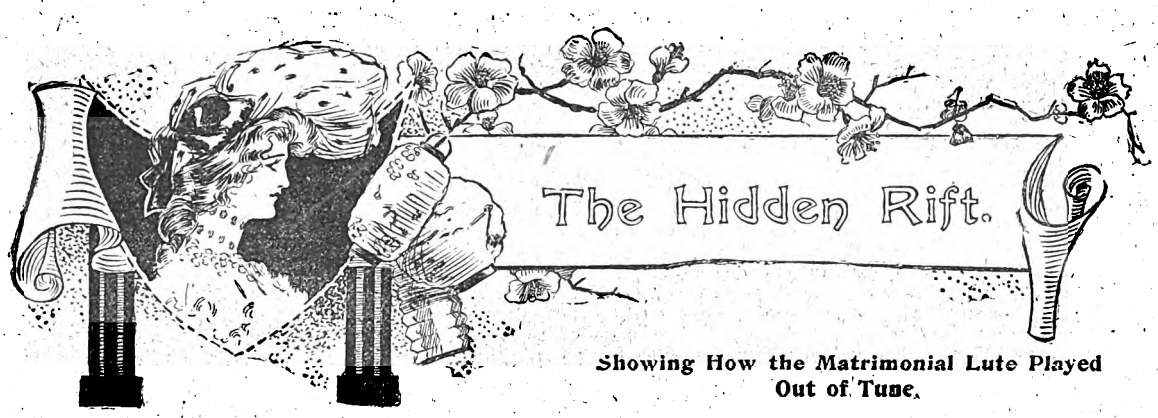

Showing How the Matrimonial Lute Played Out of Tune.

"'If ever two persons were destined to be happy together, they are!" was the comment of old Mrs. Wilford, a distant connection of the Marchmont family, as she watched young Leslie Marchmont and his charming bride drive off in the carriage, followed by showers of rice and old slippers, on the way to the railway station, where they were to take tickets for Bournemouth to spend their honeymoon.

The sentiment was echoed very sincerely by the three or four people who chanced to overhear Mrs. Wilford's remark, and if the question had been addressed to all the other guests, "What chance do you think those newly-married people have of being supremely happy?" the answer would most probably have been to the effect that there was no possibility of their being otherwise than gloriously happy.

Leslie Marchmont and his young bride, Myra, had been devoted lovers for two years. Leslie was a fine fellow, with a splendid position as joint partner with his cousin—a much older man—in a firm that did a large export business and made a lot of money, to say nothing of the very solid private account with which his name was credited at the bank. Myra Lawrence was a charming girl with a sweet face and a lovable disposition. Everyone admired her, and, rare as such a thing is, she had no enemies. Her frank nature disarmed envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness on the part of others, and she was a general favourite.

Leslie looked down at his bride as they rolled along, and he was filled with tenderness and the pride of possession.

"I will take care of you, little girl!" he whispered softly, his voice quivering with love. "You are not afraid to trust yourself to me?"

"Why should I be, Leslie?" she answered in a sweet, low tone, looking up at him with an air of implicit trustfulness. Her long lashes were just tipped with suspicious moisture, but that was due to a combination of joy and sadness, the latter at the thought of leaving home. "I *know* that I shall be perfectly happy with you, dear!"

"My one thought will be to fill your life with contentment!" he whispered, and, taking advantage of the momentary seclusion, he bent still lower and kissed her.

Who could have supposed that there would be a rift in the lute, making the music of married life lose some of its tunefulness, within the course of a few months? Yet it was so, for Leslie Marchmont made a mistake so often made by young men; he had not sufficiently judged the character of the girl to whom he was so devoted. He was full of love, he imagined that he knew her disposition thoroughly, and could make her life glad, yet he had, in the exuberance of his passion, overlooked one important trait.

Myra looked back with considerable pride over the last five years of her life. She had always been fond of drawing, and at the age of seventeen she had begun to earn a reputation as a black and white artist, making sketches for the illustrated papers and weekly home journals. Her first accepted sketch was published in a ladies' journal, and from that time she went on steadily. It was not necessary for her to work with her pencil in order to maintain herself, for her parents were well-to-do, but it pleased her to devote some of her leisure to this work, and by so doing she earned enough money to keep herself, and to spend in doing good to others. She insisted on paying a certain sum for her board and lodging, and it gratified her to think that she was independent. It was not an obtrusive kind of independence; it was a feeling of dignity, and the parents encouraged it.

To Leslie, when he appeared on the scene and captured her young heart, she was the more attractive on that account, as he knew that she would be the kind of woman to encourage him by her bravery in moments when misfortune threatened, as it might do, however remote it appeared at that moment. Myra looked up to him as a prospective wife should, and thought only of making life pleasant for him. She knew that she would give up her work, but that was not a matter of importance. Her occupations would naturally be different. As to the money earned thereby, why, Leslie would be able to supply all that she needed quite easily.

It was just that spirit of dignified independence which Leslie failed to understand properly, and the result of this failure made itself apparent within the first nine months of their married life.

An attentive observer would have detected a difference in the bearing of these young people towards one another, yet it would have been difficult for him to have defined in what this difference consisted. There seemed to be an invisible barrier raising itself between them. Myra occasionally looked at Leslie as if she were waiting for him to say something, *hoping* that he would say something, and an expression of disappointment would cross her sweet face as she turned away. He had not uttered the words which she wanted to hear.

It gradually dawned on Leslie that something was amiss, and he could not understand it. Myra had all she wanted, he paid all the bills for the household, almost all their supplies being from firms with whom he ran an account, and settled that account by a monthly cheque, he purchased for her anything she desired in the way of dress, and he gave her money without hesitation when she asked him for some. He had often told her that she could have all she wanted in the way of cash, that she had only to mention the fact and he would write out a cheque or bring the gold home for her. What was it that was ailing her? She was not ill; in fact, he had never seen her in better health!

He resolved to question her on the point, but she was before him.

"Leslie," she said one morning, "I have a request to make."

He gazed at her in some surprise; the tone was just a trifle stiff, and not like that in which she usually made her requests, nor was the style of making the request in any way similar to her usual manner.

It was generally: "Leslie, dear, I want so-and-so; do you really think that you really have enough in the bank to meet

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such lavish expenditure?" And then would be a bright laugh, he would kiss the charming face, and the money would be transferred from his pocket to hers. Yet, as he heard this formal little speech, it occurred to him that those very informal expressions of their early married life had not been repeated lately.

"Certainly, dearest!" he exclaimed. "You know that I am only too pleased to let you have anything you desire!"

"I wish you to give me a separate allowance for my own personal use, Leslie," she said quietly, and if she had raised her hand to strike him he could not have been more surprised.

"I am at a loss to understand the reason of that request, Myra," he said, his own tones becoming rather stiff. "I grudge you nothing, you can have as much money as you desire. To ask me to let you have a private purse is to make a beginning of a system of divided interests which is not at all conducive to our happiness. What I have is yours, you can have it whenever you mention the fact; what more can you ask?"

"I think I ought to have a private purse to which I can go just as I please," she replied coldly. "It is humiliating to compel me to *ask* for everything I require or desire."

Leslie's mouth grew hard.

"It is entirely against my ideas of mutual confidence," he asserted doggedly. "You can have no need for a separate purse; all the bills are paid, you can have all you desire, I give you all the cash you wish for. Your request presents itself to me as the beginning of a division between us which I will not tolerate! I am willing to do most things for you, but not that! I believe you will see that you have been wrong when you reflect calmly on the subject!"

"I wish it!" she said, looking straight at him.

"And I do not!" he returned, meeting her gaze boldly.

For a few seconds they held one another's eyes; it was like the crossing of two blades, preparatory to a duel. Then Myra turned and passed out of the room.

"H'm!" muttered Leslie, flinging himself down into an easy chair. "What has come over Myra? I would have sworn by all that is good, at one time, that her temper was as sweet as honey, as smooth as oil, yet I have noticed lately, although I couldn't fathom the thing, that her temper was changing. She has been just a little irritable at times, and—— Well, perhaps not irritable," he corrected "but certainly less loving. What nonsense is this about a separate allowance? What can she want with money? Anything she likes to mention ——"

He stopped; after a pause, he added, slowly:

"She cannot want money for something which she is not willing to let me know about? No, it cannot be more than a fad; it will vanish, and she will be sorry!"

However, he looked in vain for any expression of regret from Myra, either in word or manner. He felt awkward when he returned to dinner that evening; he had a sentiment of sheepishness as he opened his front door and let himself into his own house. How would Myra meet him? He told himself that he was quite right to refuse, yet he had a uneasy feeling within him.

He found Myra as usual waiting for him at the table, ready to ring for the dinner to be brought in. She was just the same as ever, and the dinner was perfect. He felt half-ashamed of the thought that had crossed his mind, namely, that she would show her resentment by not ministering to him as in the past, and by neglecting the care of the house which had so materially contributed to their happiness. And by the time the meal was concluded, he was wholly ashamed of the thought.

The days glided past; Myra never mentioned the episode of her formal request. She was the same Myra, he told himself illogically, only—only different!

"Do you want any money, dearest?" he asked her pleasantly, nearly a week later. His geniality was partly assumed for the purpose of hiding his perplexity.

"No, Leslie, thank you!" she replied in the same tone.

"Oh, all right!" he answered, feeling uncomfortable, without exactly understanding why. "I'll write you out a cheque whenever you like, you know!"

"Yes, I know, dear!" she replied, as she raised her face for the parting kiss.

"She is still a little sore about it, I fear," he murmured in a disappointed tone. "She doesn't like to ask me just for a while. I know what I'll do, and that will make it all smooth again."

That evening, after dinner, he stole up to her special room and placed a roll of ten bank notes in the drawer among her gloves and other feminine accessories, as he had smilingly described them.

"She is sure to find them, and then she will be all smiles, and she will come behind my chair, put both hands on my cheeks, draw my head back, and kiss me as she used to do. Ah!" And the memory of those blissful moments raised him to the zenith of delight.

He waited for Myra to speak about that roll of notes; his eyes began to twinkle with pleasure whenever he came home during the next week, but Myra said never a word. Nevertheless, she did not ask for money, and he concluded that she had seen the notes and made use of them.

"She couldn't miss them," he said to himself. "As soon as she put her hand in the drawer she would feel the crisp roll. I expect ——" He meditated for a minute. "Yes, that's it. She is a wee bit awkward about mentioning it, although she has used the money and is glad that I have been so——"

He was at a loss for the proper word; "kind" did not seem to be appropriate, and while he was trying to find the correct adjective, the word "inconsistent" flashed across his brain, and it made him warm.

"No, I don't think it is inconsistency on my part," he objected. "If I place a roll of notes in her drawer to do as she likes with, that is different from a separate allowance. Of course I don't want her to tell me about every penny she spends, but that divided interest notion is—it isn't pleasant!"

He paced the room for a few seconds.

"I'll ask her for a kiss," he muttered. "She only wants a good opportunity for reconciliation, and when I look into her sweet eyes as I see her face raised to mine—why, that will settle it, and we shall be happy again."

"Do you want any cash, Myra?" he asked with assumed innocence, as he was preparing to depart on the following morning.

"No, thank you, dear!"

Leslie repressed a smile.

"You are very economical, dearest!" he remarked meaningly. Then, relapsing into a smile that was intended to be a sign of reconciliation, he said: "Do I not deserve a kiss?"

He bent and kissed her, expecting a warm salute; he had almost felt her arms round his neck, in imagination; but he had the greatest of all disappointments in love—that of a kiss accepted, but not returned. Myra's lips were not responsive, only receptive.

Leslie succeeded in concealing his mortification and went off when near the front door he pretended to have thought of something upstairs. His real object was to peep into that drawer. He shivered as he did so; the roll of notes lay there untouched.

He was in a moody frame of mind when he entered his

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private office, where his partner was reclining in an office chair.

"Good morning, old chap!" was Harrison's greeting. "Glad to see your wife has not lost her skill as a result of marriage." He pointed to an open copy of the *Illustrated Times*. "That's a capital sketch."

Like one in a dream, Leslie glanced at the illustration indicated and saw his wife's monogram in the corner. It was fortunate that Harrison was indulging in an extensive yawn and did not pull himself round till Marchmont had regained his wonted coolness.

"Glad you think it's good," replied Leslie, with assumed modesty. "Many letters this morning?"

They then fell to about business and the incident passed. This, then, was his wife's answer to his refusal. In the first flush of vexation, his worse self tried to find some fault with Myra's conduct during the past few days, since that scene; but he was bound to admit that she had been the most careful, the most attentive of wives. And, slowly, he admitted that he had made a mistake.

His better self now conquered. It demands a good deal of courage and nobility of character to confess fully that one is in fault, but Leslie reached that stage before the luncheon hour, and he resolved to leave business for the rest of the day, go home, and take Myra out somewhere. They would have a drive in an open carriage in the rural lanes that were not far from their home; Myra always liked that, and then he would yield and ask for forgiveness.

"I say, dearest," he said, as she looked up in surprise at his return, "things are flat to-day, so I have come home to take you for a drive. I have ordered the fly. It won't take you long to get ready, will it?"

"I am sorry I cannot go this afternoon, Leslie," she replied, paling a little. "I have—something to do."

"Oh, the *Illustrated Times* can wait," he remarked, with an attempt at gaiety. "I have——"

"I am not doing work for the *Times* this afternoon," she said, her face flushing slightly. "I have some menu cards to paint for Mrs. Gascoyne's dinner-party, and they must be finished to-day!"

"Myra! You are not working for our friends?" He shrank back in dismay.

"Why not? She would pay someone else to do them, so I may as well take the money from her. What does it matter whether I receive pay from her or from a journal for work done?"

"Why do you do it?" he groaned.

"I grew tired of being compelled to *ask* whenever I wanted some pocket money," she responded quietly. "As I told you, it was humiliating. I thought that a husband would prefer that his wife should be spared *that*, and I was surprised that you made no arrangement. Then I asked you to do it, and you declined. I could not humiliate myself further, so I turned to my old work, to create what you ought to have allowed but refused to do."

"Then I ask that, at least, you will not lower my pride by working for friends, as though I kept you without funds," he cried.

Once again their eyes met, and they held one another's gaze for what seemed quite a long time. As they gazed into each other's eyes, the defiant look changed, the hardness died away, and an expression of yearning and repentance took its place.

"I was wrong. I came home to confess it and ask for forgiveness, Myra," cried Leslie, holding out his arms. "I failed to understand."

"I was wrong, too," she cried, a little catch in her voice. "I forgot that I might be humiliating you by working for Mrs. Gascoyne. And I ought to have explained differently when I required a separate allowance. Perhaps I have been *too* independent!"

"No, no!" he almost shouted, as he took her in his arms. "Oh, Myra, I am so glad that this miserable trouble is ended."

Myra finished the menu cards, according to promise, but she did no more work of that kind, and even for that she requested Mrs. Gascoyne to give the remuneration to a local charity. She did an occasional sketch for the journals, just for amusement, but she always devoted the proceeds to charitable purposes, for her husband allowed her more than enough.

The rift in the matrimonial lute was sealed, and the old tunefulness returned.

G. E. Lingen.

Your Editor Chats.

This is the last number of another volume. In a few days you will be hearing the bells "Ring out the old, ring in the new," and at the same time they will be heralding the first number of our new volume.

On glancing rapidly through the volume which this issue brings to an end, I am struck with the number of improvements that have been made in it over the previous ones, and I feel now that the excellent fiction matter of which it is composed is served up in a very tasty manner. Yet I do not intend to let *Short Stories* rest on its laurels, but I am going to make a big effort (and it will need it, too!) to bring this little paper a few more rungs up the ladder of Perfection, and some totally new and original features will be introduced.

I often receive cheery and encouraging missives from my readers, and these show that my attempts to please you have not been in vain. I sincerely trust that I shall number all my readers of 1903 amongst the increased *clientèle* of 1904. You have at this juncture of *Short Stories*' history a fine opportunity to introduce the paper to your friends, both male and female, as the new serial by Blanche Eardley, that commenced last week, is likely to be very popular. "Dupes of Destiny" is destined to be one of the most popular serials we have ever had. Remind your friends that they can start reading to-day, as the synopsis will give them the complete thread of the story.

"A Criminal Millionaire" is drawing to a conclusion, thrilling and effective. This serial, which has excited great interest among my readers, will be followed by a very powerful series of revelations, told by the chief figure in the series herself. These amazing episodes will be entitled, "Decoyed!" and the heroine will tell of the adventures that befell her at the hands of those who laid their schemes to entrap her. I will tell you more about this coming series next week.

Bolton carries off the guinea that I offered for what I considered the best solution of the Unsolved Love Problem, "The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple."

The fortunate gentleman is Mr. S. Chorlton, of 227 Spa Road, Bolton, and he expressed his arguments in a very terse but conclusive form.

By the number of solutions received from readers I should judge this problem to be one of the most interesting of the series.

Do not forget that next Monday, December 28th, is the very last day on which I can receive letters in reply to "The Duty of Roger Forbes." Full particulars of this problem appeared in our Christmas number.

December 31st is the closing day for the Statue Competition and the Running Riddles Competition announced in our Christmas number.

Your Editor.

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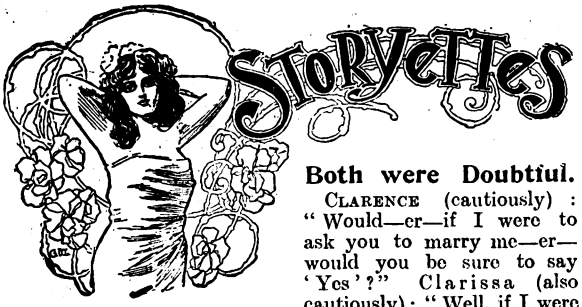

Both were Doubtful.

Clarence (cautiously): "Would—er—if I were to ask you to marry me—er—would you be sure to say 'Yes'?" Clarissa (also cautiously): "Well, if I were to say 'Yes'—er—would you be sure to ask me—er—to marry you? I'd like to be sure on that point."

Radium *v.* Gold.

He: "Darling, you are worth your weight in gold!" She: "No, John—I cannot marry any man who doesn't think me worth my weight in radium!"

The Only One Appreciated.

"Madge," said her father, "William asked me for your hand last night, and I consented." "Well, papa, that's the first bill of mine you haven't objected to."

Quite True.

"Don't talk to me," said the lettuce to the turnip; "I have a heart, and you haven't." "I don't see how that can be," replied the turnip, "you never get mashed, and I do."

He Blamed the Cook.

Young Wife (at dinner): "I didn't tell you, Adolphus, I cooked the dinner to-day myself." Husband: "Indeed! Then in my thoughts I have been doing poor Mary Ann a great injustice!"

He was Not so Backward as He Looked.

Ethel (who thinks her country cousin bashful): "Can't you find anything better to squeeze than a felt hat?" Country Cousin: "Wait a bit. I'm only reducin' my energy for fear I might hurt you."

Like Father Like Son.

Stern Father: "What an unearthly hour that fellow stops till every night, Dora! What does your mother say about it?" Daughter: "She says men haven't altered a bit since she was young, pa."

How Comforting!

She: "And you don't find it tiresome, dear, with me? You are sure you don't want to go back to your bachelor life again?" He: "Quite, my darling; indeed, married life is so awfully jolly that if you were to die to-night, I'd get married again to-morrow!"

They're Always at It.

Mrs. Widgers: "Indeed! If you knew half as much as you *think* you know, you'd know half as much again as you do know." Mr. Widgers: "Thank you! And if you knew twice as much as you *don't* know, you'd know three times as much as there is to know!"

He Still Keeps His Opinion.

Young Wife (sobbing): "I will not keep still! Before we were married you said I had a charming flow of language." Young Husband: "And so you have, dear. It not only flows, but dashes, leaps, bounds, roars, goes over cataracts and mill-sluices and there is an occasional water-spout as well."

They are Supposed to be Perfect.

He: "So the engagement is broken off?" She: "Yes. He told her he thought she should stop reading novels and read something more substantial, something that would improve her mind." He: "Well?" She: "Well, the idea of a man intimating to his *fiancée* that she could be improved in any way!"

She was Shocked.

Angelina: "What does the motto on the ring you gave me mean?" Edwin: "'Faithful to the last.'" Angelina: "Monstrous! I thought I was the first!"

Very Much Better.

Gladys: "I was so happy over Fred's letter. I fairly hugged myself." May: "Well, I was happier than you. Reggie called on me, and he did the hugging."

The Hint Direct.

"Would you mind pinning a flower in my coat when I go?" asked young De Borem. "Certainly not," replied Miss Wearyun. "It will afford me pleasure to do it at once."

Both Had Their Hopes.

Malcolm: "After we are married, Marie, you must never hesitate to ask me when you want money." Marie: "No, indeed, Malcolm; and I hope you will never hesitate about giving it to me."

A Successful Wooing.

"How many stars can you see?" she asked. "Two more than you," said he. "How do you make that out?" she asked. "*I* can see your eyes," said he. And that was the beginning of it all.

A Pleasant Outlook.

Newly-Made Bride: "Mamma says she does not think we will ever quarrel as she and papa do." Groom: "Never, dearest?" Newly-Made Bride: "No; she says you will be much easier to manage than papa was."

Jack Would Like the Favours.

Mabel: "Don't you think Fido is awfully clever?" Jack: "No, I do not." Mabel: "You horrid thing! Why don't you think so?" Jack: "Because he tries to get away when you kiss him. No intelligent being would do that. Just try it on me once."

Overheard at Brighton.

Harry: "Did you notice that lovely girl? What glorious eyes, with an expression like that of a startled fawn." Old Hand (calmly): "If she has that look she's from London." Harry: "Why?" Old Hand: "You see, all the girls there are that way. Dodging 'buses and cabs, you know!"

A Handy Name.

"I hear you are engaged again. What is the name of the fortunate young lady?" "Her name is Lucinda. That's one reason why I engaged myself to her." "Because her name is Lucinda?" "Just so. You see, that's the name of two former sweethearts of mine, and I can use on this present Lucinda the sonnets I used to my previous Lucindas. She is the most convenient *fiancée* I've had in the last ten years."

A Well-Merited Retort.

Monocle Cadsby (doing his celebrated act of fascination, and speaking to a young lady unescorted): "I think—ah——I have met you before, ah. Glad to see you; might I have the pleasure of accompanying you in your walk?" Young Lady (looking the thing in men's clothes up and down): "I think so, provided you walk about fifteen paces behind, in livery; that is, of course, if the character from your last place is satisfactory."

Verdict of Not Guilty.

"Do you mean to swear," said the foreman of the jury to the witness, "that at the time of the quarrel that constitutes the cause of this action, you saw the prisoner with a coal-scuttle in his hands, making ready to heave it at his wife?" "Not exactly," said the witness, with considerable hesitation. "I mean to swear that I saw the prisoner with a coal-scuttle in his hands." "In what attitude was he then?" asked the presiding judge. "Well, now, since your lordship has asked, I'll tell the truth. The prisoner was lying down with the coal-scuttle over his head, and his wife on the top of it."

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Reunited at Last.

A Touching Story of Poverty and Kindness.

It was Christmas Eve; dark, cold, and wet, the rain driving in torrents round the corners of the streets, where people ran against each other and scowled under their dripping umbrellas as they received the by no means welcome drops from those of their neighbours.

But in Chancery Lane there was not a creature to be seen, save a slight, thinly-clad girl, who was unprotected both against cold and wet, for she had neither cloak nor umbrella—a pale girl with great eyes which had an appealing, wistful expression in them which made the passer-by turn and look at her again, if he were of an artistic mind, recognising the wonderful possibilities which lay in them.

She crept under an archway presently, and stood looking up and down the long, narrow street with its line of tall, grey, grim buildings, wondering what she was to do. There was not a hansom or four-wheeler to be seen, even if she had had the means with which to pay one to take her home; but that was an extravagance of which she hardly thought, for the shillings which lay in her small, well-worn leather purse were few and painfully earned.

Two gentlemen passed her, comfortable-looking City men, with their great-coats well buttoned up to their ears, and sheltered by capacious umbrellas. They were men of middle-age, prosperous, and self-satisfied, hastening home to good dinners, and they had not a thought to give to the poor girl standing under the archway.

"Dear me!" said one, "that young woman will get very wet." And the thought of ill-clad young women in the street, without umbrellas or cloaks, being unpleasant, he hastened onwards.

She must make an effort to reach the Waterloo Bridge Road, the girl resolved mentally, and from there take the omnibus to Kennington, where she lived. So she began to walk forward as bravely as she could.

Suddenly a pleasant voice in her ear made her start.

"May I offer you the shelter of my umbrella?" it said; "you are getting dreadfully wet."

The London girl who works for her living, if she be respectable, has a horror of being accosted in the streets, and regards gentlemen somewhat in the light of natural enemies.

The colour rushed into the girl's pale cheeks, and she glanced up hastily and proudly enough, but the face which met her gaze was so youthful, frank, and kindly in appearance that her suspicions were disarmed.

The owner of this merry, boyish face and pleasant voice was a gentleman undoubtedly. Why had he thought of offering her such a civility?

Looking down at her dress with a sigh, she accepted his offer, not without some embarrassment, and they walked along side by side for a little way, the young man talking pleasantly and courteously, without any approach to that familiarity which she dreaded.

He learnt that she lived in Kennington with a sister, who was very ill, and almost unable to work; while as for herself, she was not so clever, and had less schooling; but she managed to earn a pound a week as a typine, being engaged from nine in the morning till seven at night.

Her companion regarded her with genuine pity and astonishment.

"What!" he said in a horrified tone, "you work ten hours daily for three shillings and fourpence. It seems very little."

The girl stared.

"Some only get from twelve to fifteen shillings a week for the same hours," she said simply. "So that, you see, I am well off."

Their ways now parted.

"How will you get home?" he asked concernedly, looking up and down the wet, dismal street. "I say, you won't get the 'bus just directly, and it does not put you down at your door, you said, so won't you let me lend you my umbrella? We fellows don't mind a little wetting, but you have no cloak or anything, and will get soaked through. Do permit me. It won't inconvenience me in the least."

She paused and hesitated.

It was certainly very wet, and she would be drenched, she knew, but still she could not make up her mind to take it. She declined the proffered loan, and moved away, but the rain beat upon her so fiercely that she paused for a second and looked back.

He saw it, and was at her side in a minute. This time she did not refuse, though she felt half ashamed of herself for yielding; but, after all, creature comforts are very dear to us, and we naturally hate unpleasant or hard things, and accept the smooth when we can get it.

"Here is my card," said the young man, fumbling in his pocket. "But you have not told me your name; would you mind doing so?"

"My name is Frances Montgomery," she answered, looking at him quickly. "Are you not afraid to lend me your umbrella? You do not know who I am. I might not return it to you, you know."

He looked at her and smiled.

"I am not afraid of that," he answered pleasantly, and, raising his hat, walked quickly away.

The girl looked after him with a strange feeling stirring at her heart. She was not accustomed to meet with consideration or kindness in her daily walk; there were few who stopped to think of her. It surprised her that anyone should do so.

But the young man who had stopped to pity and consider her was very young, very impulsive, and very generous. If he had lived a few more years in the world he would probably have passed on like the rest, but youth is strangely indiscreet, strangely warm-hearted sometimes, and he had not learnt caution or discretion yet. Moreover, the girl was young and pleasing to look upon, and he was young likewise, therefore open to impressions.

If she had been old, ugly, and wrinkled, we cannot venture to assert that he would have done precisely the same thing.

When the girl had reached the narrow, dingy street in Kennington where she and her sister lived, she rang the bell quickly, and ran up the steps with more alacrity than she was wont to do.

The tall, thin, sharp-featured woman who opened the door and took the umbrella from her hand eyed it somewhat sharply. It was a large silk one of excellent quality, and the handle was handsomely mounted with silver.

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"Lawk-a-day, Miss Frances!" she remarked with a grim smile. "Where did this 'ere fine piece o' goods come from, I'd like to know?"

"It was lent me," the girl answered, blushing guiltily.

The woman shook her head gravely.

"Look here, miss," she said, catching hold of Frances' arm. "Don't go for to take up with any smooth-spoken gentleman as wants to keep company with you in the streets. There's no good as ever comes of it, my dear, and for the sake of the darling upstairs I wouldn't have no harm come to you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hogg," Frances answered somewhat coldly. "I think I can take care of myself."

"There now, I didn't want to offend you," the landlady said kindly. "But, you see, you're pretty, my love; and it's always the pretty ones as gets tempted; and this is a wicked, cruel world, as you'll find to your sorrow when you've lived a few years more in it."

"Are you very wet, Frances?" asked a faint voice, as the girl opened the door of a small room which served its occupants both as bed and sitting room. "I have been so anxious about you, my dear."

The speaker was a thin, wasted-looking girl, with hollow cheeks and big eyes, with that dull, patient look in them peculiar to those who suffer continually. She sat up in bed working at a gay, plush smoking-cap, which she was bordering with forget-me-nots in silk, and her fingers were so slender that their appearance was almost skeleton-like.

"How are you, Maggie?" Frances asked, bending to kiss her.

"Not much better, I am afraid," sighed the invalid, working on. "You don't know how tired I am, and perhaps, after all, they may not take this."

She held up her work as she spoke, and surveyed it with mournful regret.

"What will they give you for it?" demanded her sister abruptly, hanging up her hat on a peg behind the door.

"Five shillings if they take it," Maggie replied slowly. "And I have been four days working at it. I can't work as well as I used to, I am so easily tired, you know."

Frances sighed heavily, and made no answer.

"Were the shops very gay for Christmas?" asked the invalid presently. "Did you see many pretty things, Frances?"

They talked on quietly while they ate the meal which was both tea and supper, and consisted of toast and weak tea. The elder girl went back to earlier and happier days of which she had still some vague remembrance, and told of Christmas as she had known it long ago.

"I wonder," she said, looking somewhat dreamily into the fire, "if our brother is dead. You know we had a brother when dear papa was alive, Frances—a step-brother, I mean, who went away to America when you were a baby. I don't remember very clearly, because I was only a little girl at the time, but I think someone told me—it may have been Aunt Mary—that papa had to pay away a great deal of money for him, and so became quite poor. It may not be true, though."

"If he did," responded Frances hotly, "our brother, if he were alive, ought to find us out and try to help us. But perhaps he is dead, or rich, and has forgotten all about us. You see we are only his half-sisters, and rich people hate their poor relations."

She laughed half-scornfully, half defiantly.

"My dear," said her sister gently, "you must not say so. They do not know how much the poor suffer. They have so much that they cannot understand our sufferings and struggles—that is all."

"We won't say any more about it," cried Frances. "Tell me about the Select Academy."

This was their favourite theme of conversation, and one on which the invalid was never tired of discoursing.

For five years during her father's lifetime, she had attended daily a select academy for young ladies in St. John's Wood, and the remembrance of that faded gentility had never left her.

There she had learnt to paint flowers, draw unnatural heads and fanciful landscapes, play the piano, sing, and dance, and had picked up some superficial smattering of French, German, and Italian. It was a poor enough school, but she had been abundantly satisfied with it; and the oily-headed professors, with their shabby coats, tall hats, and sweeping bows, filled her soul with delight. It is wonderful to think that five years of such schooling had only enabled the possessor of such unexceptional advantages to go out as a daily governness in a like academy of indisputable selectness, for the large sum of thirty pounds a year. She had a younger sister to care for; and a pinching struggle with narrow means, together with false economy in essentials, had broken down the poor girl's health, so that she was reduced to earn what trifle she could by fancy-work and sewing, badly-enough paid. The aunt who had taken them after their father's death had been poor herself, and had now been dead several years, leaving them entirely dependent on their own exertions.

They had scarcely finished their meal when the door opened, and in bounced the landlady, flourishing the umbrella.

"I wouldn't be worrying you for nothing, Miss Montgomery, bless your heart!" she cried indignantly. "But when a young woman comes home with the likes of this," surveying the silver-mounted handle with contempt, "given to her or lent by goodness knows who, it's time someone should speak. P'raps Miss Frances has told you about it herself, though."

The invalid turned a sad, reproachful glance upon her sister, who sank down at her bedside, crying:

"Don't look like that, Maggie. I'll tell you all about it, dear. Don't you believe me?"

She poured out her story breathlessly and incoherently enough, and drew out the card the gentleman had given her as a corroboration.

Maggie took it in her hand and read it slowly: "Frederic Delany, 18 Cavendish Square, W." Then she took the umbrella into her hand and looked at it doubtfully.

"My dear," she said gently, laying her thin hand on her sister's, "this is a gentleman—a grand gentleman, perhaps. You ought not to speak to gentlemen in the streets. Promise me you will never do it again, for when I am gone I want you to remember always that if you are only a typine and work for your living, you are also a lady—that our father was a gentleman, and you must do nothing he would be ashamed to think of his daughter doing."

She could say no more, for Frances burst out sobbing, and clung round her neck in a passion of tears.

* * * *

In the large and handsomely-furnished dining-room at No. 18 Cavendish Square, Frederick Delany sat at dinner.

Extremely youthful in appearance and even boyish in manner, he presented a striking contrast to his *vis-à-vis*, a tall, dark man of marked appearance, whose face was unusually serious, and his hair slightly silvered. No one knew very much about him, but he had a curious charm of manner underlying a certain reservedness and austerity, which made him a favourite in Society, and he was reputed to be enormously rich—a fact which, after all, was probably the more attractive of the two. He was unmarried—another reason for his popularity—and rented a small but elegantly-furnished house in Green Street, bordering on Park Lane. Some nine or ten years ago he had suddenly appeared in London—come home from America, he said—and had settled down quietly. He appeared to have no relations, and what he had done in America nobody inquired, since, probably, nobody very greatly cared. Some people, whom Society believed in, took him up, and the rest obediently followed their example. Report said he was secretly in love with the eldest Miss Delany. Be that as it may, he was frequently to be found at their pleasant house in Cavendish Square.

"You surely did not go out without your umbrella to-day, Fred?" said Miss Delany during dinner, turning to her brother. "I saw you come in without it, did I not?"

"No," he answered, blushing. "I did not forget it, but I—I lent it."

"Indeed!" said his father, smiling at the young man's embarrassment. "And to whom did you lend it?"

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"To—to a young lady," he replied, stammering, and looking slightly confused. "At least, she looked and spoke like one, though she said she was a typine, and worked ten hours a day for a pound a week."

"Dear me!" murmured his mother, in tones of geniune pity. "How does she manage to live? What was her name? Did you ask?"

"Curiously enough," Frederick replied, looking at his friend across the table, "her name was the same as Will's—Montgomery—Frances Montgomery. She has an invalid sister—Maggie, I think her name is—who is almost unable to work, and they live at Kennington."

A long, silent chord in Will Montgomery's memory was evidently touched by this statement. The expression of his face was painfully, intensely eager as he leant across the table, and, looking the younger man straight in the face, gasped out:

"Tell me about this girl—tell me again."

Briefly Frederick related what he knew of her, speaking with much pity of her poor and inadequate clothing, and dwelling upon her refinement of manner and bearing.

"Listen," said Mr. Montgomery, in a low voice of suppressed emotion, when he had finished. "I have something to tell you. Years ago there was a young man who was both wicked and extravagant. He ran into many excesses, and incurred heavy liabilities which he was utterly unable to meet. His father, who could not bear that his name should be disgraced, paid those liabilities to the amount of ten thousand pounds, and, thereby, from having been a comparatively rich man, became a poor one. The young man then went abroad to begin his life over again in a new world, leaving his father and two little half-sisters behind. He worked early and late to amass money and redeem the past. During those years of engrossing toil he learnt that his father was dead! He also heard that his half-sisters had been taken by an aunt, but of them he thought little, and gradually almost forgot their existence. When he returned to England, a young man no longer, he made one or two inquiries after the aunt with whom they had gone to live, but could hear nothing of her. He then, in the pleasures and cares of his daily life, thought no more of his sisters, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the wealth which he had so hardly won. What do you think such a man deserves?"

There was a silence.

Then Miss Delany spoke.

"He ought," she said, leaning forward, and looking gravely at Mr. Montgomery, "to go to his sisters, and not be ashamed to confess how grievously he has sinned in neglecting them, and beg their forgiveness if they have suffered through his so doing."

"I am the man," he said solemnly. "This poor girl whom your brother met to-day is my half sister—my father's child. Her name, I remember, was Frances. Frances was the younger, and Maggie the elder. God only knows the cruel want these poor girls have suffered all these years while I have lived in ease and luxury. I ought to have made every effort to find them out, for the sake of their father and mine. But it is not too late to repair my fault. I will do as you say, and they shall never know want any more."

When he left Cavendish Square, Mr. Delany, senior, remarked:

"I never liked the fellow so well as I did to-night, wife. He has good stuff in him."

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear, and at an early hour Mr. Montgomery hastened to Kennington to the address which Frederick Delany had given him, to find his long-lost sisters.

As he stood at the door of the small and dingy lodging-house they inhabited, and knocked, a burning blush mounted his brow as he thought of the want and poverty which he could so easily have relieved had he known it.

The landlady eyed him questioningly, and on his inquiry for Miss Montgomery, replied tartly:

"You ain't a-goin' to see her, sir. She've been took very bad in the night, and lies dyin' upstairs as anyone may see must have been the end of her sufferings, poor dear thing, as come on all along o'wearing bad boots as didn't ought to have been on a young lady's feet, but there weren't the money to buy a new pair with, bless her! And who may be you as comes axin' after Miss Montgomery, and what right have you to come intrudin' at a time like this?" she demanded somewhat fiercely.

"The best of rights," he answered quietly. "I am her brother."

Mrs. Hogg stared, ejaculated, and murmuring profuse apologies, conducted him upstairs.

The sight of the wretched room, with its miserable furniture, so shabby and so poor, cut him to the heart.

Maggie lay back in bed, her face as white as death, her eyes half-closed, while her breath came gaspingly as if she were in pain. By her side knelt Frances, her arms clasped round her sister in the very attitude of despair. A tiny fire flickered in the grate; there was nothing in the room save the bare necessities of life, and a few worn volumes on a shelf above the dying girl's bed; everything proclaimed the children of poverty.

A lump rose in Mr. Montgomery's throat, and he could not speak for a moment.

Frances turned her head, and, seeing a stranger, an exclamation of surprise broke from her lips.

The dying girl opened her eyes.

Mr. Montgomery stepped forward, and took her hand.

"I am your brother," he said slowly and distinctly, bending over the bed that she might catch every word; "I have cruelly neglected you. Can you ever forgive me for having left you in want so long?"

She seemed scarcely surprised, and a little wandering in her mind.

"We *had* a brother," she murmured. "Did I not tell you so, Frances? Aunt Mary told me a long time ago. We were very little when he went away, and so he forgot us—that is all."

She sighed.

"When he comes back—if he is alive and remembers—he will take care of you, Frances, my dear; but—— It is very cold."

She shivered, sighed, and, turning her head, went out for ever from the world's coldness and pain.

Frances, in an abandonment of grief, threw herself face downwards on the bed, but she could not weep, her sorrow was too great.

"Little sister," said her brother, gently raising her, "I have only you, and you have only me now. God helping me, I will do my best to make up to you for what you have lost; and I would give half of what I have to bring her back to life and health if I could."

He looked sadly at the dead girl as he spoke.

"Poor Maggie!" murmured Frances, and fell sobbing on his breast.

A year later, Fred Delany, the good Samaritan, and Frances Montgomery, the lady typine, were quietly married.

W. Hills.

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SYLVIA.

Telling How a Girl was Misjudged.

It was a calm summer evening, but a faint breeze was blowing; very pleasant after the great heat of the day. So thought two young men as they sauntered to and fro on the promenade of a fashionable watering-place. In the distance they heard the not unmusical strain of the town band.

"That is rather a pretty thing they are playing," remarked one of the men, Frank Leslie, referring to the band; "what is it called?"

"I believe it is a gavotte, called 'Sylvia,'" replied Stuart Harcourt, his companion.

What a host of bitter, sweet memories surged through Frank's mind at the mention of that name. He saw a winsome, merry face, framed in glorious masses of bright, brown hair; soft, violet eyes that had so often gazed at him with a tender lovelight shining in them. A long sigh broke from him, which caused his friend to turn to him and say:

"What is it, Leslie, old chap? Anything the matter? By-the-by, Sylvia is the name you were always shouting out when you had brain fever so badly in India. Is there anything connected with it?"

A pause ensued, during which time Frank Leslie seemed to be engaged in a mental struggle. At last he exclaimed:

"You have been a good friend to me, Stuart, and nursed me like a brother when I had the fever, so I will tell you what I would impart to no other person living, that is, my love story. Light a cigarette, old fellow, let us sit down on this bench, and here goes:

"When I was quartered at Marford, a horrid little country town, I made the acquaintance of Mr. Barns, vicar of the country parish of Wartham. He was very kind, and invited me to his house. I went, and met his daughter, Sylvia Barns. Oh, Stuart! I can never tell you how I loved that girl, and fully did I believe she loved me in return. I was always looking for opportunities to go to Wartham Vicarage, until Mark Barns, her brother, came home from Oxford, and it was comparatively easy, for he and I became inseparable companions. At last the day came when I received my orders for India. I went straight to Wartham, saw Sylvia, told her of my love, and asked if there was any hope for me?

"'I have never cared for anyone save you, Frank, and never shall.'"

"Those were her very words, Harcourt, but how false they proved! I then went to Mr. Barns, to tell him of what had taken place between his daughter and myself.

"'You are both too poor to be married,' he replied. 'I don't approve of long engagements, but if you both think the same when you come home, Leslie, I will give my sanction to the marriage. If in the meantime either of you should change your mind, write and apprise the other of the fact, but no other correspondence will I allow; in this I trust to your honour.'

"Not being able to make better terms than this, I consented.

"I had been in India about a year, when I received a note in Sylvia's handwriting, which ran as follows:

"'I have changed my name to Durnford;' and by the same mail a newspaper arrived, on opening which, my eye caught a paragraph commencing thus:

"'*The little village of Wartham was en fête on Tuesday, on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. Durnford with Miss Barns.*'

"I read no further. It was indeed insult added to injury. Not only had Sylvia proved false in the little space of time, but she had also sent me a newspaper account of her baseness. You know the rest. How I got brain fever, and how on my recovery we both obtained leave and came home."

* * * * * *

A few evenings after Frank's confession, he and Stuart attended the Infirmary ball. Whilst walking round the room criticising different belles, Stuart's attention was suddenly attracted by an exceedingly pretty girl, who was gazing at his friend with earnest attention. He saw Frank glance at her with a look of sudden scorn, then the fair face paled, and she shrank behind a lady who was standing near. Later in the evening, Frank, who had not danced many times, was accosted by one of the stewards whom he knew slightly.

"There is a lady friend of mine here who hardly knows anybody, so do come and dance with her."

So saying, he took Frank's arm, led him up to a group near the door, murmured a few indistinct words of introduction, and hurried away to another non-dancing man, leaving Frank face to face with his false love, Sylvia Barns.

"Why have you not spoken to me all the evening?" she asked in an appealing voice. "What have I done to offend you?"

"Need you ask," replied Frank sternly; "when you think of your treachery and baseness."

"Treachery and baseness!" Sylvia faltered. "Frank, I I don't understand you."

"This is no place for a discussion; come into the conservatory," said Frank.

The conservatory was empty. On arriving there Frank turned to Sylvia, and said in a scornful tone:

"You don't understand, Mrs. Durnford, what I mean by treachery? Do you not call promising to marry one man and then jilting him for another, base?"

"Yes, Frank, I should call it so; but what has it to do with me? And why do you call me Mrs. Durnford? I am Miss Durnford!"

"Miss Durnford!" ejaculated Frank, in amazement. "How so?"

"Why, poor old Aunt Durnford died when you had been away a year, leaving us her money, providing we should take her surname. Did you not receive the paper with an account of Mark's wedding in it, which beautifully explained it all? My father said I wasn't to write a letter. I wrote a note, though, letting you know of my change of name."

A light flashed across Frank's mind.

"Then it was Mark who was married, and of course, I remember, he always was in love with his cousin, Bessie Barns. Oh, my darling, my darling, can you ever forgive me for doubting you?" murmured Frank passionately, when he had explained his fears.

What Sylvia answered I know not; suffice it to say that the little village of Wartham was again *en fête* shortly afterwards, on the occasion of Miss Durnford's marriage with Captain Leslie of the Royal Heavies.

May Harvey.

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER,

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

The Doom of a Traitor.

"Look here, Staunton, what sort of a game is this you are playing on us? I'm talking business, strict business understand, and there's my pile on the table. Don't let us misunderstand one another."

"Yes, and there's mine, and now what have you got to say?"

It was four o'clock of the morning after the concert, and Derrick Kesteven and Isolo Staunton stood facing each other from opposite sides of the table in the Council Chamber. Kesteven had taken a five-chambered .38 Smith and Wesson out of his hip-pocket and laid it on the table in front of him, and Staunton had answered the challenge by doing the same.

As though by tacit consent they put their hands behind their backs and looked at each other eye to eye across the table. Each knew perfectly well that if he put a hand out towards his weapon he would be shot the next moment.

"Can't you see what it means? Surely you know enough of what you and I have been working through together for the last fifteen years or so——

"Look here, Staunton, you just remember what I told you after your talk here with those Spaniards. This is no funeral of mine. I resigned right then and I want to know how it happens that we started out from the Bay of Nice last evening for a sort of *al fresco* sea-concert-picnic business, and some of us who didn't want to go to sleep after what happened, find ourselves out of sight of land on board this craft of yours ripping through the water faster than a destroyer. Where are we?"

Staunton took out his watch and looked at it for about half a minute.

"I should say that we cleared the Straits of Gibraltar about an hour ago, and we are now heading about South-West—well, we will say, across the Atlantic."

"And our destination?"

"Is at present undecided."

"In other words, you've somehow fixed the thing up so that you've enticed the whole lot of us on board this infernal craft of yours to dine and have a concert and so on, and you think that you've got the whole lot of us, not only our own personal friends, but your guests as well, absolutely at your mercy. That's so, isn't it?"

"My dear Kesteven," replied Staunton, pulling a chair up to the table and sitting down well within reach of his revolver, "you have hit off the situation to perfection. Just take up your gun and put it in your pocket, and let us talk like reasonable beings. Put yours away first. Shoot me if you like, and if you want everybody on board to find trouble. As it is I am standing right on the sharp edge of eternity, and one way or another it doesn't, after all, matter very much. Just a few years more or less, that's all."

"You're grit, Solly. Grit right through, darn you," replied Kesteven, in just the same voice in which he had spoken; nearly fifteen years before, on the verandah of the house in San Francisco, when they had shaken hands over their partnership.

He took up his pistol and balanced it for a moment in his hand. Staunton, sitting back in his chair, with his hands in his trousers pockets, looked at him eye to eye, and said:

"Well, if you mean business, why don't you shoot?"

"No!" said Kesteven, putting his pistol back in his pocket and sitting down. "Let it go at that. I know a stronger man than myself when I see him, and we've both got daughters on board this hooker of yours. Now, suppose you shoot."

"Not much," laughed Staunton, throwing his own revolver across the table. "This isn't a sort of time for dog to eat dog anyhow."

It was curious how these two men, multi-millionaires both of them, with the world at their feet like a football, reverted, in this supreme hour of conflict, to the old poker language of the days when they were both adventurers, with only a few thousand dollars between themselves and poverty—or prison.

"O. K.," said Kesteven, throwing Staunton's revolver back across the table. "We'll play the cards face up. And now I suppose I can call the game. What is it?"

"It's a longish story," said Staunton. "You see, it's this way. We'll count you out of the business, as you wanted to be, but I'm in it right up to the ears. I made a bad mistake getting here so quickly—not myself, I mean, but the yacht, after leaving Leith and going to the anchorage."

"Yes," interrupted Kesteven, "but who in thunder could have known that except yourself and the skipper?"

"My dear Derrick, it seems to me as if you'd been seeing nothing since you shut down on the partnership. You were talking to me the other day about our friend Mr. Dennison and his colleague Mr. Smith. Well, do you happen to know who Mr. Smith is?"

"Eh, Smith, well I guess he's just Mr. Smith, chief of the International Police in London. Anything more?"

"Yes," replied Staunton, taking a sip at his whisky and soda, "Mr. Smith is also the Monsieur de Ronski, who——"

"What do you say!" exclaimed Kesteven, jumping to his feet. "What, that man and his wife and his daughter, that lovely girl, that incomparable singer? Look here, Solly, are you really sure of this?"

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"We've been through a few pretty tight places, Derrick, since you and I started to work together," replied Staunton, also getting up, "but this is about the tightest that I ever tried to get through, and if you'll sit down for a minute I'll just show you how I mean to do it if the Fates won't look sideways on me. You'd hardly think that we had a traitor on board this boat would you, a man that we both trusted rather too much or too little, maybe too little perhaps?"

"What, not Valdez?" exclaimed Kesteven.

"No, no," replied Staunton, "he has his limitations, and he makes his mistakes, as he did with young Ellerton, and made all this trouble with poor Mercedes, but there's nothing of the traitor about him. I'll introduce you to the traitor in a minute or two, and then you shall see."

"Yes," said Kesteven, as he emptied his glass. "Of course, if it's a case of treason, I don't want you to tell me what's necessary. Heave ahead! I'm with you there. You won't hurt my feelings."

"I thought not," laughed Staunton, going to the telephone and taking the transmitter down.

"Have you got him there? Yes. Very well. Send him here at once. Put him in the sleeping bag, and don't let anyone see him. Have you got everything arranged below? Very well. That will do. Send him aft."

Staunton hung up the transmitter and opened the double door.

"Say, what in thunder are you doing, Staunton? Is there going to be any murder and sudden death about this business?"

"Murder? No!" replied Staunton quietly. "Sudden death? Probably. In short, if you wish to see it, you can assist at an execution, but anyhow it's going to take place within the next ten minutes."

"Well," replied Kesteven, "taking your word for it that it is a traitor, I reckon I'm with you. Bring him right along."

The telephone bell tinkled again, and the next moment a couple of stalwart quarter-masters came in, carrying a long, shapeless bundle between them.

"Put it down," said Staunton, "and go forward and tell Mr. Darfield that I should be glad if he would come here."

The men laid their burden on the floor, touched their caps, and went out without a word. Staunton closed the doors and came back and touched the bundle, inside which something was moving, with his foot, and said:

"This is it. What do you think it is?"

"It looks something like a man," said Kesteven slowly, and then suddenly he continued more anxiously, "look here, Solly, don't prolong the agony, it isn't a woman, is it?"

A smothered groan came from within the sleeping bag. Staunton leant down and unbuttoned the flap. "Take hold of that end, Derrick."

Kesteven took hold of the bottom of the bag with both hands. There was another shuddering movement inside it and he heard another gasping moan. Then Staunton put his hand in, and, with a wrench, dragged out Doctor Billaud, grey-white with fear, his eyes rolling in their sockets. His lower jaw was working convulsively, rattling his teeth together, his hands were clenched, and his legs were trembling and knocking against each other.

"Stand up, you dirty traitor, stand up and tell us what you think of yourself. Confound you!"

It was not often that Isolo Staunton let the savage that was in him loose, but it was loose now. He took Billaud by the jaw and the back of his head and lifted him up as though he had been a child. Then he let him go, and Billaud dropped into a huddled heap on the floor, gasping out between his sobs:

"What? Mercy for a thing like you," laughed Staunton, rolling him over with his foot, "look at it, Derrick. That's the sort of thing that thought it could give us away. What do you think of it?"

"Looks very mean, anyhow," said Kesteven, somewhat uneasily, for he had never seen anything quite so terrible as his late partner was now, vibrating in every nerve with strongly suppressed passion.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"You'll see soon," said Staunton shortly, and then the telephone bell tinkled twice. He opened the doors again and the first officer came in, pale, but quite steady and self-possessed. He knew already the part that he was going to be called upon to play. Billaud's life was nothing to him in comparison with the work which he had set himself to do. He had had a long talk with Janet in her own room after the concert and she had given him enough of her strength to enable him to bear himself like a man.

"Mr. Darfield," said Staunton, touching Billaud's shuddering body with his foot again, "it seems that our friend the doctor has been foolish enough to feel jealous because he has not been allowed to learn quite all about the inner workings of the *Isola*, and so he has thought fit to take a stupid, womanish sort of revenge by trying to betray me and therefore, of course, all of those who work with me to the police.

"Therefore, I have decided to reward his zeal in the cause of law and order by admitting him to a full knowledge of the secrets which he seems to have been so anxious to learn. Is everything ready below?"

"Yes, sir," replied Darfield, "everything."

"Very well, then," said Staunton, "then we can initiate our friend at once."

Billaud moaned again inarticulately, dragged himself to his knees, clasped his hands, and then rolled forward at Staunton's feet and tried to put his arms round his legs, sobbing again:

"Mercy, mercy, sir; have pity, have pity. I have sinned but I will atone. Do not kill me now, I am not fit to die; pity, pity!"

Staunton lifted his foot and kicked him away.

"Pity for a thing like you," he laughed; "a thing that doesn't even think itself fit to die. Really, my dear doctor, that is nothing whatever to do with me. You should have thought of that before. As it is, I am afraid you will have to arrange that little difficulty as best you can in the next world. You won't have time to do it in this one."

Billaud uttered another gasping moan and dropped prone, his forehead hitting the carpet with a soft sound, which to Kesteven's ears had something sickening in it.

"The man's fainted," he said roughly. "Say, I don't see any particular sport in this. I know you can't let him live, but don't play with the poor fellow like that. You're a man, not a cat."

His tone of disgust rather than his words cooled Staunton's frenzy of revenge. He shrugged his shoulders and said half apologetically:

"Well, perhaps you're right; the thing isn't worth playing with."

He took the brandy decanter and poured out half a glass, straightened Billaud out, lifted his head, and poured some into his mouth. He shuddered and gasped and opened his eyes.

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"Ah, where am I? What has happened? Ah, yes, yes, I remember. God help me! I am lost!"

"Not quite, my friend, but you soon will be," laughed Staunton, picking him up by the shoulders and dropping him on to a chair. "Just oblige me by tieing him up, Mr. Darfield, in case he falls down again and hurts himself. You will find a bit of line there on the sofa. I thought we might want it."

Darfield picked up a little coil of thin rope from the sofa, and in a couple of minutes had fastened the shrinking, trembling form of the doomed man to the chair. Meanwhile Staunton had pulled the corner of the carpet aside and tapped four times on the floor with the toe of his boot. Three taps answered him from below. He went to the chair and said to Darfield:

"Give me a hand."

They lifted the chair and placed it on the square in the corner, and as they did so Billaud recovered sense enough from his paralysis of fear to remember how he had helped to put Wilfrid Ellerton in the same position after he had administered the drug to him.

"Come along, Kesteven," said Staunton, "and you, too, Mr. Darfield."

He went and stood behind the huge chair. Two others took their places on either side. Billaud's head dropped forward and a gasping sob gurgled in his throat. Staunton tapped with his toe again and the platform sank. It came to rest on the floor of the lower chamber.

"Come, now, rouse up, doctor," said Staunton, with a savage laugh, as he caught his chin and turned his face up. "If you want to have just another look about you, this is the time to do it."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake put the man out of his misery and be done with it," exclaimed Kesteven, with a gesture of disgust. "I didn't think you were as mean as that, Solly. Get it over. Just think what Mer——"

The next instant he was looking into the muzzle of Staunton's revolver.

"Another syllable and by all that's holy you'll go down with him."

"Then I guess Mr. Darfield might as well put us away together," replied Kesteven quietly.

Staunton looked down and saw the barrel of his partner's pistol pointing straight at his heart.

"I've seen you, Solly, and I guess the hands are about even. I've got fours and one over and so have you. All the same I was wrong and I apologise."

"Good enough," said Staunton, putting his revolver back into his pocket, "but you ought to know better than risk sudden death like that twice in half an hour." Then he turned to his first officer and said:

"Mr. Darfield, you will be good enough to forget this little incident. I have no reason for losing a good officer and a faithful servant—you see what I mean, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Darfield, "I understand you."

"Ah, pity, pity on me, monsieur; pity for the love of Heaven. I will be faithful again, truly I will. I will tell you everything, and then I will be silent, indeed I will."

Billaud had come to himself again and straightened his head up, the only part of his body he could move, and as he gasped the words out he looked at him with a glance which even Staunton did not wish to see again.

He turned away without making any reply and touched the button in the end wall of the chamber. The steel panel fell back, disclosing the sloping passage down which Ellerton had been carried on his way to the Underworld. At the end was the diving chamber with the electric bulb shining in the roof.

"Lend a hand, Mr. Darfield," said Staunton, taking hold of the back of the chair. "This is part of the secret the doctor wanted to learn, and he'll learn a bigger one very soon."

They lifted the chair and carried Billaud whimpering hopeless, half-inarticulate pleas for mercy, down the passage and planted the chair in the middle of the diving chamber.

"Thank you, Mr. Darfield, that will do; I don't want you to have any more share in this business than you've got to have. I'll do the rest."

"Thank you, sir," replied the first officer, with a very evident note of relief in his voice. He went out into the passage and Staunton, apparently deaf to the hardly human cries which came sobbing and gasping from his victim's lips, took up a coil of rope lying on the floor of the chamber beside a couple of fifty kilogramme weights, and lashed it round his body and framework of the chair. Then he laughed again:

"Good-bye, doctor, see you in the next world perhaps," and followed Darfield into the passage.

He took hold of one of the levers on the wall.

A hoarse scream of despairing agony burst from Billaud's white and trembling lips, and the next moment the sheet of steel slid down and quenched it into silence.

Staunton pulled the second lever.

There was a faint gurgling sound of inrushing water. He pulled out his watch and counted a hundred and twenty seconds, then he pushed back the second lever and then a minute later the first. The sheet of steel rose again, and Kesteven, who had come half way down the sloping passage, looked into the chamber. It was drenched with water and empty.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Plans for the Future.

Kesteven had seen as much as most men have done but when he and Staunton and Darfield found themselves back in the Council Chamber, and Staunton had kicked the corner of the carpet over the sinking platform, he went to the table and took hold of the brandy decanter.

Darfield's face was grey-white and his eyes were beginning to wander. They moved from Kesteven's face to Staunton's, and back again aimlessly. He caught hold of the back of a chair, swayed to and fro for a moment, and then dropped into it.

"I thought so," said Staunton, "and it's just as well."

He went to the little cabinet on the left-hand side of the doors and unlocked it. Kesteven saw a row of little bottles, with blue labels on them. Staunton took one of them out and let ten drops fall into a minim glass, which he had taken up with his left hand. He jumped to his feet, and said:

"Look here, Solly. I'm full of this. If you're going to fix up another funeral this morning I'm going to bed."

"My dear Derrick, it's nothing of the sort," replied Staunton, taking a hypodermic syringe out of its case and filling it from the glass. "Mr. Darfield wants a sedative tonic as he has just said, and if he likes I will give it to him."

"No, sir, I thank you,"

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exclaimed Darfield, getting up. "If you will allow me—if I have done all that you require, I will only ask that you will give me a couple of hours' sleep. Really, sir, that is all I want."

"Are you frightened, Mr. Darfield?" said Staunton, going towards him with the syringe balanced between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. "Surely you don't think that I want to do you any harm—you—look here!"—he went on pulling up his sleeve and running the needle under the skin of his arm. "I want a sedative as you do, and I am not going to commit suicide."

He pressed the piston and the skin puffed up above the puncture. "There is half of it," he said, "will you have the other? I think it will do you good."

"Thank you, sir," said Darfield, pulling up his sleeve. "I would give a good deal for three hours' sleep just now."

"And you shall have it, because you have earned it," said Staunton, gripping him by the wrist and thrusting the needle into the flesh of his forearm. He pressed the piston until the last drop of the drug had gone in. He took the needle out, opened the doors, and said:

"Now, the sooner you get to bed the better, and it will be as well for you to forget everything that has happened to-night."

"Yes, sir, I will forget everything except what you have just said," replied Darfield, as he stepped haltingly over the combing of the doorway and disappeared into the grey mingling of the dying night and the dawning day.

Staunton closed the doors, went to the cabinet, opened a drawer, and took out a lancet, he bared his arm again, and ripped the flesh open where the swelling was still visible. A stream of blood, mingled with a whitish fluid, ran down towards his wrist. He took out his pocket handkerchief and pressed it over the wound.

"Just go to that cabinet, Derrick, will you, and get me the collodion and a bandage. The collodion is on the second shelf to the left hand, and the bandages are in the bottom drawer to the right."

"You are pretty hard shell, Solly. Grit all through," said Kesteven, "and if I could only sympathise with you in that South American scheme of yours, I'd like to help you to be Emperor and make myself your Prime Minister or Chancellor or whatever it is."

"You can do it now, Derrick, if you like," replied Staunton, as Kesteven poured the collodion over the wound and then wrapped the bandage over it.

"Not me, Solly," he replied, shaking his head as he finished the bandage and pinned the end. "I've got Cora to think about, to say nothing about the Grand Duke, and I reckon I should feel pretty mean if she didn't become a Grand Duchess in due course, and, incidentally, I might ask what you might intend doing with the lot of us on board here. I suppose you haven't forgotten you have about forty people on board this boat who will be pretty well astonished when they wake up later on this morning and find themselves skimming over the wide Atlantic at thirty or forty miles an hour, instead of running into moorings in the Bay of Nice. What are you going to do about them?"

"Well," said Staunton, pulling his coat sleeves down, "that is a matter that wants thinking about, isn't it? If you don't mind being partners again for a few hours, Derrick, I think you can help me out of one of the tightest places I have been in for some time, and at the same time go home with all your feathers flying."

"As regards the superfluous guests, I reckon. Is that it?" asked Kesteven, looking at him from under his half-lowered eyelids.

"You've got it in once, as we used to say out West," said Staunton. "You see it's this way, I've got this crowd of people on board, I've had to bring them away, but I don't want them, and I don't wish any evil to them."

"With exceptions, I suppose?" said Kesteven, sitting up and looking hard at him.

"Yes, naturally there are certain exceptions. If there hadn't been the yacht wouldn't be where she is now. A man with all I have to risk doesn't get outside the four corners of the law for nothing."

"And the exceptions?" asked Kesteven.

"Well," said Staunton, poising himself on the edge of the table, "to begin with, there's our mutual friend, Smith—de Ronski. I can't let him go, and his wife and daughter—no, no, don't worry about your gun. I see what you're thinking, and I quite appreciate——"

"Rats, Solly, don't give me any of that stuff. Put it in plain figures, and let's be done with it."

"Exactly what I was going to do, if you hadn't weighed in with that chivalrous interruption," said Staunton, with a sneering laugh running through his words. "It comes to this. For my safety, to say nothing about Mercedes and you and Cora, these people have got to stop on board for the present. You don't want me to tell you what would happen if I landed them at the end of the cable——"

"Do they all know?" Kesteven interrupted, sitting straight up in his chair. In his eyes was a strange gleam.

"If my information is worth anything, my dear Derrick," said Staunton, flicking the ash off his cigar—"his women-folk, charming and all as they are, are rather more dangerous to our interests than Mr. Smith himself. I know pretty well what he knows and what he wants to do, but when you get women taking a hand in a game like this you don't know what to play."

"That's so," said Kesteven. "Quite right. If they're in it with Smith, well charming and all as they are I suppose they've got to take their chance with him. Anyone else? Dennison, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Staunton slowly, "I think I'll have to prolong his holiday for a few weeks, but if you'll just do what I am going to ask you to do, Derrick, I'll give you my word as one white man to another, that no harm shall come to any of them unless it's absolutely necessary. By that, of course, I mean that none of them shall find trouble unless he or she goes and deliberately looks for it."

"Good enough," replied Kesteven. "I'll take it at that; and now what do you want me to do?"

"Just this," said Staunton, taking out his watch. "If we have been keeping our speed, we shall be within twenty miles of Madeira about an hour after breakfast. The de Ronskis and Mr. Dennison will not appear at breakfast. They will have it in their own rooms if they want it. When breakfast is over the two steam pinnaces will be at your service. You will explain to our guests that it has become impossible for me to take them back to Nice, and they will take a trip with you in the two pinnaces to Funchal, where you will be able to get back to Europe by the first South African liner that comes along. I shall not appear myself, because I hate explanations. When they get back to Southampton they can talk as much as they please. The *Isola* will take a good deal of finding by then."

"And Mercedes and Cora?"

"They will of course go with you, and so will Miss Yuill. I'll have a talk with Mercedes before breakfast. Under all the circumstances it will be for you to hand her, and, of course, Miss Yuill, over to the care of my old friend, José Martinez at Funchal. I'll explain the matter to Miss Yuill.

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in that little paradise which Martinez has up in the mountains.

"I shall tell Miss Yuill that for the present, at least, no disturbing news of any sort must be allowed to reach Mercedes, and I'll give you a letter to Martinez to the same effect. Cora will, of course, go with you and the Grand Duke wherever you like to take her. How does that fit in?"

"Couldn't be better as far as I can see," replied Kesteven, "although it doesn't look as if you'd given me any too little to do. The sort of circus that I'm going to have with Lady Medcalf-Mears and the rest of them, promises to be a bit more exciting than amusing, still I reckon I shall be able to worry through somehow, and as long as I can depend on that promise you've given about Madame de Ronski and Miss Paula, you can depend on me to help you all I can inside the four-square of the law, but you mustn't expect anything outside of it. I have resigned, and you know my reasons for doing it."

"Yes," replied Staunton. "that's so, old man. I'm quite satisfied. I should have done just the same in your place, and if I hadn't set myself to make something more than a few millions—well, well, we won't argue that old question out again. You can trust me anyhow, if it's only for Mercedes' sake. She's my hostage to fortune and to you."

"That's so," said Kesteven, getting up and holding out his hand. "Whatever happens you can trust me to look after her just as if she was Cora's sister."

"Then we'll let it go at that, Derrick, and if I do go under as, of course, may happen, you'll go to my lawyers in London, and they'll hand you over on proof of my death or disappearance a million pounds, which is as clean money as a Quaker might want to handle."

"Good enough, Solly," said Kesteven, and the hands which twice within the last hour had held the threat of sudden death grasped each other, it might be for the last time, in honest faith and friendship.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Proclaimed as President.

It would be impossible to attempt to describe the feelings of the guests of the *Isola* when, after Kesteven had made the necessary explanations at breakfast, they found themselves with their baggage loaded up into two big steam pinnaces running into the Bay of Funchal, watching the white-painted, graceful shape of the *Isola* fading rapidly away into the grey distance to the south-westward, until in an incredibly short space of time it became a white spot of sunlight on the surface of the shimmering sea, and then vanished.

A week later the Union-Castle liner *Saxon* dropped anchor in the bay and picked up the forty astounded and more or less angry passengers.

Three days later the *Saxon* tied up at Ocean Quay, Southampton. On the other side of the Customs' shed there was a special train standing in front of the ordinary boat train. Kesteven had cabled for it from Madeira. It consisted of an engine, two saloon carriages, the baggage waggon, and the guard's van. The late guests of the *Isola*, in common with a good many of their fellow passengers on the *Saxon*, were still of the belief that some serious outrage was in course of perpetration against themselves, but Kesteven, who had taken the Grand Duke and Iddison into his confidence as far as was necessary, managed everything with such infinite tact that they were easily persuaded to take the advantage of the other passengers and get up to London an hour or so before them.

As the big engine, hissing and panting after its seventy-miles spin, pulled up at Waterloo, half-a-dozen newsboys came running along, screaming out:

"United States of South America proclaimed this morning. President Staunton's letter to the Powers. War expected. Here you are, sir. *St. James's, Globe*, or *Westminster?*"

"Well," laughed Kesteven, as he took a handful of papers through the window and threw the boy a shilling, "I reckon that's pretty quick. Our late host hasn't lost much time getting out there and having himself made President, but, anyhow, that will keep for the present. And now, ladies and gentlemen," he went on, taking his hat down from the rack, "you will find the omnibuses ready for your servants and your baggage and carriages for yourselves. Let us dine at the Carlton."

What all London was discussing with wonder was tersely but sufficiently described in the following cable in the *St. James's Gazette*, which Kesteven read aloud to Cora and the Grand Duke and Lady Medcalf-Mears, as they drove along York Road on their way to the Carlton:

"A NEW WORLD POWER.

"The United States of South America."

(From our own Correspondent.)

"Buenos Aires, Tuesday, 12.50 p.m.

"An amazing occurrence has happened. Soon after six o'clock this morning the yacht *Isola*, belonging to the well-known financier and millionaire, Mr. Isolo Staunton, who is the son of Mr. Staunton Zuarez, the late President of Peru, entered the harbour flying the flag of the newly-created United States of South America.

"Cables have come to hand during the morning which inform us that from Panama to Cape Horn and from Caracas to Monte Video, the same flag has been hoisted in every capital of the Continent.

"It is reported that there are hundreds of thousands of men under arms, and that no fewer than seven fleets of war-ships, the most up-to-date products of European shipyards, are already patrolling the entrances to every river and harbour which gives access to the New World Power which has so suddenly and so mysteriously sprung into being.

"From the best information that I have been able to gather here, I feel that I am justified in saying that this miracle of empire-making has been the work of one man."

"Well, upon my word," said Lady Medcalf-Mears. "What an extraordinary character the man must be, although, of course, no one could be surprised at anything he has done, or may do, after the amazing way in which he behaved to us. It was as extraordinary as it was scandalous."

"Certainly," said the Grand Duke, who had taken the paper from Kesteven and run his eye over the momentous paragraph.

"It is distinctly a dangerous situation, and from what I have been able to see of the character of our late host, he would be a desperate man if he found himself in a desperate position."

"There's not much doubt about that," laughed Cora, leaning back on the soft, springy cushions. "I reckon that if trouble has to be made, he would make it about as thoroughly as any man on earth."

"But surely," exclaimed Lady Medcalf-Mears, almost angrily, "it would be a perfectly disgraceful thing, a scandal to humanity as well as a disaster to the whole world, if this man's wicked ambitions led to war. The Great Powers ought to combine and crush him and his new Republic at once before he has time to do any mischief," she added somewhat inconsistently.

"But my dear lady," replied the Grand Duke, smiling at her fervour, "surely you do not see anything wicked in forming a new State, if it be done by lawful means. If that were so you would condemn every State and Empire on earth, and especially your own British Empire. For my part I confess that I have not a small admiration for the man who could make so great a *coup d'état* as that so secretly and so suddenly. No doubt he will behave himself peacefully, so that the Powers shall recognise him and the Constitution of his Republic. If he does not, then his quarrel with the world will be settled by war."

Here the carriage drew up at the Carlton, and the discussion perforce ended for the present.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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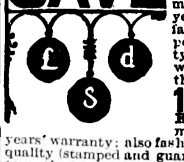

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21/- Fine Old Violin, by Pietro Antorious; magnificent rich solo tone; in perfect condition, with fully mounted bow and case; approval.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Writing on Photos.

"Is it correct, on a gentleman presenting his photo to a young lady to whom he is engaged, for him to put his inscription on it? In the event of writing on the photo, would it be permissible to put 'with fondest love'?"—"LOVESICK."

* * * * *

I do not know that it is correct to write on a photo. It is a matter of taste. Many people insist that all their photos should be signed—it is a little fad—while others prefer the photo without writing. Ask your sweetheart if she would like you to write on the photo, and if she agrees, you might use the words you mention. Above all, don't be too keen on being "correct." Be natural, that is the important point.

Nine Years, and Not Engaged.

DEAR, dear, "DOROTHY"! You have been going out with a young man for nine years and he has never uttered a word about marriage. Well, though nine-year friendships are very nice, certainly you have a right to expect him to say one way or the other if he has serious intentions. You say he is always affectionate and kind, that you have spent holidays together, and that everybody thinks you are properly engaged, and that he is quite in a position to marry. Well, one of these days, I certainly should gently point out to him that your friends are making inquiries about the matter, and leave him to say the needed word. A nine-years' engagement is bad enough, but nine years and no engagement is a bit too much of a good thing.

Sweethearts Who Are Not In Love.

"WHAT is a girl to do when she feels that she no longer loves her *fiancé*, but has a decided preference for somebody else?" Several correspondents lately have put me this question, so I will answer them together. They will not, I am sure, be offended if I do not deal with each one separately, and thus cover the same ground several times over.

* * * * *

If a girl no longer loves the man to whom she is engaged, it is her duty to tell him so. To enter into marriage, knowing well all the time that your affection lies elsewhere, is almost as serious an offence as being untrue to your husband after marriage—and it often means the same thing. Remember that one of the marriage vows is "love." This reminds me of a very charming play I saw recently. An engaged young couple both discovered that they no longer cared for each other but preferred others. But because they were engaged, they solemnly kept up the pretence of continued love, all the time hoping for some reason for a breach. Fortunately for their happiness the breach took place, and instead of either of them being broken-hearted, both were exceedingly pleased. In the case of my correspondents, who knows but that the young men they are engaged to are not every bit as anxious to end the affair as they themselves? Certainly nothing would be lost by telling the plain truth.

Whereabouts Wanted.

"E. S." asks if I know of a lady who used to write under the name of "Cynthia" in 1899, and who used to often go to South Africa. No, I do not, but if I should hear of her, I will place a paragraph on this page against your initials. If she should see this, she might communicate with me, and I will notify you of her whereabouts, if she wishes to disclose them.

Should She Receive Letters?

YOU got friendly with a young man while on your summer holiday, did you, "RAB"? Since his return he has been sending little remembrances. But you are now "keeping company" with somebody else, and want to know if you should still receive letters from the other.

* * * * *

You can receive letters from anybody if you are on friendly terms with them. But if he writes love letters to you, I think you had better just tell him that you are "keeping company" with another. That would be only fair to him, would it not. For if you continued to receive letters and presents he might very rightly think that he was the only one.

Secret Marriages.

"I AM privately engaged to a girl of eighteen, but her parents are against our marriage," writes "BOB." "We are determined to marry in a year's time. How can this be done?"

* * * * *

I never advise young couples to marry against the wishes of either parents. Instead of conspiring for a runaway match, it would be far better for you to spend the next year in convincing her parents of your fitness to become her husband. Runaway matches are, no doubt, very romantic, but somebody suffers from them after the rapture is over. So I am sorry, "BOB," that I cannot help you with any suggestion.

Unanswered Letters.

SOME troubled lovers seek my advice on very slende grounds, but I suppose they are seriously worried, or they would not write. For instance, "A. E. W." got very friendly with a certain young lady a month ago, and they went for long walks together, after which she went away to her home. She promised to write to "A. E. W." if he wrote first. Three days after "A. E. W." wrote, but received no reply. Three weeks have now elapsed, but nothing has come from her.

* * * * *

Write again, "A. E. W." If she doesn't write back then, it will be very rude indeed of her, and I should consider the affair closed. But give her one more chance. Every young man in love should persevere.

Engaged to Another Fellow.

"KRUGER" (South Africa), writes: "A young lady I am very fond of writes to me weekly. I know she is engaged to another fellow, but she tells me in her letters from England that she is also very fond of me. I should much like to become engaged to her, although I don't want to injure the other man."

* * * * *

Of course you cannot suggest any engagement to her, so long as she belongs to another. She ought not to worry you by writing in the way she does. That kind of girl seems to be playing a double game. Cannot you find out from other people whether or not she is likely to continue engaged to the other man? Perhaps there has been a breach, and she is writing to you in this strain because she anticipates that she will soon be in need of a new lover. I would find out definitely before even thinking about an engagement.

Cynthia

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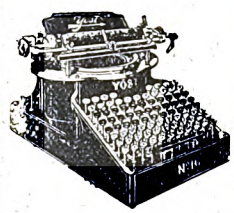

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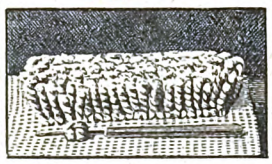

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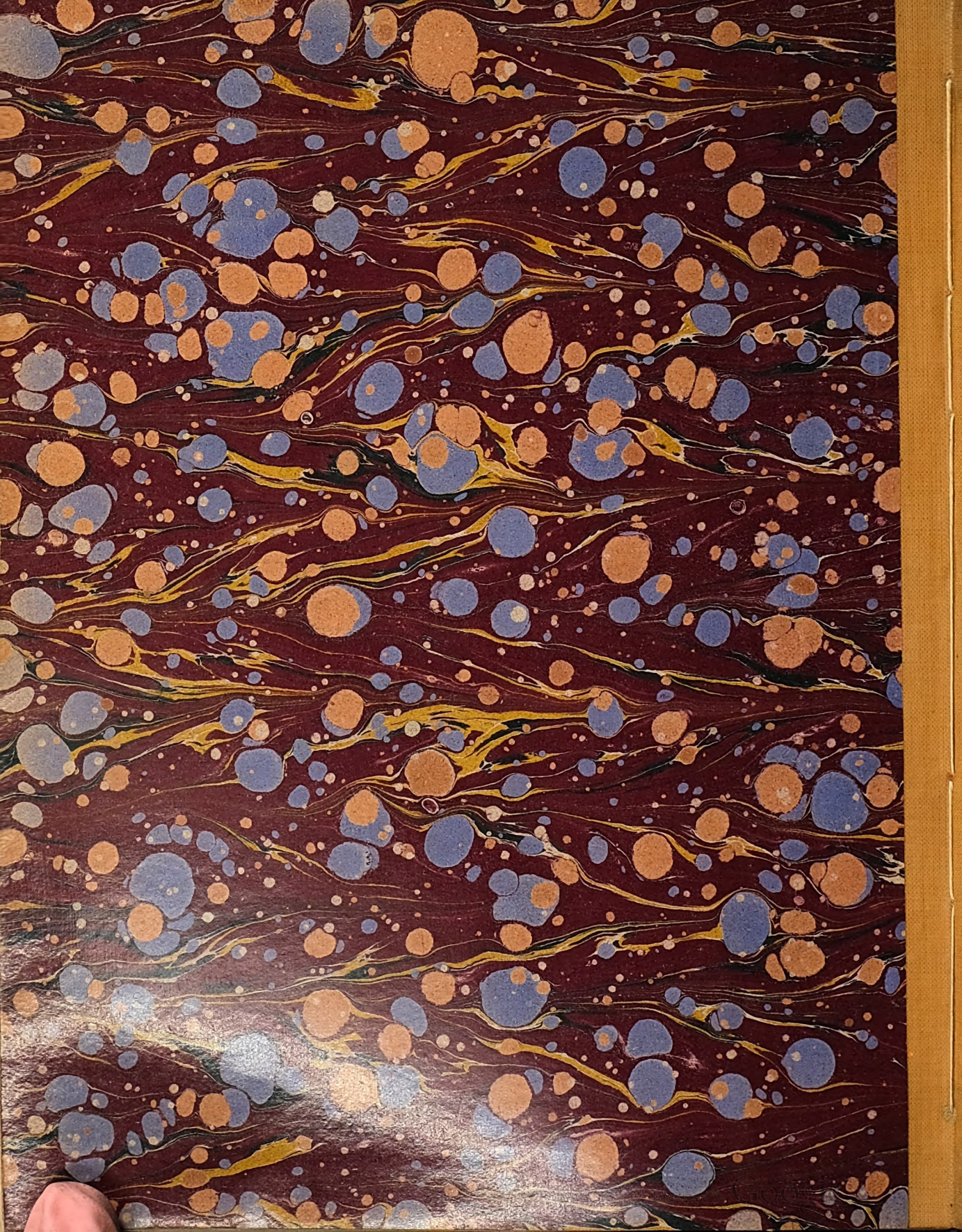

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